

Overcoming Doubt

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You know, it's at times like this in our world where there is so much chaos with riots and different things going on with still dealing with the political effects of pandemics or claimed pandemics, whatever the case may be, times like this where there is a lot of pressure on Christian preachers to make comments on social issues and for better or for worse whether I'm right or wrong, I resist those pressures. God did not call me to be a political commentator and I don't think he's called the church to be a place of social commentary. What God has called us to do is to preach the Gospel and to make disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. Matthew 28 is pretty clear on that and throughout the course of the writing of the New Testament there was all kinds of political intrigue that was going on but you find the apostles focusing not on the political events of their day but focusing on the Gospel. The Apostle Paul said in Romans 1:16, Rome being a centerpiece of great political intrigue throughout the New Testament era, Paul said he wanted to come to Rome because he was eager to preach the Gospel to Jews and Gentiles alike for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. And you know, my friends, even in the course of our history there have been great political calamities, we've had four presidential assassinations over the course of our history and what you and I as Christians need to do and what I believe that pastors need to do is to not take their eye off of the ball but to do what Paul said to do in 2 Timothy 4, preach the word. It is the word that is living and active and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. It is God's word which is able to rebuke, correct and to train us in righteousness, and it is in God's word that we find itself fullness of the sum of our responsibilities before God, and it is just so very vital for us not to forget what the great commandments are as taught by our Lord Jesus: to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, strength and mind, and our neighbor as ourselves, Jesus saying that those two commandments being a summary of the fullness of God's moral law expressed in the 10 Commandments found in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. I say those things just to give us a sense of perspective. Political events and medical issues and social justice matters, those things are going to rise and fall and these things have been with us since the beginning of time. The question for us is what are the matters of eternal perspective, what are the matters of enduring internal significance, what is it that God commands us and what is it that God would have for us as believing people in the midst of such chaotic times? Well, you know, we find that out by going to his word, going to his word which has endured for millennia, going to his word which has been unchanging throughout all of the different rising and falling of nations and political leaders and all kinds of different things that seem calamitous in the

day but were ultimately of passing significance. My friend, it is when we go to God's word that we find the matters that last, the matters that are significant from God's perspective, and it's just very important for us not to take our eye off the ball and focus on other things just because everyone around us is talking about it. So we come to God's word with a grateful heart.

Now with that said and in the context of our study of 1 John, the question is what does God have for his people in times like this? The things that God has and the things that God wants from his people are the same regardless of what's happening around us. God's word is enduring, it is unchanging. God himself is immutable and unchanging. God sits in the throne room of heaven unaffected by the events of the world around us and we just must have that perspective on it. So in the midst of such chaos and conflicting opinions within the world and within the church about everything that's happening around us, what is it that God would have for his people, what is it that he would have for us here at Truth Community Church and those of you that I'm so grateful join around us from different locations, what is it that God would have for us in the midst of these times? Well, do you know what? It's the same thing today that it was before the events in Minneapolis took place. It's the same thing before Donald Trump was elected President, before Barack Obama was elected President. It simply hasn't changed. We stand on a firm unchanging foundation that holds. Jesus Christ is our cornerstone. Jesus Christ is our foundation. The Gospel hasn't changed. Christ hasn't changed and his word to us hasn't changed. And in the blessed love of Christ for his people as expressed through the teaching of his apostles, what is it that he has for us in the midst of this time? What should you and I be pursuing in the midst of these times knowing that as the closer that we stay to God's word the surer our footsteps are going to be? Well, my friend, nothing's changed. In 1 John 1:4 it says that, "These things I've written so that our joy may be made complete," that we might know in the midst of the chaos something of an enduring contentment, an enduring gladness that gives us peace and flows out in loving one another as we go through life, that we might know joy. Chapter 2, verse 1, he says, "These things I've written to you so that you may not sin."

You know, one of the things that I've tried to say not often enough I'm sure throughout the course of my, you know, 25 years of ministry or however long it's been, time just gets away from me so much, but one of the things that I've tried to emphasize in teaching on the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount and other places is this, it's at times like this where there is a preening self-righteousness that manifests itself in the world and also in the church, people so concerned about social justice matters and, you know, making statements condemning this or that person because of the deeds that they have done. Well, my friend, what you need to understand is that repentance has a different significance for you and it has a different significance for me. The repentance that God requires from you is the thing that you should be most concerned about and what God requires from you is not repentance over sins that you haven't committed or, you know, or the sins of society, God isn't calling you to repent of that, God is calling you to repent of your personal sins, of your angry spirit, of your ungracious words, of your unkindness, of your adulteress thoughts, of your thieving lying lips, and things of that nature. The personal matters of personal holiness are not set aside simply because there are things

going on in society and the challenge for you and I as Christians is to never neglect our pursuit of our own personal holiness in light of God's word and to not get swept up in, you know, in the passing events of the day thinking that if we make virtuous statements about what others have done wrong, that somehow we're vindicated before God or in the eyes of men. It does not work that way. That is not what God is calling us to do and it's a fearful thing to realize how quickly and easily people are led astray even some of you just getting caught up in the events of the day and losing sight of biblical priorities. I just have to speak candidly and bluntly to you as your pastor. You know, what else can I do, what else should I do, I ask you? But in chapter 2, verse 1, we see the importance that God places on these things by what he says when the Apostle John says, "My little children, I have written these things to you so that you may not sin."

