

“Love and Hate”

(1 John 3:11-24 ~ Part 3)

Introduction

➤ The book of “1 John” was written to Christians – to all who professed to be a follower in Christ (see 2:12-14, 19; 3:1; 5:13). In doing so, throughout this book, the apostle John gave several tests to help Christians examine the veracity and maturity of their Christian faith (see 1Cor.11:28; 2Cor.13:5). As is typical throughout this book, the apostle John utilized a writing style of extreme contrasts. He did this, writing words inspired by the Holy Spirit of God (2Tim.3:16; 2Pet.1:21), to show that there is no such thing of a person being “kind of” a Christian or a “nominal” Christian (i.e., Christian in name only).

While every Christian struggles to be a faithful Christian, true Christians do not merely pretend to be Christians – they are possessors of Christ not merely professors of Christ. While their struggles are real (Jms.3:2), so is their faith. While their love for Christ is not perfect, it is indeed genuine.

➤ This is evident in the passage before us this morning. Once again, John wrote in terms of stark contrasts. In this passage, John likens the Christian’s life to that of Christ and the non-Christian’s life to that of Cain. The Christian lives a life filled with and compelled by God’s love. The non-Christian, having rejected Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, is devoid of God’s (saving/sanctifying) love. Therefore, the way of Christ is the way of (true) love, and the way of Cain is the way of hate.

Those who truly love God, and His Son Jesus Christ, are compelled (by the Spirit of God and the Word of God) to love what God loves – especially those God loves and who love God. For the love of God is not from this world, and the world is opposed to the love of God.

1 John 3:11-24 ~ “For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. ¹²We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s righteous. ¹³Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. ¹⁴We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. ¹⁵Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. ¹⁶By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. ¹⁷But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? ¹⁸Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. ¹⁹By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; ²⁰for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. ²¹Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; ²²and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. ²³And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. ²⁴Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.”

➤ Biblical love is not merely a feeling, or even an emotion. It is a conscious decision to act in a way that truly benefits the recipient, by demonstrating the love of God. This love is the highest and purest form of love [*agapaō* (vb., 5x; vs.11, 14^{2x}, 18, 23), *agape* (n., 2x; vs.16, 17), *agapetos* (adj., vs.21) ; variant forms of this word for love used 52 times in 1 John (105 verses). It is selfless, sacrificial, and sacred. It is a love that comes from God (1Jn.4:7-8, 16), and therefore a love that reflects the attributes and character of God.

In this passage of Scripture, we find several truths regarding the Christian’s call to love as God loves.

I. The Instruction (vs.11-12)

- It is important to point out what may be obvious: this is a command from the Lord. It is not a suggestion from the Lord, and therefore not optional for Christians. This (subjunctive) verb – “*we should love*” (vs.11; *agapaō*) – indicates this is an action to be followed, not merely a feeling to be felt or an idea to be thought. As we will see, the command to love is active not passive. We are not necessarily commanded to feel love for one another, as much as we are commanded to be loving toward one another. We are not to “police” how others love us, but to actively love others (whether it is reciprocated or not).
- In verses 11-12, this command is stated in the positive (what to do) and the negative (what not to do).

A. What to do (vs.11)

- The point is terribly easy to understand, and yet often very difficult to apply. The point is this: those who truly love God, those who have been loved by God with a sovereign and salvific love, will love that which God loves, who God loves, and how God loves. A person cannot truly love God and hate what God loves. To put it more specifically, those who are truly God’s children (Christians) will love all who are God’s children (Christians). This is not only common sense, but also a command of God.

Matt 22:37-40 ~ “And [Jesus] said ... ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.’”

John 15:12 ~ “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

Gal 5:14 ~ “For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”
[Lev.19:18; cf. Rom.13:10]

B. What not to do (vs.12)

- Interestingly, and surprisingly, the apostle John contrasted the Christian who loves with that of Cain – the first murderer in human history – “*we should love one another. We should not be like Cain*” (vs.11-12). To put it bluntly, “We should love one another, not murder one another.”
- Cain is forever an illustration of hatred – an extreme example of failing to love his brother. Overcome by envy, anger, and hatred, Cain literally killed his own brother. “*We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s righteous*” (vs.12). We dare not dismiss this as mere hyperbole. The illustration is graphic because the sin of hatred is so insidious. This physical act resulted from spiritual rebellion against God – the physical sin of murder arose from the spiritual sin of hatred (unrighteous anger). All visible/physical sin, stems from invisible/spiritual sin. “In God’s eyes, hatred is the moral equivalent of murder” (John MacArthur; *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary; 1Jn.3:13, 15*).

