

1 JOHN – CHAPTER 3:19-22A

Truth and Confidence

INTRODUCTION

In the preceding section of 1 John 3:11-18, the author sharply contrasts the apostles and the children of God with the antichrists, emphasizing the distinction through the lens of love and hate. The antichrists, identified as those who deny Jesus as the Christ and fail to love their brethren, are identified by their hatred, likened to Cain's murderous act, and are thus children of the devil.

In contrast, the Apostolic community and believers are identified by their love for one another, having believed in the gospel, and the message they received from the beginning to love one another, exemplified by Jesus' self-sacrificial love.

This section is not a test for salvation but a delineation of identity, highlighting that the false teachers' lack of love is intertwined with their false doctrine, setting them apart from the believers who are called to love in deed and truth.

We ended the last lesson; our love for one another is not sourced from each other, but from God's love, through Jesus' sacrifice. The reason we love is that God loved us first. When we love to receive love, when we love because we are receiving love from others, we will struggle. Why? Because we will disappoint, and we will be disappointed with others. We struggle with the flesh and sin, and we will fail one another. But if we can all love one another because of Jesus's love for us, then we will be very successful regardless of whether we fail.

1 JOHN 3:19-24 – TRUTH AND CONFIDENCE

This section of 1 John must be evaluated first in its context. What is it that the author is saying to this group of believers? What is the context of this passage? The context is love. Verse 19 is not a new paragraph. The previous verse indicates that we do not love in word but in deed, in function. The phrase "by this" deals with the fact that love is action, not only in words.

Look back at verse 10 and see that "the one who does not love his brother" is not of God. We saw that the false teachers are identified as not loving the brethren. The text then says in verse 18 that love is a function, not a statement. By the action of love, we will know.

The question we ask now is, what do we know? The next word is the conjunction "**ὅτι** *hoti*." Once again, we have a conjunction that plays a large part in interpretation. Even in English, this reads weird. But the common interpretation of this passage is "Assurance Through a Clear Conscience." This teaching emphasizes that a clear conscience is rooted in living out God's commands and provides assurance to believers of their standing with God based upon performance. Within this typical teaching, believers are encouraged to examine their actions, ensure they align with God's commands, and trust God when feeling unworthy.

"The confidence we have in approaching God in prayer is directly tied to our obedience to His commands, particularly the command to love one another."

So, when a believer feels unworthy, they pull out their checklist and ensure the boxes are checked.

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What is this interpretation based upon? It is based upon the interpretation (not the translation) of the conjunction “**ὅτι** *hoti*.” Let’s retranslate this a bit. Remember my thoughts on “**ὅτι** *hoti*” in John and 1 John? Try not to translate them, see how it fits.

1 John 3:19-24 – My Translation – Literal Greek Word Order

And in this we will know of the truth we are and in the sight of Him we will assure the heart of our whatever it condemns, our the heart greater is God the heart and knows all. Beloved whatever the heart of ours not it condemns, boldness we have before the God and when we ask we receive from Him the commandments of His we keep and the things pleasing sight of His we do.

And this is the commandment of His so that we should believe in the name of the Son of His, Jesus Christ and we would love one another just as he gave commandments to us. And the one keeping the commandments of His in Him abides and He in him, in this we know He abides in us by the Spirit whom to us He has given.

My Translation – English Rendering

And by this we will know, we are of the truth, and in His sight we will assure our heart whatever it condemns, God is greater than our heart and knows all. Beloved, whatever our heart does not condemn, we have boldness before God, and when we ask, we receive from Him.

We keep His commandments and do the things pleasing in His sight and this is His commandment so that we would believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He gave commandment to us. And the one keeping His commandments abides in Him, and He in him; by this we know He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given to us.

Translation notes*

- I am convinced that the second half of verse 22 belongs with verse 23 and begins a new thought.
- I have not translated the “**ὅτι** *hoti*” conjunctions as previously noted.
- The word “us” is not in the text associated with “condemn”
- Verse 24 - the one keeping His commandments is an articular participle and identifies the readers and the apostolic community.
- Verse 23 restates the commandments from Jesus Christ through the Apostles to the children. But there are no imperatives in this section. These are all indicative verbs, observations.

EXPOSITION

This section is still in the context of the greater discourse (1 John 2:28-4:6), and this is still in the conversation of the immediate context (1 John 3:11-18), and leads into the final section of the discourse (1 John 4:1-6). The main point must be maintained. The author is contrasting the antichrists with the children and the Apostolic community.

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Verse 19 begins with “And We will know...”

Restating verse 19 in its context, “we will know (if someone has the love of God abiding in Him) because we are of the truth.