So, yeah, we're affected by the sins of other people and we see the events happening around us and, you know, we form our own opinions about that, but you know, when the end of the day comes and you start to crawl into bed and you put your head down on your pillow, what I want you never to forget to the extent that I have anything to do with it in my pastoral role is for you never to forget that you have a personal responsibility to God to pursue your own sanctification, for you to grow in your own personal holiness and the fact that other people are sinning does not somehow give you a pass on your own personal life. John says, "I've written these things to you so that you may not sin," and so there's this sense of joy, there's this sense of holiness and personal responsibility before God, and then in chapter 5, verse 13, we see that John has written to us so that we might know that we have eternal life, and that there would be an assurance, there would be a calm confidence, an ever deeply rooted sense of assurance and confidence that we truly have been born again; that we truly belong to the Lord Jesus Christ; that he has truly saved us out of the tribulations and the chaos of this world; that we belong to him; that we belong to a different kingdom and therefore our priorities are different, our affections are different, what we love and respond to have all been radically changed by this great work of God in bringing about our salvation and causing us to be born again and transferring us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light, the kingdom of slavery to Satan into the kingdom of slavery to the Lord Jesus Christ.

So as we go to God's word, we find that the enduring principles are unchanged by the world around us. Joy, holiness, assurance, in light of those things and in light of what Paul said in Philippians 2, what you and I want to do, what our priority is, is to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Having received Christ, having been on the receiving end of the grace and mercy and patience of God that saved us from our sins, now you and I look at Scripture, we look at the world around us, we look at our lives and our circle of relationships and influence and we say, "Okay, God, how do I live out salvation in the life that You have given me? How do joy and assurance and holiness play out in my life?" Those are the questions that we want to ask and answer as we come to God's word today.

So the text that providentially is in front of us as we've gone consecutively through 1 John begins at chapter 3, verse 19 through verse 24, and with that lengthy introduction, I

want to turn to the text and read it as we come to God's word and open it up here this morning. 1 John 3, beginning in verse 19 says this,

19 We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him 20 in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things. 21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; 22 and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. 23 This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. 24 The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

Now many of you come from religious backgrounds that at the end of the day used to give you this consistent message: you have not done enough. You have church leaders who are always calling for more commitment, calling for more attendance, that tell you to do more to support the church and you just feel like you're under a whip to do more and more and more and there's just this relentless pressure that is put upon some even in professing Christian circles perhaps by men who don't realize the effects of what they're saying. In other places and other backgrounds, priests have told you that you cannot have assurance of salvation, indeed that it's even sinful presumption to think that you would know that you're saved, that you will go immediately into the presence of Christ into blessedness immediately upon dying and, you know, and to say that you know that is actually sinful presumption, it's a complete reversal of everything that we see in God's word here in 1 John, isn't it? And beyond that, there is also this sense that we have personally that it's very easy to fall into, we forget that we relate to God on the basis of his gracious initiative to us in Christ and we start to focus on our own personal performance, and what we find is that we never quite reach the point where we think that what we've done is good enough, and some of you with introspective tender hearts realize that you have besetting sins and it's easy for the waves of the guilt and concern that you have over that to pull you undertow and pull you under the water to a point that you almost drown in the midst of it, and we could multiply other examples but you get the idea, just this sense that, "I haven't done enough and there's more to do, and I haven't reached my potential and I haven't fulfilled all righteousness," and as a result of that you sink deeper and deeper into discouragement, into doubt, even into despair for the sake of not having attained to the standard of perfection that God's moral law requires from us.

Well, it's precisely at those kinds of points that we need to come back and remember exactly what the Gospel says and what the Gospel is about and what Scripture says about our privileges in Christ, perhaps better stated, what it is that Christ has done for us. You see, Christ came in order to save us and to save us to the uttermost, to deliver us completely. You know, God is perfectly aware of the fact that you and I entering into this fallen human race, that you and I are going to fall short of his glory. This is not a newsflash to God. This is not a surprise to him and when we understand something of the love with which Christ came, when we understand something of the sovereign power and