1 John 3:15 ~ “Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”

II. The Exhortation (vs.13-18)

- Notice the sharp distinction between Christians and non-Christians: “*Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you*” (vs.13). In other words, while hatred is not a characteristic of a Christian it is certainly a characteristic of a non-Christians (see Tit.3:3; Col.1:21). The point here is the sharp and blatant difference between Christians and non-Christians when it comes to (true/biblical) love (See Jn.13:35; Gal.5:19-24).

- Therefore, Christians ought not be *“surprised”* (vs.13; *thaumazō*, “to be filled with wonder”) when they are hated by non-Christians. However, it ought to be surprising when Christians hate and especially surprising when Christians hate other Christians!

As the world hates Christ, and in hating Christ they hate God as well (Jn.15:23), they will express that hatred in those who follow Christ and worship God. Therefore, it should not be surprising to Christians when they suffer opposition or persecution for Christ. Rather, it should be surprising to Christians when they do not (2Tim.3:12-13).

A. The hatred of the world (vs.13, 15)

- The phrase *“the world”* (*kosmos*; vs.13, used 23x in 1 John) refers not to the physical planet (earth) but to the devil’s rule in and over all unbelievers and all that is ungodly. The world – all that is ungodly and unrighteous in this world – is contrary to God’s will and subject to God just and eternal wrath. *“[T]he whole world lies in the power of the evil one”* (1Jn.5:19). As believers, we are called to be in the world but not of the world (see Jn.15:19; 1Jn.2:15-17; 4:4-6; 5:19).
- The reason for this hatred from the world – that is, from unbelievers – is that they ultimately hate God and the things of God (Jn.3:19-21; Rom.1:30; 8:7; Jms.4:4). Even if non-Christians do not conspicuously hate Christians, we know that they fundamentally hate all that the Christian worships, believes, and does in their pursuit of knowing Christ and making Christ known. Christians will be hated by those who hate Jesus Christ; they will be rejected by those who reject Christ; they will be persecuted by those who would persecute Christ (see Matt.10:16-22; Jn.15:18-25; 17:14).
- Consequently, spiritually speaking, *“Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him”* (vs.15). In trying to make his point, John again used absolute contrasts. This does not mean that every hateful word or act automatically/immediately condemns a person to hell, or that no one who commits murder will go to heaven. Rather, this means that a life that is characterized by hatred – unrepentant hateful attitudes and behaviors (especially unrepentant hatred toward other Christians) – is evidence of an unsaved life.

B. The love of Christians (vs.14, 16-18)

- As those who have been saved by God’s sovereign and sanctifying love, and consequently indwelt by the power and presence of God’s Holy Spirit, Christians are compelled by God to love the way God loves and what God loves. Christian love – selfless, sacrificial, and sacred love – characterizes every true Christian, and worldly hatred characterizes every non-Christian.

Some have rightly said that since loving God is the greatest commandment (Matt.22:37-38), failing to love God is the greatest sin. It could also be argued that since loving others is the second greatest commandment (Matt.22:39), failure to love others is the second greatest sin.

- In these verses, we find not only the reason Christians love but the way Christians love.

1. The reason Christians love (vs.14)

First and foremost, the reason Christians love is because God has graciously, mercifully, and lovingly saved them. Christians do not love because they are simply more loving, or because they are better people. It is important to remember that apart from God’s saving grace, Christians are just as hateful and sinful as non-Christians. What separates Christians from non-Christians is Christ – Christians are saved by God’s grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

True love then is a natural/supernatural byproduct of being saved, and therefore is evidence of (not meriting) one’s true salvation: *“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death”* (vs.14).

