

ASSURANCE, INSIGHT, CONFIDENCE, AND KNOWLEDGE

1 John 3:18-24

As we continue our study in this third chapter of **1 John** we will be both challenged and comforted.

ASSURANCE

Verse 18 begins with a familiar reference to “My little children.” I don’t know about you, but I find myself comforted by this phrase and how personal and intimate it is. As we continue our study of this great letter let us never lose sight of the fact we are the children of God! We belong to His family! How great it is of our Heavenly Father to refer to us as His children.

The verse continues with an admonition: “let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.” This connects us with **verse 17** where we are asked how can the love of God dwell in us as believers if we see a brother in need and do nothing to relieve that need. I believe there are times when kind words are exactly what is needed. When in place, then they are in place. But, there are times when much more is needed than words. Words can communicate compassion, but as we all know, actions speaks louder than words.

Remember what our Lord’s half brother James said in **James 2:15-16**? “If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?”

There are times when love demands more than expressions of concern. It may demands some sort of sacrifice. It is easy to say something, but altogether different to do something. Just saying something will never get done what doing will. The proof is in the pudding!

INSIGHT

In **verse 19** we find the means whereby we, as believers, can have assurance. Isn’t having assurance a powerful thing? Assurance produces confidence. It results in a good degree of peace in the heart. It dispels doubts and results in boldness, even before our Lord. It is, in my opinion, what is needed in the heart of a believer to

enable them to do acceptable service to the Lord. It allows freedom to serve knowing acceptance is assured even in light of imperfections and failures. Also, if our lives manifest action in meeting a legitimate need when made known to us and our words turn into actions, this results in confidence in our hearts which enables us to face the Lord and make our desires known to Him in prayer. We are wise to understand we are not responsible to meet a man's every need. That is impossible. What we are responsible for are those things we can take care of when we learn there is a need.

Isn't that what John is saying in **verse 20** as he writes: "For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." Now I doubt my ability to communicate the great truth in this passage, but please know, what John is saying by the Holy Spirit is nothing less than amazing!

Do you ever have doubt to rise up in your heart? Do you ever struggle with the feeling of condemnation even when there is no apparent cause for such a feeling? I suppose most, if not all, of us have at one time or another. Our heart is a unique thing. As you know, a reference to the heart is not a reference to the organ which lies in our bosom, but rather refers to the seat of our emotions and desires. It may be our heart is the deepest part of our being.

Jeremiah 17:9 says some strange things about the heart of man; all men actually. He said it is: "deceitful...desperately wicked" and then asks the question "who can know it?" He continues in **verse 10** with an answer to that question where we are told the Lord knows our hearts fully. That truth is both troubling and comforting.

Over the years I have heard people say things like, "If I know my heart!" Well, the truth of the matter is, we do not! We may think we do, but in reality we do not. But God does and our knowing this ought to bring us a great degree of assurance. There is much I could say about the heart, but for this study I will limit our consideration of the heart to what John is saying here.

Has there ever been a time in your life as a believer when you became overwhelmed with a feeling of guilt? You knew you were saved, had repented of your sins the best you knew how, and had invited Jesus into your life and yet you struggled with a sense of guilt? This is how the heart can deceive. But John tells us here we can be lifted above those subjective feelings of a heart that deceives, to the facts of the Word of God and Holy Spirit which has inspired John to write.

I am of the opinion there are few things, if anything, more troubling to a follower of Christ than having a lack of assurance in the heart that it is well with the Lord! How many times have we been willingly active in self condemnation? How many times have we made self accusations about ourselves and been harder on ourselves than the Lord has? I have been guilty of doing this very thing: very guilty. You'll have to answer for yourself. I am of the opinion we are all guilty of this to some degree at one time or another, if we are a true child of God. That's the bad news.

The God news is "God is greater than our heart and knoweth all things." To say this simply is to say God knows more about us than we know about ourselves. To say it yet more plainly, He knows the truth about us!

Allow me to try and illustrate this great assuring truth by referring to two great men we read about in the Word of God. The first example is David: "a man after God's own heart." (Just a side note, one writer I was reading after said we find the "true David in the Psalms") David was a unique and special man, but he was a man. As we survey his life as recorded in the Scriptures we can find him in the Valley Elah slaying the giant and lingering in Jerusalem on his housetop where he was slain by a giant.

Which was the true David? Actually, both were. But, although men may and have condemned David, listen to what God said about him because of what God knew about him. We have God's thoughts about him in the statement I gave about him above. God knew David was "a man after God's own heart." Yes, he sinned and sinned deeply. Still, in spite of that sin, David wanted God's will above his own. At the very bottom of David's heart was God! A desire for the things of God! The essence of his life was much more than a forbidden interlude with Bathsheba. In fact, the general character and pattern of the life of David was habitually towards God, not towards sin.

The second example is a man most of us can easily identify with and that is the Apostle Peter. Peter: hot and cold; fiery and bold; quick to decide and speak. He was a man who was more sure of himself than he should have been. In fact, he boasted in that fact. He was so sure of himself he boasted he was not only willing to accompany Jesus into Jerusalem (the enemy's territory), but he was even willing to follow Jesus all the way to death if need be. He was sure of himself. But he didn't know his heart as well as Jesus.

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This truth is set forth in the conversation we find recorded between the Lord and Peter in all four Gospel accounts of the night of Jesus' betrayal. I have chosen to use what Luke said, but I encourage you to also read the other accounts as given in: **Matthew 26:31-35; Mark 14:26-31; John 13:36-38.**

Luke 22:31-34 reads: "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee that they faith fail not: and *when thou are converted* (emphasis mine), strengthen thy brethren. And he (Peter) said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee both into prison, and to death. And he (the Lord) said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me."