the sovereign love with which he said, "I have come to seek and to save that which has been lost," we realize that Christ has come in a gracious way in order to cover us, in order to redeem us, in order to save us from all of that guilt and all of that sin and all of that falling short, and what you and I must understand and this is really the beginning point in some ways of Christian growth, is to understand that on our behalf our elder brother the Lord Jesus Christ, he has done everything that the law requires for us. It has been done on our behalf. His perfect life in obedience to the law of God, he did that on our behalf. He fulfilled righteousness for us. At his death on the cross as he suffered under the weight of God's wrath, he did that for us. And so all of our demerits have been covered and paid for by the blood of Christ, his blood washes away all of our sins Scripture says, and everything that the law requires in a positive sense he has also done that on our behalf so that we realize that when we are in union with Jesus Christ, God has graciously imputed to us, God graciously accepts the obedience and the suffering of his Son as a complete fulfillment of everything that he requires from us. And we receive that gift, we receive that benefit by faith, by receiving Christ, by resting in him, by coming to him in a repentant faith that denies our own self-righteousness and – watch this – denies and forsakes any reliance of our own obedience as finding favor with God, and we rest everything about our hope and everything about our acceptance with God in Christ and not in ourselves. That's what God wants from you, is he wants your faith in Christ, he wants your submission to his Son, to receive him, to rest in him as your hope for pardon and acceptance with God, and what Scripture tells us is that for those who put their faith in Christ in that way, God accepts them, God approves of them, God receives them and lovingly graciously accepts everything about his Son for those who believe in his Son. That's what God commands. That is what God requires, and the more that you understand that principle of salvation by faith alone and the more that you understand the excellencies of the obedience of Christ and the perfection of his sin offering at the cross, you realize that as you are in Christ, that there is this confidence that can mark your spiritual life, that there is this assurance that satisfies the demands of your accusing conscience that, "No, it's not a matter of my merit or lack thereof. God accepts me in Christ and I can know that that's a full acceptance because Christ has done everything to perfection for me." And that is the soil in which assurance of salvation grows. My friend, my friend, you will never find assurance of salvation as long as you are striving to please God with your own efforts. Nothing in your efforts, there is nothing in your efforts that could be acceptable to him. Nothing about it. It's tainted by bad motives. It's tainted by fractured accomplishment. You cannot please God with your own behavior and the sooner that we realize that and forsake any reliance on our own works and trust fully in Christ alone, that is where assurance and confidence start to grow from.

So for today it's time to see what Scripture says about what Christ has done for us and especially today the privileges that are ours in Christ, and this entire section is about confidence and assurance in Christ and I want you to see this. Look at verse 19 and in verse 24, you'll see how this is bracketed by the confident assertions that say "we know." We know. Verse 19, "We know by this that we are of the truth." Verse 24, "We know by this that He abides in us." Right there you see how this passage is bracketed, everything that is within those brackets is designed to produce that sense of assurance in you that you would know that you belong to Christ, that you would know that you are accepted by

God therefore there is joy and gladness that comes from walking in this world because you know where you stand and you know what will happen to you when you die. And even in the middle of the passage at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of this passage you find these points of assurance and this is the context, look at verse 21 with me. We're just taking a quick overview of the passage to get oriented in its primary theme. In verse 21 John says, "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God." So you see, beginning and end, "we know." In the middle of the passage, "we have confidence." And when we contemplate the theme verse that we've alluded to many times even here this morning, chapter 5, verse 13, "These things I have written to you that you may know that you have eternal life." Well, let's just pause right there, call a brief time-out and just recognize that assurance is the goal, it is one of the intended outcomes of God in your salvation. God intends for you to know that you would be saved and that you are saved. So if you live with recurring debilitating doubt in your life, well, this is a blessed thing to hear, is that God intends your life and your spiritual life to be different than that, not bogged down in introspective doubt but living in an outward view of Christ that gives assurance and confidence to your spiritual life. This is what God has for his children. This is the intent of Scripture to bring us to that kind of knowledge that we belong to him, that we are safe in his hands, and that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. That is the wonderful blessedness that is before us in this passage.

So my friend, let's talk about, let's just say a couple of things. Religious systems that simply provoke and thrive on unrelieved guilt in your life, they are obviously not true. Religious systems that leave you in darkness, that leave you in doubt and fear cannot possibly be the religion of the Bible. It could not possibly be true Christianity because everything that we see here is God speaking to us through his word saying that his intention is to relieve us of fear, to remove guilt from us so that we would have a confident assurance that we belong to him, and wouldn't that be more consistent with what Scripture describes of our God, that he is a God of love, grace, mercy, patience and kindness? If the fruit of the Holy Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, well, if that's what the Spirit produces, isn't that what God would have for his children as well, that sense of peace and confidence? Isn't that consistent with Romans 8:1 that says, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"? And so we are swimming in freshwater here, we are swimming in refreshing oceans of grace to understand what the purpose of God is for his people, that this is to be the reality of our spiritual experience. This is what God wants for us. So my friend, I say this to encourage you, not to convict or condemn you. If your life has been marked by introspective doubt and ongoing discouragement, "Am I saved or am I not?" And you think somehow that this is what God has for you, well, I've got good news for you. That is not the experience that God intends for his children to have at all. He wants us to know. He wants us to live in light of the confidence of his blessing and that is what this passage calls us to and it helps us to overcome doubt to know these things.