2. The way Christians love (vs.16-18)

As we have seen, biblical (Christian or true) love is vastly different from worldly love. This is evident not only in the root of love but also in the fruit of it. Christians should be the most loving people on the planet. This is not a permissive, or an unconditional love, but a love that is both from Christ and unto the honor/glory of Christ. In verses 16-18, John notes three important aspects regarding the way Christians love.

a. The epitome of Christian love (vs.16)

As always, Jesus Christ is the supreme example of how we are to live the Christian life. When it comes to loving one another, Jesus perfected and personified love in literally giving His life for us: *“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us”* (vs.16; see Rom.5:8). This, of course, is referring to Christ’s substitutionary death on the cross, which is the greatest example of selfless and sacrificial love (see Jn.10:11, 15, 17-18; 13:37-38; 15:13; cf. Is.53:4-6; 2Cor.5:21).

The first part of verse sixteen is doctrine, and the second part of the verse is instruction: *“and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers”* (vs.16). Here again is the stark contrast between the way of Christ and the way of Cain (vs.12). Where Cain literally murdered his own brother out of hateful envy, Christ literally sacrificed His own life out of selfless love. We are to be like Christ, and not like Cain.

b. The evidence of Christian love (vs.17)

While no Christian loves perfectly, this is to be every Christian’s goal. Since love can be kind of an abstract concept – hard to define and hard to identify – John gave an example as to how we can evaluate the genuineness of our love for one another: *“But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?”* (vs.17).

We may never have the opportunity to give our lives to save another, but we all have many opportunities throughout our lives to help a *“brother [or sister] in need”* (vs.17). This not to suggest that we are commanded to help everyone who asks for help, or that Christians are to live in some socialistic utopia.

The key here is twofold: 1) having the means to help (*“if anyone has the world’s goods”*; vs.17), and 2) knowing someone – particularly another Christian – in genuine need (*“sees his brother in need”*; vs.17).

So here is the test of a Christian’s love: The true Christian will not be apathetic toward another Christian in need. How does the true Christian, with the (abundant) resources to help, respond to a brother or sister in need? When they are able, and when it is appropriate, the true Christian – in whom *“God’s love abide[s]”* (vs.17) – expresses their love by helping those in genuine need.

Notice John’s rhetorical, self-examining, question: *“... if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?”* (vs.17). The phrase *“closes his heart against him”* may imply an intentional (conscious) effort to resist the natural impulse to help someone in need. Like knowingly *“clos[ing]”* (*kleiō*), or slamming, a door in someone’s face!

c. The expression of Christian love (vs.18)

The expression of this love must be sincere, and not merely some Christian rhetoric or ritual. In verse eighteen we read: *“Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth”* (vs.18). Again, we see this love is feeling, but an active expression. Christian love is no mere emotion nor is it mere profession.

The phrase “*word or talk*” (*logos ... glōssa*) conveys two ways of saying the same thing. This is, we ought not just talk about loving others or even profess to love others. This can be seen when Christians get together – in Bible study or prayer time – and merely discuss all the needs of people around them and in the church, and even commit to praying for them, and then do nothing about it (sometimes we can talk about praying for others and never pray for them, other times we can pray for them and never attempt to help them). As the saying goes, “Talk is cheap.”

Rather than simply profess to have a Christian love, or talk about loving others, we are called to actually – actively – love one another: “*in deed and in truth*” (vs.18; *ergon ... alētheia*). In other words, our love must be seen in good works we do and in the sincerity of our hearts. Words are important, but Christian love is not truly expressed in words alone. Likewise, sincerity is important, but Christian love is not truly expressed in sincerity alone (see Rom.5:8).

✓Illust: “True love cannot long be dormant. It is like fire, of an active nature – it must be at work. Love longs for expression ... Command it to be without expression and you command it not to live. And true love is not satisfied with expressing itself in words. It does use words, but it is painfully conscious of their feebleness, for the full meaning of love is not to be conveyed in any human language. It breaks the backs of words and crushes them to atoms when it lays upon them all that it means. Love must express itself in deeds, as our old proverb says, ‘Actions speak more loudly than words’” (Charles Spurgeon, sermon “God’s Love to the Saints”; July 11, 1875).

God’s love cannot truly be received and not shared. Just like true saving faith expresses itself in good works (and the absence of good works can be evidence of no true saving faith), so too those who have received God’s salvific love express that love in loving others (and the absence of godly love can be evidence of not receiving God’s salvific love; cf. vs.10, 15, 17).

