

BLESSED ASSURANCE
The Love Test
1 John 3

In this series, we have been learning about how we can be CERTAIN that we know God. Know that you know him! This week, I want us to see another piece of evidence that reveals those who truly know God. **Now, if you truly have experienced life-changing faith in God, then it will most certainly reveal itself in your life in the way that we are going to look at this morning.** We will see this in the letters of both Simon Peter and in 1 John. Let's look first at the passage that I started unpacking with you two weeks ago to see this evidence that I am talking about.

2 Peter 1:5-7 NLT

5 In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone.

This is such a great passage. It reveals an ongoing progression of growth in a true believer's life. Notice that the first five qualities that come out of our faith are inward qualities of character:

***Virtue** – Interior moral energy

***Knowledge** – Genuine insight into the nature of God and the life he offers.

***Self-Control** – The ability to control your sensual appetites.

***Patience**

*This is the word, “**Hupo-moni**” which means “**to endure under.**”

*It is the capacity and proven ability to endure more than just normal pain and suffering. It is the endurance of one's own sufferings and that of other's.

*This endurance is like Christ's endurance of all things for our sake!

***Godliness**

-Godliness is WORSHIP, rightly directed – God-directed passion; ascribing worth to God in every respect. God-directed passion will enable you to keep your focus for the next quality of the life of God that develops within God's people:

Faith always leads to love.

Did you hear that? If you do not love others, then you PROVE that you do not love God! Simon Peter placed love at the APEX of his qualities of Christian character because it is the highest and most challenging expression of our faith. **Real faith leads to genuine love.** And that is no easy matter. Nothing will tax you as much as learning to love others. The culmination of all spiritual growth is LOVE, and love comes out of a FAITH that has developed virtue, knowledge, self-control, patience, and godliness. The love that Peter describes here is a two-fold expression of the same thing.

***Brotherly Kindness** – Mutual love for other believers. True COMMUNITY.

- Mutual affection that can be developed and nurtured
- Deep friendship (**Blood-brothers**).

***Love** – Love for all people, just as God loved the world. “Agape-love”

Now, it is very easy for us to use the word love in such a casual way that it loses all meaning. The term “love” has been used to describe everything from our physical hunger (“I love cheeseburgers!”), to our enjoyment of some activity (“I love to play baseball!”), to our passion for our spouse (“I love you, Baby!”). The Bible uses several different words to describe what we call love.

Eros – Sexual love; Love born in want or perceived need. Centered in self.

Philos – Relational love; love born of familial connection. Other-centered.

Agape – *Agape describes a love that loves without changing. It is a self-giving love that gives without demanding or expecting re-payment. It is love so great that it can be given to the unlovable or unappealing. It is love that loves even when it is rejected. Agape love gives and loves because it wants to; it does not demand or expect repayment from the love given- it gives because it loves, it does not love in order to receive.*

*Jesus demonstrated phileo and agape love in perfect form.

All true love is BORN FROM and BASED UPON the love of God. This is what John meant when he said, “**We LOVE, because he first loved us!**” God’s love always goes first, and our love originates and is born out of his love for us. This is why Jesus answered the question, “**What is the greatest commandment?**” with a two-fold answer: “**Love God with all of your heart, soul mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself!**” That sounds great, right? Jesus was making it clear that we can talk all day long about how much we love God, but those are EMPTY WORDS if they do not reveal themselves in our love for other people. That is so true. But I want to dig even deeper into that truth this morning. You see, it is easy for us to SAY that we love God and others, but what are we REALLY DOING to show that? I love this quote from C.S. Lewis about how we say that we “love everyone.”

"It is easier to be enthusiastic about Humanity with a capital 'H' than it is to love individual men and women, especially those who are uninteresting, exasperating, depraved, or otherwise unattractive. Loving everybody in general may be an excuse for loving nobody in particular."

This leads me to the evidence of our faith that the Apostle John says in his letter will most certainly exist in abundance in the hearts of those who truly love and belong to God. Read this with me: **1 John 3:10, 18-19 NIV**

10 So now we can tell who are children of God and who are children of the devil. Anyone who does not live righteously and does not love other believers does not belong to God. ... 18 Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions. 19 Our actions will show that we belong to the truth, so we will be confident when we stand before God.

Do you understand what John is saying? Let me state it to you this way:

Those who truly love God will love those who belong to God.