So let's start to look at the passage. I want to make a preliminary comment and then we will have four points in the remainder of our time here this morning. Look at verse 19

with me now, this opening clause in our passage. He says, "We will know by this that we are of the truth." Well, that's a pretty important point. What is the "this" that he is speaking about because whatever "this" is, is what we build our hope on apparently. He's pointing back to what he had just said in verses 16 to 18. He says in verse 16, "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us." You see, our foundation of assurance and our foundation of confidence goes back to the very basic fundamental truth that Jesus Christ has loved us and laid down his life for us. He came from heaven to earth to fulfill God's law on our behalf, he went to the cross in order to take the curse in himself that God pronounces against guilty sinners, Christ became a curse for us and having satisfied the curse of God for those who are in him, the curse has now been satisfied. There is no longer any curse for disobedience upon those who are in Christ. So this is the fundamental foundation of our salvation is that Jesus Christ laid down his life for us, that God finds satisfaction in his people in what Christ has done for them, recognizing that you and I cannot fulfill the law on our own and it is futile to even try.

So Christ has done this on our behalf and so the foundation of the assurance of which he is speaking in today's text rests on what he had said earlier in verse 16 and so assurance starts with a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. You know, some of you who are watching will maybe remember private conversations that we've had in your times of introspection and I've tried in those conversations to point you outside of looking, instead of looking inside yourself and have you repented enough and do you believe enough and have you obeyed enough, and you get tied up into knots and you don't know what to do with that, and the answer to that is that you have to look outside yourself, you look beyond yourself to Christ and say the question is not have you done enough because, my friend, you haven't. You have not done enough and you can't. The question that you and I need to continually ask ourselves is this: has Christ done enough? Has Christ done enough for us? Was there any defect in his life? No, there wasn't. Was his death sufficient for the sins of everyone who believes in him? Well, he himself said while he was hanging there, "It's finished. Paid in full." God raised him from the dead in response to that sin sacrifice and so what you and I see when we look to Christ is that Christ has done enough, and so we ask the question instead of looking introspectively at what we have done, we look out to Christ and say, "Who is Christ in what He has done? What has He done?" Well, he's the Savior of the world and he's done this in his life and his death and his resurrection for sinners. Okay, that's a great start. And then you ask the next question: do you believe that about Christ? Do you personally believe that about Jesus Christ, that God has appointed him to be the Savior of the world? You say, "Well, yes, I believe that." Do you believe that he lived a perfect life? Do you believe that his death was for sinners just like you? "Yes. Amen, God be praised, that is what I believe, I believe that." Well, you see, that's where you start. People continually over and over again reverse the process and they want to start looking inside when Scripture says instead that this is his commandment that you believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ. Once you've established that in your mind, once you understand the clarity of Christ and who he is and what he's done and do you believe that? "Yes, I do." Then and only then do you start to look at the fruit that that produces in the life of those who believe. You cannot reverse the order. You cannot mix them together. You must follow the clarity of that sequence so that things fall into the proper place.

Then so with that said, in chapter 3, verse 16, go back to that, "We know by this, that He laid down His life for us," we know this, "and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." Okay, now here's what we're seeing is that there is an effect that Christ produces in his children, that just as Christ laid down his life for everyone who would believe in him, those who believe in him start to adopt and manifest a similar attitude toward other believers as well. Christ laid down his life for them, I want to lay my life down for them also. So you start to recognize some of the fruit of saving faith, some of the fruit of God's work in your life by the way that it affects the way that you view other Christians.

So he goes on and says we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren, verse 17, he gives a negative statement. If you've got the world's goods and you see a Christian in need and you don't respond to that, how does the love of God dwell in you? But little children, therefore, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. That's the context that leads us up verse 19 here. So let's state it simply here. Assurance starts with that saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and then faith in Christ produces love for other Christians as a result, and that shows the reality of your salvation. Do you believe in Christ? Has it inclined you toward love toward other believers, not simply those that agree with you necessarily? Do you see that in your life? Well, if those things are true, then certain consequences flow from that and that's what John is starting to talk about in verse 19 and here's an overview of the point. Eventually I'll get to my four points here but, you know, I'm enjoying this so much, why rush through it, right? Eventually what we find is this, is that, yes, we believe in Christ and, yes, generally I do have a love for other believers but we find this to be true, that in the midst of that greater context we find ourselves falling short. You and I, we stumble along the way. We don't love as well or as good or as faithfully as we should and we start to realize that there are defects in our performance, there are defects in the way that we live out our life and we have this faith in Christ and this love for other Christians, and it is side-by-side with inconsistency, with failure, with outright sin even. What are we to do and what are we to think then? Even as we practice love, we fall short. We haven't always sacrificed for others, we have been selfish, we have had lousy attitudes, we have been, you know, falling short, how do we when we start to see that, how do we have confidence at times like that? How is it that confidence can dwell in the midst of our imperfect obedience? That's the question.

