

When My Heart Condemns Me (1 John 3:19-24)

How can I be assured of my salvation?

1. *He walks in the light as God is in the light, and is the light (1:5-7)*
2. *He sees his sin, confesses it, and repents of it (1:8-10)*
3. *He abides in Jesus and walks as He walked (2:1-6)*
4. *He loves the brethren in word and deed (2:7-11; 3:14-18)*
5. *He does not love the world (2:15-17)*
6. *He practices righteousness considering Christ's return (2:28-3:3)*
7. *He sins less, not sinless (3:4-7)*
8. *God's seed abides in him, not the devil's (3:8-10)*
9. *The world hates him because of God's righteousness in him (3:11-13)*

10. His heart (conscience) does not condemn him (v.19-22)

- John exhorts his beloved children to “love one another” (3:14, 17-18, 23). He also wants his readers to “know” they are in the truth (2:3, 5, 28, 29; 3:2, 5, 14, 16, 19) and be reassured (v.19) in their salvation.
- He also acknowledges that, at times, the heart (conscience) of the child of God may accuse (condemn) him. What is this about?

The heart, conscience, and conviction (v.19-20):

- The heart is the seat of feelings and inward jury. It is often interchangeable with our conscience (depending on the context), which will accuse or excuse us of our thoughts, intentions, and actions. It will function as a justifying advocate or a condemning accuser. It is the control center for our inner life.
- Everyone born as an image-bearer possesses a conscience. Conviction is the alarm system of the conscience that God has programmed into His image bearers. The conviction itself is not necessarily a byproduct of salvation and varies in sensitivity among both the unregenerate and regenerate.
- Conviction (from the conscience) will either accuse or excuse the thoughts, actions, or motivation of image-bearers when what it believes to be a particular truth is threatened. Conviction is conceived internally, often blooming in some outward manner.
- For a conviction to be trusted, the mind must be informed correctly, and the conscience must be conditioned accurately.
- The mind (knowledge) is easier to be changed than the conscience. It is more complex and takes longer to harden a sensitive conscience or soften a hardened conscience than to inform the mind since convictions are often “settled.”

Why would someone possess a condemning heart?

- A. As a Christian, the Holy Spirit may convict the man or woman of their sin. As a result, they will have no peace in their hearts until they confess and forsake it.
- B. As a Christian, the mind may be misinformed of truth (in part or in whole), and as a result, the conscience vilifies what it believes to be inaccurate.
- C. As a Christian, he or she may confuse remorse and contrition over sin with self-pity, which is a form of pride.
- D. He or she may not be regenerated; as a result, the conviction and condemnation experienced is the saving grace that both precedes and proceeds regeneration (positional in nature).
- E. Someone has informed them of a deficiency on their end, or someone else's tortured conscience has told them of something, and as a result, there is internal tension: this is “foreign” information that the man or woman must make sense of.

- Often, believers who possess a sensitive conscience are competent in the Scriptures. They may be perfectionists in other areas of their life. This has a spill-over effect in the moral and spiritual realm. They perceive their imperfections and are prone to discouragement when they disappoint the ones they love.
- Other times, believers can possess a clear conscience yet be lukewarm in sanctification. Since there is little progress in their sanctification, their mind is slow to be renewed (Eph. 4:23; Rom. 12:1-2).
- The perfectionist with a sensitive conscience must protect the conscience while at the same time trusting that Jesus is their perfection and righteousness (1 Jn. 2:1). There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).

John wants to reassure believers that if (when) their hearts condemn them, God is greater than their hearts (convictions), and He knows everything (v.20b).

- Conviction from the conscience cannot always be trusted, as it must interact with what is objectively true. Feelings and emotions wrought from the conscience must be derivative from two truths: What is true of God? What is true of you?
- If God's omniscience brings terror, there is no assurance, for Christ has pacified the wrath and condemnation of God (Rom. 8:1-11). If God's omniscience brings comfort, there can be assurance because God knows everything.
- John's chief purpose is that when believers are most aware of their shortcomings concerning God's standards, the love and mercy of the Father are present to heal their troubled conscience. John's exhortation is meant to heal the wounded conscience.
- We may be too strict or lenient about the “warning system” of the conscience. At the same time, we must not claim superior enlightenment where the conscience is viewed as inconsequential. While you cannot always trust your conscience, you can trust God.

Why does John want believers to have a settled conscience?

- A disturbed and unsettled conscience will hinder a believer's prayer life.
- Shame and guilt may overcome a believer struggling with a sensitive conscience. While there are many causes of a troubled conscience, contextually, this would be a failure to love the brethren (3:14, 17-18, 23).
- The mark of a mature believer is to act on what he knows to be true of God and himself.
- When the conscience is clear after being properly informed of God's truth, there is power, persistence, and fervency in prayer because all hindrances to communion with God have been removed. While God promises to give us whatever we ask (Jn. 14:13-14; 15:14-15), a clear conscience alone is not the deciding factor, but only what He wills to give (v.22).
- Paradoxically, God may will that His will not be accomplished; there is a will of God that God wills not to happen, yet in all things, God's will will happen because God has one will.
- While our obedience and willing service often condition the blessings we receive (v.22), we mustn't presume that obedience alone guarantees the favorable granting of requests.

11. The Spirit of Christ (Holy Spirit) dwells in him (v.23-24)

- John is not concerned only with raw obedience, but rather a true abiding which delights in obeying because it loves (Jn. 15:1-11; 13:34-35). Love must precede obedience.
- Loving obedience to the commandments (believe in Jesus and loving the brethren, v.23) is only possible through the enabling work of the Holy Spirit that has taken permanent residence inside the believer. Faith and conduct cannot be separated.
- The indwelling and filling of the Holy Spirit are evident by conduct, not in feeling. His presence and power are palpable and patent. The presence of God is not felt but demonstrated in action, as Christlikeness is birthed from a heart that loves one another (1:10-11; 3:4-24).