James 2:14-17 ~ “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

III. The Examination (vs.19-24)

➤ After instructing and exhorting Christians to love one another – and knowing that all of Christians fail to always love perfectly – the apostle John encourages them to use this command as a means of spiritual examination and, ultimately, assurance of salvation.

1 John 3:19-24 ~ “By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him;

²⁰for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.

²¹Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; ²²and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. ²³And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. ²⁴Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.”

➤ In these verses, the apostle John gives three important aspects regarding a Christians spiritual self-examination.

A. Conviction of the heart (vs.19-20)

➤ As we have already seen in the book of “1 John”, the apostle wrote this book to examine the veracity and maturity of their faith. One way we can see this is through John’s repeated use of various forms of the word “*know*” (*ginōskō/oida*) – used over 40 times, in the 105 verses of 1 John). In fact, the word “*know*” appears six times in the passage we are currently studying (1Jn.3:11-24):

1 John 3:14 ~ “We know [*oida*] that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.”

1 John 3:15 ~ “Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know [*oida*] that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”

1 John 3:16 ~ “By this we know [*ginōskō*] love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”

1 John 3:19 ~ “By this we shall know [*ginōskō*] that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him”

1 John 3:20 ~ “for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows [*ginōskō*] everything.”

1 John 3:24 ~ “Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know [*ginōskō*] that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.”

➤ Again, John’s purpose in writing this book is to encourage professing Christians to examine their lives to see if they truly are followers of Christ. This examination is crucial for every professing Christian. For not all who say they are Christians are actually saved – many who profess Christ do not possess Christ.

Matt 25:10-13 ~ “And while they [i.e., the five foolish virgins] were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. ¹¹Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ ¹²But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ ¹³Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.’”

Matt 7:21-23 ~ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²²On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ ²³And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

➤ Ultimately, John was not writing to discourage Christians, and he certainly was not trying to cause Christians to doubt the efficacy of Christ’s atoning sacrifice. He was writing to help Christians – as they struggle with persecution, temptation, sin, and doubt – to come to know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that they are saved.

1 John 5:13 ~ “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.”

1 John 5:20 ~ “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.”

➤ The Christians’ assurance of salvation must not come from subjective feelings, false doctrine, or religious works or experiences – these can all bring a false assurance of salvation (see Matt.7:21-23). True assurance of salvation must come from a genuine self-examination of one’s faith in Christ, and how this faith is demonstrated in one’s daily life. While a person is not saved by good works, every Christian is saved unto good works (Eph.2:5, 8-9; Tit.3:5; 2Tim.1:9). Therefore, a Christian’s assurance

of salvation comes as they truly examine their faith in Christ and the results (i.e., evidences) of their faith in Christ.

1 Cor 11:28 ~ “Let a person examine [*dokimazō*] himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.”

2 Cor 13:5 ~ “Examine [*peirazō*] yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test [*dokimazō*] yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you fail to meet the test [*adokimos*]!”

➤ We see one aspect of this examination in verse 19: *“By this we shall know that we are of the truth”* (vs.19). The immediate question is “What does the ‘by this’ refer to?” Specifically, this test of examination is loving one another in deed and in truth. For when we love, as we have been loved by Christ, we demonstrate that we are truly in Christ and Christ (by the Holy Spirit) is truly in us.

When we genuinely discover – through sincere and biblical self-examination – that we actively love our brothers and sisters in Christ, *“we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him”* (vs.19). This discovery will not only inform the mind that *“we are of the truth”* but also *“reassure [the] heart”* [*peithō kardia*; to persuade, convince, or quiet the heart].

1 John 3:19 ~ “... we will know that we are of the truth and will convince our conscience in his presence” (NET)

1 John 3:19 ~ “... and will convince our hearts in His presence” (HCSB)

➤ The apostle John is referring here to the human conscience (see Rom.2:15; 9:1; 13:5; 1Cor.8:7-13; 10:23-30). Everyone has a “conscience” (*syneidēsis*; lit. “with knowledge”; see Rom.2:15; 9:1; 13:5), which in English also means “with knowledge. It is a God-given internal mechanism that serves to inform us of God’s moral law – whether or not we are doing what is right. To put it more simply, more succinctly, the conscience is our God-given guilt-producing warning device.