Well, in light of everything that we have said, you should see this, this is a transition point in the message and this is a fundamental pivot point for your spiritual growth. I'm thinking of some of you young men who are new to Christ and how much I want you to grasp this principle that I am about to articulate here, is to understand this, is that as a Christian God does not accept you based on your fluctuating performance. That is not the ground on which God accepts you. God accepts you in Christ. It is in Christ that you were first saved. It is in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone that you received Christ. Well, what we want to understand is that is always henceforth going forward that is always the basis upon which God accepts us. He is always accepting us based on Christ. Christ is always in heaven representing us and interceding for us. Everything about our hope of acceptance and everything about our hope of assurance is

rested in the person and work of Jesus Christ on our behalf, and because that never changes, because Christ never changes and because his work is finished for us and that he intercedes for us, we could never be lost and we are always saved and always accepted on the basis of what he has done and that changes everything.

My Christian friend, God is not accepting you based on the rise and fall of your daily devotions. That's not how it works. God accepts you, God receives you gladly, fully, lovingly, to the uttermost, God receives you and accepts you in Christ and based on his perfect righteousness and therefore here's the logic of the passage and it's very critical for us to see, is that the outworking of love in your life for other believers is a token, it is a symbol, it is a recognizing mark of the greater work of Christ for you and in you, and as love manifests itself in your life, it shows forth the greater inner reality of the love of Christ shed abroad in your heart and the love for other believers testifies to that and as we see what that love for other believers is pointing us to, we are reminded of this, that Christ has paid it all for us, that God accepts us on that basis and as a result of that we can be confident, we can be sure that we belong to him even in the midst of our fluctuating, imperfect, very flawed obedience in our Christian life. That's what John is pointing to here.

So there's four aspects to this confidence. Finally I get to my points here that I want to point out to you and we'll go through these rather quickly because we've played such a foundation now. First of all, we find confidence in what we could call God's perception. Confidence in God's perception. What is it that God sees and what is it that God knows that gives us confidence? Well, the new birth is recognized on a human level by the effects that it produces in our lives.

Look at chapter 3, verses 19 and 20. He says, "We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things." Notice those themes of assurance and confidence that he's speaking about. Verse 19, we will know by this. We will assure our heart before him. Now why would we need that persuasion? Why would we need that reassurance? Why would we need confidence if Christ has already done it all on our behalf? Well, we realize that we fall short and to one extent or another you and I, we can all as Christians relate to what I'm about to say, at least those that have been in the Lord for any length of time at all. Don't you find it true that you get tired of stumbling into the same besetting sin again and again? Have you ever reached the point where you just are weary of confessing the same sin to God again that you confessed yesterday and last week and last month and it seems like sin is just clinging to you and pulling you down, trying to pull you under the water, so to speak? You get weary of that battle against your flesh, that battle against your bad attitudes, that battle against your, you know, your sinful conduct? We all know something about that to one degree or another. The Apostle Paul certainly did in Romans 7 and he looked at his life and he concluded in Romans 7:24, "Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from the body of this death?" He said, "I am sick of the sin in my life!" Well, you know, you go along in the Christian life and you start to recognize that there is this, you know, that there is this battle that the Spirit has

with the flesh that gets kind of wearying, and if we focus just on that battle, it can bring us down into discouragement, despair and even doubt.

Well, how then do we overcome it? Well, what we do is this, is that we remember that perfect Savior who made a perfect sacrifice on our behalf. We rest in him. We come back to Christ. You and I, there's a sense in which we could say you and I, we still need the Gospel even as we're walking as Christians. We need the Gospel to remind us that our sinful lives and our sinful shortcomings as we go through life as Christians, that Christ died for those as well; that his righteousness covers that; that his grace and mercy and his blood has cleansed us even from that, even from our sins as believers. You know, it's not that Christ died for your sins before you were a Christian and now you're on your own, Christ brought you back to point zero but you've got to work it out on your own, that's not it. Christ died for your sins prior to your conversion, during your sanctification as well, all of your sins have been covered by the blood of Christ. Here's what John is saying as you look at verses 19 and 20, verse 20 in particular, he says, "will assure our heart before Him in whatever our heart condemns us." He's speaking to the little children here, verse 18. He is speaking to fellow Christians here and we go through those times where we feel the condemnation of our indwelling and remaining sin and it discourages us and it weighs it down.

