



# Acting in Confidence

## Christopher B. Harbin

### John 13:30-38

True confidence is an attitude based on a sense of trust and security. It is not easy to build, nor is it often simple to maintain. We often picture a media scene where one character asks the other, “Do you trust me?” The answer generally ought to be, “Is there any reason I should?” How do we respond when it is Jesus asking us to trust him? We may offer a glib answer, but do our actions follow such a response appropriately?

The gospels generally portray Peter with one foot in his mouth, the other foot quick to follow Jesus’ leading. His intentions were generally the very best, though they very often were misdirected for a lack of understanding Jesus’ core values and priorities. Then again, this was all new to Peter. He had been a fisherman for years, the son of a fisherman far longer, but this disciple thing was a new venture, and Jesus was by definition a game-changer.

Peter had been a leader among the disciples from the very start. His impulsive nature led him to take many an initiative among the others. Often, he was the spokesman for what no one else was willing to say, at other times, we can picture the disciples cringing in response to Peter’s words or actions. Peter’s words flowed from a desire to honor and serve Jesus, but they so often betrayed an interest or purpose in conflict with Jesus’ desires and teaching. Regardless, the gospel writers took pains to show in Peter’s example how Jesus gently redirected all of them at so many points in which religion, culture and society would take them down a path contrary to the direction Jesus wanted them to follow.

The night of Jesus’ last meal with the disciples was no different.

They were all gathered to celebrate the Passover meal, when Jesus took the focus of the celebration off the story of the exodus from Egypt and spoke of the new Exodus he would introduce. Jesus would usher in a new Exodus to freedom through God’s power working within him.

Jesus spoke about revealing God’s greatness in a way that would also display his own greatness. There could be no doubt what he was talking about. God’s greatest demonstration of power in their history has been the victory over Egypt, the world’s superpower. They had won their freedom without needing to lift a finger for anything other than marching to their freedom.

Oh, they knew what that meant! They were certain. The Exodus was a central theme of Judaism. It spoke of God’s victory over an oppressive regime which held the Hebrews in slavery. If Jesus were about to usher in a new Exodus, it meant he was about to overthrow the Roman Empire’s hold upon Israel! Every Jew in existence knew how that would apply to their lives! All but a small group who profited from their relationship with Rome yearned for such a day! A chance to participate in the new Exodus was the experience of lifetimes, and none of the disciples wanted to miss out on it.

Then Jesus shifted his words, confusing them with talk about their not seeing him and going where they could not follow. That just did not make sense to them. Like the common reaction for most of us when we hear words that just don’t make sense, they just ignored those statements to get to the good stuff. I mean, where could Jesus go they couldn’t follow? None of them understood Jesus to be speaking about his death. They weren’t ready for such talk. It did not fit the pattern. It was too far beyond their expectations and understanding of how God would and should operate. Moses didn’t die in the Exodus. Why should they consider it possible for Jesus to die? God was about to act in a powerful way, and they just wanted to be part of such an important day in history!

Then Jesus went back to the basics of his good news: Love one another. I imagine they were kind of tired of hearing the same thing over and over and over and over again. Yada, yada, yada, yada...

“Okay, yeah, we’ve heard that before some many times,” not that they had really understood how to apply it to their lives. It was going to be really important in a few hours when they all abandoned Jesus and denied him through various means. They would all need to forgive one another and love one another in spite of their errors, failures, and devastating sense of loss. Love one another. Yeah, they needed to hear it once more, regardless of believing they had heard it all before, regardless of believing they were ready for some new insight Jesus had not yet shared.

Jesus was not so concerned with telling them something else new, however. He was focused on the fact that at heart the gospel is very simple. It can be reduced to the trite phrases of “Love God and love one another.” Those are not difficult phrases to understand. We can easily memorize them. We can quote them daily, but that is not the point. They point is trusting God enough to actually live them, to apply them in full reality in our daily living.

Your love must be the same love I have for you. You must apply the same excesses to your love for one another that you see in my actions, decisions, attitudes, and priorities. You must be willing to apply love in the same measure that you have seen and will see displayed in my life. After all, it is love which set Jesus apart from so many others.

Judaism focused on legislation, rules, and traditions to bring the nation into God’s presence as worthy of God’s blessings. It changed the outward appearances of their lives, but it did not manage to change the internal reality of their lives. They were still seeking freedom and confidence in God’s blessings, provision, and protection. Their religious observance was too often caught up in issues of their insecurity, rather than expressing attitudes of freedom which flowed from confidence in God. They were too focused on earning security to live securely on the basis of God’s love.

Love was such a repetitive theme, that Peter managed actually to go back to Jesus’ comment about not being followed. “Lord, where are you going?” Peter was listening, but he was not hearing the things that really mattered. He was concerned with minutiae that just did not matter. He could not just accept Jesus saying he could not follow him. It unsettled him too much to really focus on what Jesus told him was important.

“Where are you going? Why can’t I come with you?”

Jesus’ response is interesting. He doesn’t tell Peter where he is going. He just tells him the timing is not right. “Not now,” he says, “only later down the road.” Peter responds like one of our little children, “But I want to go with you now!” Then he takes it a step further. “I am willing to die for you!” That was an interesting response. Peter finally touched on the right subject, but he didn’t really understand what he was saying.

“Are you so sure you are ready to die for me? Your actions won’t measure up to your words through morning.”

You know, maybe that’s why Jesus stressed that same phrase over and over again. We quote it and repeat it. We sing about it. The problem we have is living it. We want to trust God enough to love freely. We fantasize about loving God enough, even to the point of being willing to die for that love. Yet those words often fall shy of the reality of our limited confidence.

Like Peter, we still have conflicting visions of how life should play out. We are still captured by alternative views of reality. Our confidence needs maturing. Our words need time to soak through our priorities and purposes until they filter down into our actions.

As long as they are words, there is potential. But words of confidence in God have little meaning until we take steps to act upon them. Are we ready to let go of competing sources of security to place all at God’s feet? Only then can we truly act in confidence. Only then can we focus on the love to which we are called.

\*\_\*\_\*