Everyone has a conscience, but everyone does not have a clean or clear conscience. The conscience is like a skylight to the soul, enabling the light of God’s truth to instruct, warn and guide. Sin, disobedience to God and rebellion against God, covers the conscience so that little or none of God’s truth affects the soul of a person. This results in having a “weak” or “defiled” conscience (1Cor.8:7), or even an “evil” conscience (Heb.10:22), as opposed to a conscience that is “good” (1Tim.1:5) or “clean” (Heb.10:22) or “clear” (1Tim.3:9).

Simply put, God uses the conscience to guide us – in wisdom and purity – as we seek to apply His truth to our daily lives. The conscience serves to give us practical guidance in areas that are not specifically detailed in Scripture. For example:

1 Sam 24:2-7 ~ “Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel and went to seek David and his men in front of the Wildgoats’ Rocks. ³And he came to the sheepfolds by the way, where there was a cave, and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the innermost parts of the cave. ⁴And the men of David said to him, ‘Here is the day of which the Lord said to you, ‘Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it shall seem good to you.’ Then David arose and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul’s robe. ⁵And afterward David’s heart struck him, because he had cut off a corner of Saul’s robe. ⁶He said to his men, ‘The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the Lord’s anointed, to put out my hand against him, seeing he is the Lord’s anointed.’ ⁷So David persuaded his men with these words and did not permit them to attack Saul. And Saul rose up and left the cave and went on his way.” (see 1Sam.25:31; 2Sam.24:10)

1 Sam 24:5 ~ “And it came about afterward that David's conscience bothered him because he had cut off the edge of Saul's robe.” (NASB)

➤ To be sure, there is no verse in Scripture that specifically forbids a person from cutting a corner of the king's robe while he is relieving himself in a cave. However, as David knew, Scripture does prohibit dishonoring or harming the king who is *"the Lord's anointed"* (1Sam.24:6, 10; 26:11; cf. 26:9; Ex. 22:28; 2 Sam. 1:14; 19:21; 1Chr.16:22; Ps.105:15; cf. Rom.13:1ff). David was conscience-stricken because he knew that he had violated the command of the Lord.

Our consciences must be informed by, transformed in, and conformed to the will of God by the Word of God! The conscience can be marred or stained by sin, obscuring or obstructing our ability to see the light of the truth of God's Word. This is why God exhorts us to be faithful in prayer, diligent in the study of His Word and committed to a local assembly of believers – so that we can be instructed, encouraged, corrected, and trained in righteousness (Heb.4:12-13; 2Tim.3:16-17). It is also why we are to be quick to confess and repent from sin, and faithful to read/study God's Word, actively "cleaning off" the skylight of our conscience so that we can rightly discern the truth and will of God.

✓ **Illust:** "While conscience is something to which we can and should listen, it is not an infallible guide to right conduct. Conscience will tell you that you should not do what is wrong and that you should do what is right, but conscience alone cannot tell you what is right or what is wrong. It is only the Bible, the written Word of God, that can teach you that. When you have the Bible and when the Holy Spirit is shining on its pages teaching you what you should do, then conscience will tell you that you ought to do it. But if you do not have the Word of God, then even though conscience will tell you to do the right thing, you will not know what the right thing is and you will err, as Paul had done" (Boice, J. M. *Acts: an expositional commentary*, p. 375).

➤ When a believer is convicted – conscience-stricken – this does not mean that they are unsaved. In fact, the conviction of sin, when accompanied by genuine confession and repentance, is great evidence of true salvation (of having neither a weak nor defiled conscience). To this point, the apostle John encourages Christians to remember that *"whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything"* (vs.20). It is imperative we remember that "good works" neither save us nor keep us saved, but are the fruit of our salvation. Salvation comes by God's grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. It can neither be earned nor secured by good works. For the true believer, conviction of sin does not mean condemnation of the soul!

Rom 5:1 ~ "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Rom 8:1 ~ "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

➤ Every Christian, at one time or another, experiences the convicting pang of sin – when *"our heart condemns us"* (vs.20). Thankfully, the security of a Christian's salvation is not based on the (weak, fickle) condition of his/her heart. Simply put, the security of one's salvation is based on God, who is *"greater than our heart, and he knows everything"* (vs.20). In other words, *"the Lord knows those who are His"* (2Tim.2:19). He is not ignorant, nor can He ever be deceived. Therefore, ultimately, the assurance of our salvation must not rest on our good works but on the finished work of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ.