Well, how then are we to get out of that rather than just swirling around deeper and deeper into the vortex of it all? Well, we go back to the fact that we remember what he says in verse 20, that God is greater than our heart and he knows all things. God knows the reality. God knows that you are in Christ. God sees you in Christ. God accepts you in Christ so that – listen – so that your bouts of discouragement and introspective despair do not change the greater unalterable reality of what Christ has done for you. God knows the greater work of Christ, God knows that it's been applied your account, and while you may seem to be up and down what you and I need to understand is that God's attitude toward us does not fluctuate based on our ever-changing performance. God's attitude toward us is settled in Christ. He accepts us in Christ and therefore even in the midst of the struggles we have confidence that God's attitude toward us has not changed. That, my friend, is one of the great aspects of what Christ has secured for you. He has permanently satisfied God on our behalf God permanently unchangingly accepts Christ and accepts us in Christ and therefore though we walk through those struggles and our heart starts to doubt, we go back to what God sees, what God's perception of it all is. God perceives us in Christ, he sees us in the one who laid his life down for us and you know what? God is satisfied with that. So as we go and we confess those besetting sins, we do so not in fear that we're going to be struck in anger, we go in the spirit of 1 John 1:9, if we confess our sins, what is God's response? He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

My friend, if you are in Christ, you need to understand you've been given a very great gift. You've been given a wonderful position from God not only delivered from the threat of eternal condemnation but brought into this relationship, better stated this position with God where you are completely accepted in Christ, and that in fatherly love he forgives your sins when you come and confess them. His anger has been turned away. His rod of

wrath has been laid aside and now he deals with us with the shepherd's crook of a loving shepherd who intends for goodness and lovingkindness to follow us all the days of our lives after which we will enter into the house of the Lord forever, and that brings assurance to our hearts knowing that what God's plan has been has been carried out, that God perceives us in Christ and that gives us confidence. We look to what God accepts rather than our performance. God accepts Christ and we rest in that and it gives us assurance even in those times where our conscience is accusing us, "Look at what you did today. Look at what you did yesterday. Are you ever going to get this right?" And all of those condemning thoughts, God intends for those accusations in our inner man to be silenced in the presence of the satisfaction that he has given to us in our Lord Jesus Christ. So we can assure our hearts as we look to Christ and that God accepts Christ on our behalf and find assurance in the midst of that confliction that we feel in our hearts.

Now secondly and in a related sense we can say this, that there is confidence in God's presence. There is confidence in God's presence, and as I've said earlier, I'll say once more here just because it's in my note at this point, is that God intends you to move from doubt to confidence. God does not intend for his children to live in the midst of that debilitating uncertainty. God has given you this life in part so that you would overcome doubt, that's the title of today's message, "Overcoming Doubt," and we see it here, God intends you to move from doubt to spiritual confidence. Verse 21, "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us," in other words, if we have silenced the false accusations of our heart in light of the shed blood of Christ and we have answered the demands of conscience by looking afresh to our Lord Jesus Christ, if we've done that then verse 21, "we have confidence before God." We have confidence that he accepts us, that we are in the presence of one who loves us, the one who is gracious to us, and that we can go through this life, through ups and downs, through sickness and in health, through good relationships and challenges within them, we can go through all of them knowing that there is a vertical certainty in our life that gives stability and where we find our deepest sense of purpose, joy and meaning, it's in the acceptance that we have in God in our Lord Jesus Christ, and that we would have that kind of confidence as an ongoing present aspect of our experience.

Look at that verse again there in verse 21, he says, "we have confidence." This present ongoing reality that defines, you know, the whole perspective through which we walk life, in which we walk through life is what I meant to say there. Get those prepositions messed up if you talk long enough. So there's this confident that we have but, beloved, as you read in the rest of 1 John, it's not just about the present aspect of our walk with Christ, that it also defines the way that we anticipate the future. As we contemplate the reality that there will be a day of judgment before God, we can have confidence even then. That's what this confidence does, even in light of future judgment we're confident. Look at chapter 2, verse 28. "My little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears," when he appears, future tense, this is what's coming, "we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming." Abide in Christ so that there will be confidence in the future. Chapter 4, verse 17. I'll give you just a moment to turn there. Chapter 4, verse 17, "By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment." Do you see it? I mean, this is just really exploding like fireworks

against the night sky of what God intends our spiritual experience to be like, one of confidence not anger, one of confidence not fear, one of Christ not deathly introspection. Confidence. Assurance. Confidence. How many times would he have to say it before we would believe that this is actually what God intends our experience to be like? Those of you that grew up in Arminian churches that threatened you with the loss of salvation if you sinned too much and, you know, and some of you maybe went to the altar time and time and time again trying to get your salvation back because you'd lost it in the week before. Oh, my friend, this truth from God's word delivers you from all of that and it delivers you into this realm of confidence.

So verse 13 of chapter 5, let's look at it again. He says, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life." Then verse 14, "This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us." So beloved, confidence in God's presence, confidence in his presence now, he accepts me in Christ now, and confidence even in what would otherwise be a most fearful day, looking forward to a day of judgment, recognizing that God has already accepted us in such a way that we can be confident as we look to that day. We do not look to the day of judgment in fear in Christ because we have already been accepted. Do you understand that, beloved, that you have been justified now and what the implication of that is, one of the implications of that is that you have already today at the very moment that you believed in Christ you were declared righteous, you were declared justified in a way that satisfies the coming day of judgment as well. You will be no more justified in the day of judgment than you are now because every aspect of justification is premised in what Christ has done for us. And as we rest in Christ, we understand that he has satisfied God, he has satisfied the justice of God, he has satisfied the wrath of God on our behalf, and as we trust him and because we trust in him, then all of that is applied to our account as well and therefore we're confident, we're at peace, we're without fear because God has received us in Christ and that is all the more that he asks from us.