Did you notice the phrase "when thou are converted?" I knew you did. In some way the interchange between the Lord and Peter is funny. As the Lord is telling Peter what he is within hours of doing it seems Peter is trying to convenience the Lord he knew himself much better than what Omniscience knew. You see, Peter didn't really know his heart: neither do we. But the Lord did and does.

If we were to continue reading in **Luke 22** we would find in **verse 54-62** how all this plays out. We would need to pay special attention to **verse 61** where we find: "And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice." I don't believe the look from Jesus was a "I told you so" look, but rather a look of love that said, in essence, "You'll get through this Peter. Things will be alright. I know what's in your heart even though you don't."

If you have ever wondered how this turned out for Peter, just look at **Acts 3:14** where we find him confronting his own people gathered at the Temple. On the day the lame man was healed, he was able to face them and boldly proclaim they had "denied the Holy One and the Just" as he had only days before. He was able to do so with the assurance that only comes from a heart confident everything was alright between him and the Lord regardless of his past failures. I imagine the time he spent in tearful prayer helped with his confidence. Peter might tell us living with confidence is not the only way to live, but it is the best way to live.

One more thing before we move on: no Christian should treat sin lightly, but neither should they be harder on themselves after they repent than what God is.

CONFIDENCE

It is rather obvious that **verse 21** and **verse 22** go together. In these two verses we are told by John what it takes to be successful in our prayer life. A successful prayer life is connected to a confident life. Isn't that what John is saying? There is a way to be confident when we approach the Lord in prayer.

Verse 21 begins with "Beloved." Remember how I like to enunciate this word? "*Be-love-ed*" and oh! how loved we are by the Lord! You know and I know when we have a heart disturbed by un-confessed sin we possess no confidence. We have no peace and have difficulty approaching our Father in prayer and rightly so! **But**, oh, when our heart is clean and clear, we find we have boldness and can "come boldly unto the throne of grace..." **Hebrews 4:16**.

Verse 22 is joined to **verse 21** with that little but powerful junction "And." John is saying, in light of coming before a God in prayer that knows our hearts better than we do, we can come with confidence that "whatsoever we ask, we receive." As I move on, please allow me to preface this somewhat. This does not mean we have carte blanche when we pray. It is not a "name it and claim it" proposal. Although some preachers preach what I call a "Wall Street Gospel: that includes happiness, health, and wealth," it doesn't mean God is making the offer.

Yet, here we find a pattern, if you will, for answered prayer. John says: "we ask... we receive...**because** (emphasis mine) we keep...and do." God desires to bless His children and we know we are His children. This epistle emphasizes that great truth. Even the psalmist in **Psalms 37:4** says: "Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." But, the key to getting what we desire, is desiring what the Lord desires to give. We *must* pray according to God's will in light of God's Word.

This **22nd verse** tells us when "we keep his commandments (which is to love the Lord according to **John 14:15** and our brother) and do those things that are pleasing in his sight" we will receive from the Lord what we ask the Lord for. Should I also not say, according to this verse, God will not do for us what we can do for ourselves? Can I not say the key to answered prayer is to obey the Lord by doing those things He commands?

Although we live in the grace dispensation and are saved by grace through faith, it does not mean we have no commandments to keep! Obedience, from the beginning of time in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve, has been the means whereby God may bless those who are His children.

KNOWLEDGE

If you are wondering what the commandment is we are expected to keep, **verse 23** tells us. It is a twofold command. “And this is the commandment. That we should believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.” Isn’t what John is saying somewhat profound? I think so. Let us not forget how John has been instructing us in this chapter about failing to love a brother?

Here John is connecting believing on the “name of our Lord Jesus Christ” and the fact we are to “love one another.” One writer I was reading after said this can be summed up by saying: it is: “faith towards God and love towards men: this is the Christian obligation.” I really can’t disagree with that thought. But allow me to say something which helps me and I pray helps you as well. When John is talking about our loving the brethren, he does not suggest we are to run up to them and throw our arms around them. That’s not the kind of “love” he’s talking about. What he is talking about is, when the opportunity or need arises and we can do something about the need, we will do more than just offer up lip service: we will find a way to show our love in “deed and truth.” Our love will be manifest in the actions we take. We will refuse to gossip about them or hurt them in any way. Rather we will find a way to help them.

Doesn’t **verse 23** remind you somewhat of **Matthew 22:34-40** where Jesus was asked and answered the question posed by the scribe about what the greatest commandment is? I think so.

Although there were no chapter divisions in the letter John wrote, may I say John brings this chapter to a close in **verse 24** with something worth knowing? “And he that keepeth (remember this speaks of continuing action, habitual action) his commandments dwelleth (constantly abides) in him, and he in him (it is reciprocating). And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.” I like knowing things with certainty. Here John says we can know with certainty whether or not we are abiding in Christ and whether or not Christ

abides in us. We can know this because of the Spirit which dwells within us and witnesses to us.

John made reference to the Holy Spirit in **chapter 2:20** but this is the first time he mentions the Spirit by name. How precious it is to have the witness of the Holy Spirit testifying to us and affirming we are one of God's "little children" **verse 18**.

So much could be said here and maybe ought to be said, but allow me to bring this study to a close. John has given us some powerful things that will help our heart be confident if we will both listen and obey. The things he has given us through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit—by the way—are: assurance in **verses 18-19**; insight in **verse 20**; confidence in **verses 21-22**; and knowledge in **verses 23-24**. All of which are helpful for the children of God.

Isn't it amazing to know we are part of the family of God! I think so too....

Tom Price, 2020