✓ **Illust:** "Some of his readers may have been so overwhelmed by the memory of their past sins and awareness of present ones that they found the thought of God's forgiveness nearly impossible to accept. Their overactive consciences, beleaguering them with their own shortcomings, perhaps made it difficult for them to have a settled confidence in their right standing before God. So John wrote to encourage those believers and enable them to accurately evaluate their own spiritual condition. In so doing, he sought to solidify their conviction, rightly inform their conscience, and strengthen their assurance with a true understanding of their transformation and its evidences" (John MacArthur; *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1, 2, 3 John*; 3:19-20).

B. Confidence in the Lord (vs.21-22)

- Notice that even as our confidence in in the Lord in the midst of conviction, so our confidence is in the Lord in the absence of conviction: *“Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God”* (vs.21). In other words, when (after careful and prayerful examination in the Scriptures) our conscious is clear – free from ravages (guilt, shame) of sin – we can know that we are accepted by God in Jesus Christ our Lord. Among other things, this assurance leads us to confidently come *“before God”* in prayer.
- Again, the Christian’s assurance of salvation must not come from subjective feelings, false doctrine, or religious works or experiences. As the apostle Paul stated, we are to *“put no confidence in the flesh”* (Phil.3:3). Rather, *“we have confidence before God”* (vs.21). This *“confidence”* (*parrēsia*; see 1Jn.2:28; 4:17) refers to a freedom to speak or boldness of speech, and here describes the privilege granted to all believers to come before (the holy) God in prayer.
- Heb 4:16** ~ “Let us then with confidence [*parrēsia*] draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”
- When we are walking in faithful obedience to the Lord, we are walking according to the will of the Lord: *“whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him”* (vs.22). As this verse is often misused and abused, taken out of context, it must be noted that nowhere in Scripture does God promise to unconditionally give us whatever we want. This false teaching stems from those who peddle the “prosperity gospel” (which is a false gospel; Gal.1:8-9), and those who advocate a “name-it-and-claim it” approach to prayer.
- Notice the condition stated in verse 22: *“because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him”* (vs.22). This truth is repeated throughout Scripture, and often from the mouth of Jesus Christ.
- 1 John 5:14** ~ “And this is the confidence [*parrēsia*] that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.”
- John 14:13-14 ~ “Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.”
- John 15:7-8 ~ “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.”
- John 15:16 ~ “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.”
- John 16:23 ~ “In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.”
- It should be clear that God will not give His children “whatever they want” just because they asked for it – especially is “what they want” is sinful, harmful, or in any way contrary to God’s will. What parent would, in the name of love, give their little child a knife just because he asked for it? What loving parent would let their little child swim in the ocean just because she wanted to? Likewise, it is ridiculous to presume that God will give you whatever you want just because you asked, or just because you said, “In Jesus’ name.” However, to those who are obedient – to those who are walking according to God’s Word and praying according to His will – God will indeed give them whatever ask. True prayer is not trying to get something from God, but seeking the will of God.

C. Obedience to the Lord (vs.23-24)

➤ Disobeying God (sinning against God) is a hindrance to prayer, to fellowship with God, and to the peace of God. Conversely, obedience to the Lord enables us to pray unencumbered by sin and guilt, and frees us to experience the fullness of peace with God. Sincere, wholehearted, obedience to the Lord is one of the greatest assurances of salvation.

To highlight this truth, John highlighted the two greatest commandments as one: *“And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us”* (vs.23). Here we see that to *“believe in the name of [God’s] Son Jesus Christ”* is the truest and highest expression of the greatest commandment to love God.

Matt 22:34-40 ~ “But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. ³⁵And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” ³⁷And he said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.’” (see Deut.6:5; Lev.19:18)

➤ As we’ve seen, a person cannot truly love Christ (or believe in Christ) if they hate Christians (1Jn.3:10, 14, 15; 4:8, 20). In this sense, to love God and love those whom God loves are two sides of the same command.

Gal 5:14 ~ “For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

James 2:8 ~ “If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well.”