So this work of Christ is perfect. God accepts us in Christ. Let me say it again. I've said this 50 times I bet today, I'll say it number 51 here. My Christian friend, God accepts you in Christ. Now work that out in your mind. Meditate on that. Dwell on that. Consider it day and night. Go back to it again and again and again because understanding that basic principle, God accepts you in Christ, is the key to the confidence of which John is speaking here. So instead of saying, "But is my repentance enough and is my obedience enough?" Stop that, my Christian friend. Stop that. Look to Christ and realize that Christ has satisfied that and as I said earlier, I'll say it once again, no, your repentance is not enough. You are not repentance enough. You are not obedient enough. So we can answer that question for you, no, it's not enough so stop asking the question. It's already been answered. You are a sinner who falls short of the glory of God even as a believer in Christ in yourself. The answer to the troubles of your heart is the fact that God accepts you in Christ, that Christ is enough, Christ's obedience was enough, Christ's death was enough, Christ's resurrection, Christ's ascension, Christ's intercession, that's enough and when you believe in Christ, then all of the other questions have been answered for you and that gives you confidence.

Now if you're confident in his presence based on that finished work of Christ, then something else will be true of you. Point 3 is this, is that you'll have confidence in prayer. You can be confident in prayer. Look at verse 22 with me. He says we have confidence before God at the end of verse 21, and then in verse 22, "and," there's another benefit to this, "and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight." Whatever we ask we receive from him. Elsewhere it emphasizes the importance of asking according to the will of God and, you know, we wait for God to give things in his time and all of that, God doesn't answer in our way on our timetable, he answers in his way on his timetable, but we know that when we go to this God who has accepted us, if he's accepted us then when we pray he hears us and he hears us favorably, and he hears us to bless us. You know, Jesus taught in Matthew 7 that earthly fathers, sinful, evil, earthly fathers know how to answer the requests of their children. A child comes to his father and says, "Can I have bread? I need some bread, my father." He's not going to give him a rock in his place. "Father, some fish," the staple of the day back then, "Father, could I have a fish?" He's not going to give him a snake and deal with him in such a perverse way like that. He says, "Well, if you being sinful know how to deal with your children like that, how much more God who is holy, who is perfect in His love, how much more will He give good things to His children who ask of Him?" This is confidence that comes from knowing the character of God and knowing the basis upon which he accepts us. He accepts us in Christ.

So we go to God knowing that he is favorably disposed toward us, that he loves us, that he accepts us, and that gives us confidence when we pray. So, you know, I mean, what this in part teaches us, yes, we have to pray, we have to ask in order to receive these blessings, it's not just dispensed, you know, irregardless of the disposition of our heart and the dependence of our heart, but as we ask, as we pray, God receives us favorably. So do you see how all of this just starts to tumble down like a majestic waterfall falling down from the source from which it came and blessings falling down upon us as a result? God having sent Christ to be the Savior of the world, having applied that to our account through the work of the Holy Spirit and causing us to be born again, and we enter into this love of God and we've been accepted by him and we start to see the effects of loving other believers and obedience in our lives, and as a result of that we're confident and we can pray in confidence knowing that God receives us. Why, this is a total reversal of everything that so many of us used to think was the truth of what it meant to be a Christian, isn't it? Confidence and blessing and God's favor, you know, like a hen extending its wings over the chicks to bring them into safety and protection. Wow. It's almost like this, it's almost like God is good. It's almost like God is good to those that he receives in Christ. It's not almost like that, that's the way it is. That's the way it is, beloved, and part of the way that you please God in your Christian life is that you believe these things and you live in light of them and you adopt attitudes of confidence and assurance in result of these revealed truths which speak to the glory of the love of Christ for those that he gave himself for. Wonderful truths that produce confidence in our lives.