*This is prime evidence that you belong to God. If you are a child of God, then you will love the children of God. Period. If we love Jesus, then we can learn to love his children. Our love for God is SUBJECTIVE if it is not reflected outwardly in our relationship with other people. God says that our love for him will inevitably show itself in our love for others, and especially for those who belong to our family of faith! **1 John 4:12, 20-21 NLT**

12 No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us. ... 20 If someone says, "I love God," but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is a liar; for if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see? 21 And he has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their Christian brothers and sisters.

Our faith is revealed in love! Do you love God's people? **Are you even CLOSE to any of God's children in your everyday life? If not, how can you love them? I am always trying to encourage believers to DEVELOP Christ-centered friendships in their lives. How can you live the Christian life without this? You cannot!** Furthermore, if we do not love God's children, then we will stumble around in our darkness of our own disobedience and **fail to feel secure**. Our "love life" is also actually tied to our sense of security in Christ. **1 John 3:18-19 ESV**

18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. 19 By this we shall **know** that we are of the truth and **reassure our heart** before him.

If you want to "set your heart at rest [in God]," then you must step out and love!

-This is how you can KNOW that you belong to the truth

-This is how you REASSURE your heart in God's presence

So, what does "loving one another" really mean? Well, you can first be sure that love is not just LIKE. You are called to love people that you may not initially like! This means that our love is "MORE THAN A FEELING!" Once again, we are called by faith to GO BEYOND our feelings in order to find security in Christ. John describes this in two ways in 1 John 3. First, he gives a NEGATIVE EXAMPLE: **1 John 3:11-15 NIV**

11 For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. 12 Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. 13 Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. 14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. 15 Anyone who

hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.

Cain committed the first murder in human history, and it was his brother that he killed! John said that we should NOT do this to our brothers and sisters! Cain is an example of the many ways that we harbor hatred in our hearts that causes the death of others.

*Cain "murdered" his brother = "to butcher, slaughter." He SACRIFICED his brother for his OWN GAIN. This is what many of us do. We kill others for our own promotion!

So, what are some VIOLATIONS of love that we can see in our own hearts? Maybe you need to deal with some of these:

Hatred, as demonstrated by:

- *The Refusal to FORGIVE
- *Holding on to GRUDGES
- *Harboring envy, jealousy, resentment, and bitterness
- *Gossip and slander

We are called to love people in the same way that Jesus Christ loved us. This leads me to our POSITIVE EXAMPLE of love. (The **other John 3:16** that you may not have known about): **1 John 3:16 NIV**

16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

Wow, that is some command! But John did not come up with this on his own. He was quoting the words of Christ: **John 13:34-35 NLT**

34 So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. 35 Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."

Think of just HOW Jesus loved his disciples. From the beginning, he invited them into his life. He also spoke hope, purpose, and encouragement into their lives. His love for them was not just a warm feeling. At times, it was not soft and gentle. He was firm with his followers. He rebuked them openly and privately when they needed it. That was love. He also regularly affirmed his love for them. He told them that he loved them! He loved them by spending TIME with them. (Quality AND quantity!). He loved them by PRAYING for them regularly. He loved them by GIVING HIS LIFE for them. This is just how he told us to love one another! (1 John 3:16) He also lovingly challenged his disciples. He stretched their faith. He did not PANDER to them. He even LET THEM FAIL (but not without praying for them to be restored afterwards!). He did not shield them from the truth. He warned them of their flaws and faults and the consequences that would follow. He exposed their stubbornness

and pride. His love was PERFECT FAMILY LOVE. **It was stubborn, selfless love. It was love that was willing to NOT BE LIKED!**

This is the kind of love that stands out in contrast to the world around us. John boiled it down to its essence in this passage we are looking at today. He described it as an imminently PRACTICAL love. **1 John 3:17 NLT**

17 If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion--how can God's love be in that person?

Christ's love is demonstrated by:

- *GIVING you own resources to meet the needs of your faith family – Compassion.
- *SERVING Christians around you – Humility
- *Not seeking REWARDS from those you help – Selflessness.

We are called to “LAY DOWN” (or “LAY ASIDE”) our own wants and needs for the sake of our Christian brothers and sisters. Are you doing this in your life in any way at all? If not, then what does that say TO you ABOUT you?

What do you need to do with this message today?

- *Ask for or offer forgiveness to another brother or sister?**
- *Confess and release some grudge or resentment that you have been harboring in your heart?**
- *Make a practical (and maybe scary) move toward your faith family?**

If you want to grow in the confidence that you KNOW THAT YOU KNOW GOD, then you must take those steps that lead you toward your Christian brothers and sisters.

Let's pray.