➤ The basis of one’s salvation is faith in Christ – saved by God’s grace alone through faith alone, in Christ alone. In that sense, to *“believe in ... [God’s] Son Jesus Christ”* (vs.23) is the greatest commandment; the ultimate expression of truly loving God. Second only to the greatest commandment is to *“love one another”* (vs.23). A so-called belief in God that does not truly love God, and love those who belong to God, is an empty faith and false religion – a faith of demons.

James 2:19 ~ “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe – and shudder!”

➤ This is the promise given by God to all those who have truly received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior: *“Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us”* (vs.24). Those who truly obey the commands of God, those who are true children of God, abide in God and God abides in them [*“abides”* (*menō*); to reside or remain]. That is, through the indwelling power and presence of the Holy Spirit of God – *“whom he has given us”* (vs.24) – Christians live in God and God lives in them.

Although this is ultimately mysterious and confounding, it is nonetheless clearly taught in Scripture:

John 15:4-5 ~ “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

➤ The abiding presence of God comes through the Holy Spirit, which God gives in fullness to every believer at the moment of true conversion. This is the “Helper”, “Comforter”, and “Spirit of truth” whom Jesus promised to send, to all true believers, after His resurrection and ascension (see John 14:16-18, 26; 15:26; 16:7-14; 20:22). The Holy Spirit enables Christians to understand, and rightly apply, the Word of God (1Cor.2:14-16), and it is the Holy Spirit of God that empowers Christians to live according to the will of God (Rom.8:13-14).

✓Illust: “We believe in God the Holy Spirit: one in essence with the Father and Son. He was sent by God the Father and God the Son to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. The Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus Christ and implements Christ’s work of redemption and baptism. He regenerates, baptizes, seals, gifts, and indwells all believers at conversion, progressively sanctifying, and securing them in Christ forever. The Spirit fills, leads, comforts, and intercedes for believers, empowering them for godly living and service. His presence is evident by the fruit of the Spirit and the building up of believers into the body of Christ, the Church” (SBC Doctrinal Statement).

Conclusion

➤ In his commentary on 1 John (3:19-24), Charles Swindoll wrote this incredible summary:

“Right now, you may be wondering where you stand. None of us lives perfectly like Christ. None of us exhibits continual self-sacrificial love for our brothers and sisters in Christ. All of us have moments when we mistreat the brethren by our actions – neglecting them in time of need, lashing out at them with our words, failing to minister to them as fellow members of the body. We may not be shedding blood like Cain did to Abel, but we frequently find ourselves failing to love the brethren as Christ loved us.

John knows that all of us are in this predicament, in which we know the good we ought to do but we just failed to do it. This is why he includes the important words of encouragement in these verses. Genuine believers who waffle between Cain and Christ need to remember that there not made righteous by their works, but by faith in the name of the Son of God.

John says, *‘We will know by this that we are of the truth’* (3:19). By *what?* By loving our brothers and sisters in Christ in deed and truth. When we love as he loved, we demonstrate that a new nature dwells in us from above. However, when sin inevitably finds its way into our thoughts, words, and actions, we can still have assurance before God, who is greater than our self-condemning hearts. He knows us. He knows the genuineness of our faith and love. He knows all about our bouts with evil and our struggles against habitual sins. And He provides the strength to overcome them by His Spirit.

John’s desire is to strengthen our assurance.

‘You’re not like Cain!’ he says.

A doubter might respond, ‘But you can’t see my heart, John. Last week I was really, really angry at one of the elders. And his wife!’

‘No, no, no,’ John responds. ‘Look at the totality of your life. You kept the faith even when you were challenged by false teaching. You’ve consistently provided for the poor in the church, opened your home to the hurting, and reached out to the lost – all motivated by your faith in Christ and love for others.’

‘But I punched that deacon in the mouth yesterday!’

John shakes his head, ‘Look, the fact that you feel remorse for these things means you’re definitely *not* like Cain. You’re not a child of the devil. The Spirit is prodding your conscience. You just need to respond to it. Confess your sins to God. Reconcile with your brothers and sisters. Sacrifice your pride and make amends.’

That’s John’s main point in 1 John 3:19-24. He is not trying to make true children of God doubt their salvation because of their sins, but to motivate them to return immediately to the way of righteousness and truth whenever they find themselves beginning to take even small steps in Cain’s direction” (Charles Swindoll; *Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary: 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude; 1Jn.3:19-24*).