So there's one final ground of confidence in today's passage and its confidence in God's person, and all of these things overlap, we just kind of separate them out for purposes of

understanding. But in verse 23, let's just note it again. We read it earlier and highlighted it, "This is His commandment," this is what God calls you to, to "believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ," start there and then as a consequence of that we see God commanding us to "love one another." To love one another. That was kind of what I said, what the elders said I should say, that's what the elders said in the email that we sent out yesterday as we contemplate coming back together. You know, we've been emphasizing for a number of weeks the importance of that perspective as we come back together that we love one another and that our faith in Christ, our understanding of what God has done for us and our responsibility and our opportunity to love each other and to accept each other even though we may have differences of opinion on secondary matters that are solely related to earthly matters, my friend, that is not the point of the commandment of God. That is not what God calls us to be the focus of our Christian life and the way that we interact with one another. Yeah, I'm animated about it. I can't help myself. We look to Scripture to see what God considers important, what God commands of us, and what he commands is this faith in Christ that leads toward love for one another; that prefers one another in love; that does not merely look out for our own selfish interests but also for the interests of others, Philippians 2, in humility of mind, regarding one another as more important than yourself. Oh, your personal opinions about what's happening in the world around us today, those things are utterly secondary to the greater responsibility that God calls you to, to love one another and beyond that to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So I ask you whether your belief in Christ and this command to love one another is producing peace and harmony in the relationships in your home and with other believers, or is it producing something else? Well, if it's producing something else, if it's producing hostility and alienation, my friend, you need to repent. Let's just be real clear. God gives us this confidence graciously but he has called us to a particular kind of living within the body of Christ that is called loving one another and being at peace with one another and serving one another. So these are not peripheral matters that we talk about and as we anticipate coming back together, this isn't peripheral, this love for each other, this is central to why we exist as Christians, this is central to the purpose of our salvation and, you know, I just encourage us all to contemplate these things and to let the Spirit of God work them out according to his will in our lives.

So point 4, confident in God's person. The Holy Spirit gives us assurance that we belong to Christ. Verse 24, "The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him." That "He in him," a reference to the Holy Spirit who indwells us, Romans 8:9. The Spirit of God dwells within us, he goes on to say, "We know by this," there it is again, that confidence, "We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us." God dwelling in us in the person of his Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit giving us understanding as we study God's word so that we could see these things that are hidden from the eyes of the unbelieving, and we understand them with clarity and perception because the Spirit of God imparts that ability to us, and as the Spirit works and produces his fruit in us, we recognize the presence of the Spirit by the effects that he produces in us. You can know if you're one of God's elect by answering the question do you believe in Christ because that's what election produces is faith in Christ. Are you a Christian? Do you love other believers? This is one of the effects of the Spirit. Are you starting to grow

and appreciate something of the assurance and confidence of salvation? That's a fruit of the Spirit. And we just see this blessed work of the Holy Spirit in us, this person of the Holy Spirit producing faith in us, producing love in us, producing obedience in us, producing confidence and assurance. Oh, my friends, we don't see him with our visible eyes, we don't see him in a tangible form anymore then we see the wind blowing through the trees. The actual wind, what we see instead is the effects. You see the leaves rustling, you see the limbs bending, you know the wind's blowing, right, because that's the effect of it. Well, my friend, the way that we know that we are in Christ and that we're abiding in him, John is saying it's by these effects that he produces: faith, love, obedience, truth, assurance, confidence, and that is what God has done for us in Christ and that's how we overcome doubt is understanding the effects of the Spirit and what it is that God, the basis upon which God accepts us.

My friend, do you know these truths? Is this true in your heart? Do you know this deeply inside you? This is so much more than nominal Christianity, isn't it? This is so much more than just keeping a couple of rules or, you know, living according to external standards and trying to please men with your life. Well, if that's what you thought Christianity was, my friend, I have a blessed invitation to give you, is that Christ calls you into all of these blessings, calls you out of that trust in self, calls you out of sin, calls you out of the world to receive him, to rest in his death and resurrection as the payment of your sins, to rest in his love and obedience as the basis upon which God accepts you. You are right now being offered the greatest of gifts, the gift of eternal life which is found through repentant faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Will you come to him?

Let's pray together.

Dear Father, we are so very grateful to You for Your kindness, so very grateful to You for our Lord Jesus Christ. I pray for my Christian brothers and sisters, Father, many of whom no doubt have had difficult weeks, who perhaps struggle incessantly it seems with doubt and discouragement. I pray, Father, that by Your blessed Holy Spirit You would give them understanding to find the confidence and assurance of which we have spoken here today, and that You would work in all of us to give an overflowing abundant manifestation of all of these fruits of the Spirit of which we've been speaking here today. Father, for the dear friends who are outside of Christ, those dear loved ones whose lives are struggling, Father, as throughout our whole congregation, you know, I pray, Father, that Your Spirit would be gracious to them just as You've been to me in the past and continue to be. Father, I pray that You would multiply that gracious work in the hearts of the unbelieving that they might become believing and that they might enter into the greatness of this abundant life which has been secured for us in the person of our Lord Jesus. Father, as we look forward to gathering together on Tuesday, we ask for Your blessing, we ask for Your protection, we ask for Your help, that every aspect, Father, of this transition back to more normal operations, Father, would be attended by the love and blessing of Your Holy Spirit shown and shed abroad in our hearts and manifested in all of our interactions with one another. We love You. We praise You. And Lord, at the end of such a time as this, we profoundly thank You for Your faithfulness. Great is Your faithfulness, Lord, unto us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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