The word for “know” is “**γινώσκω** *ginōskō*,” which is different than verse 14; this is not something we are told by God, but is experiential knowledge. This knowledge is based upon an observation, an evaluation, a test.

The phrase we are of the truth is a present indicative of “*eimi*.” Meaning that this is a status statement, “we are of the truth.” It is not conditional.

The typical translation of “we will know *that* we are of the truth...” is misleading. That translation deceives people into thinking that knowing the truth is based on experience. The entire body of doctrine tells us that the truth is found in the Word of God. To be “of the truth” is to be in alignment with His Word, not some type of experiential test.

The author is NOT telling them how to tell them how to know if they are of the truth, rather he is telling them that they will know (something), and “we are of the truth” is either the reason for the knowledge or is parenthetical.

The next statement is translated as “and will assure our hearts before Him...” The heart is translated from “**καρδία** *kardia*.”

When evaluating the next few lines of this passage, we must understand the meaning of the heart. The heart is not emotional, it is not a feeling; it is the inner recesses of the mind. This is the epicenter of the true thoughts of a person. The “nous” is the forethought, the heart is the deeper thought. The author is telling them that the inner recesses of the mind, the deeper thoughts, is what is being persuaded.

Remember the context – The audience has been duped, they have not been evaluating in accordance with Apostolic teaching, they are not evaluating with the heart. This is telling them that if they evaluate appropriately, then they will know. What will they know? Based upon the context, it is evaluating the antichrists vs the apostles; the “in this” refers to the love in verses 17-18. They are to test, observe the love, and make the obvious conclusion that they are ones who do not have the love of God in them.

Verse 20 is strange; the Greek word order makes this problematic, and the verse breaks. We have to go back to verse 19 to complete the thought. “And before Him we will assure our heart (in) whatever our heart condemns.”

Every single major translation adds “us.” If our heart condemns whom? What is the context? The context continues to contrast the believers addressed in this letter with the false teachers.

They are to evaluate in accordance with God’s Word, and they are instructed that teachers must first have a true message, and we also evaluate their love (John 13:35), whether they are characterized by “*agape*.” If they are not, then the author indicates that they are unworthy of their attention.

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Condemns is “**καταγινώσκω** *kataginōskō*” which is literally to note against, to come to know against. It means to find fault with, to ascribe blame (Galatians 2:11). It is improper to put this word in the same understanding as “**κατακρίνω** *katakrinō*.” This is not to be found guilty and condemned, but rather to note that they are not measuring up to the standard.

The rest of verse 20 indicates that God is greater than our hearts and knows all things; therefore, when we use doctrine and the Spirit of Truth to influence our inner mind and then our mind can properly evaluate.

Verse 21 then gives another confidence. If the heart does not condemn, we have confidence before God. This indicates that those whom they were following can go with them before God and with boldness before God.

This is not a self-evaluation but an evaluation as a whole, including the teachers. As a body they need to exercise proper Biblical measure and be in God’s word and abide in Jesus and when they have evaluated the teachers and they passed muster, then as a body, they will have boldness before God (1 John 2:28) knowing they have abided in Him because they are abiding in the teaching of the Apostles.

Verse 22a – and whatever we ask, we receive from Him

This is in context, not a random prayer for whatever they want. The pronoun “**ὅς** *hos*,” translated as “whatever,” is a relative pronoun and relates to the entire conversation. The pronoun and the context dictate that the requests and fulfilment have to do with the evaluation based upon the truth using God’s Word.

Let’s back up. What is happening? If we take the high-arching view of this text.

The author is encouraging and ensuring the audience that they (the children) are able to address the problem of the antichrist by evaluating two criteria. The first is found in chapter 2 and is the primary measure. What is their message?

The second is based upon the message that they have heard from the beginning, that they should love one another. The antichrists have also failed in that regard. This also is an evaluating point for them. In verse 16, we have the main observation: if someone has the means to live and does not help a brother in need, how does the love of God abide in him? Then the challenge is next in verse 19 that love must be in deed and truth.

Now, the author tells them, in this challenge, we will know who has the love of God abiding in them. The statement “we are of the truth and will ” is a definitive encouragement intended to have them push through any doubts they may have. As long as they rely upon the truth (Apostolic message they have heard from the beginning) then their heart will not fail. The heart is not an emotional statement; rather, it is the deep recesses of thought.

In whatever their heart finds fault, they can be confident that God and Truth will prevail; in whatever their heart does not find fault, then they as a body will have boldness, knowing that they have abided in Christ, and in this question, this issue, whatever they ask God will provide.