

## "The Confident Christian"

### I John 3:10-24

I wonder is there anyone in our congregation have some doubts concerning their standing with God? I believe that every Christian has had doubts, and John tells us how to handle those doubts so we can have the confidence we desire as we walk in the Light.

*Text...This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother. This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him. This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.*

### ***How do we know?***

In verse 19, we read: “*This then is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence*” John has written many verses that we have studied explaining to us that there are tests of whether we belong to Christ are not, tests of whether we are in fellowship with Him; test that ought to give assurance to our hearts as whether or not we love our brothers and sisters in the

faith. In verse 19, John told his audience again that if they love one another, that assure their hearts in the presence of God, and give them certainty that they were God's children. But the antithesis is true: if they did not love one another, or if they hated one brother, that would be an assurance that they were not a child of God. It is a cause not to assure their hearts, but to doubt their hearts.

Have you ever wondered whether or not you're a child of God? For some, doubts may be well-grounded and for others doubts may be ill-founded.

Let us deal with those for a moment.

### **Doubts that are well-grounded.**

- A. If a Christian hates their brother, and that has caused them to doubt whether or not they are saved, it may be because they are not saved. I Jn. 3:15 John wrote, 'whosoever hates his brother is a murderer: and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him'. John is saying that if the doubts that people have in their heart about salvation are well-grounded if there is hate or animosity between them and their brethren.
- B. A Christian who is engaged in a habitual, continual, constant lifestyle of sin is a sure sign that they are not a child of God. That is disobedience.
- C. If a person has never obeyed the gospel, they too can have a conscience that bothers them, especially if they have been exposed to the truth.

John has a goal; he wants those who are not genuine (the Gnostics) to realize it, and to start to doubt their salvation for the one sole purpose that they might be sure of their salvation.

Another goal is to get those who are genuine (but also human with all of the frailties that come with being human) to not doubt their salvation so that they will be sure of their salvation

Therefore, in verse 20 he writes: '*God is greater than our heart and knows all things*'. John is speaking of the fact that if Christians think they are bad, and if they start to doubt their salvation because they realize that they have a murderous, hateful spirit towards a brother, or there's a root of sin within their soul of an habitual lifestyle of iniquity before God; and their heart is condemning them, it

may be well-grounded doubt because of that constant sin in their life, John is saying, "I want you to analyze that doubt - don't get rid of it! Face it!"

As Paul said in 2 Timothy 2:19: *'The Lord knows them that are his. And, Let everyone that names the name of Christ depart from iniquity'*. A doubting or condemning heart should be a warning.

2 Peter 1:10 - to *'give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall'*.

John is saying to the church that "If your heart is condemning you, the first thing you ought to do is examine yourselves. Paul wrote it to the church in Corinth in 2 Corinthians 13:5 - *'Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves'*."

Therefore there are times, because of not loving the brethren or harboring sin that those who claim to be Christians need to doubt. But what about ill-founded doubts that some have in their heart concerning their salvation. Their hearts are condemning them and they have doubts about their salvation.

They do not have a constant failure and habitual sin in their life, but, there has been a blot on their journey. Because of that, whether some consider it to be a small hiccup or a large fall, they have a bad conscience toward God - and it causes them from time to time, or maybe constantly, to doubt their salvation. Maybe after reading verses 10-18, they might be tempted to say: 'Am I saved at all? How guilty have I been of being an unloving Christian, an uncaring Christian? I have not laid my life down for the brethren the way that John is exhorting me to do. Have I shut up my emotions when I have been faced with the needs of others, my brothers and sisters in Christ and those outside the church? I have been guilty of loving in word, loving in language, but not loving in deed and in truth'.

Now, let's be honest with one another, and honest with God: all of us, at some time or another, have been guilty of these things. While we agree that these ought to be exceptions rather than the rule in the Christian life, we are all guilty of being unloving towards our brethren in Christ. But here's where the problem arises: if we have an oversensitive conscience, we can read passages of Scripture like this and we begin to say to ourself, 'I'm not truly saved', or 'There's a cause for doubt' - when there is no cause for doubt, our sensitive conscience can actually begin to do the devil's work for him.

Some have self-incriminating doubts, and it makes them feel condemned in their heart. It's wrong, because God has not condemned them if they are one of His children who do his work, keep his commands, loves the brethren, and walks in the light. And that bad conscience, that condemning heart is preventing them from approaching God. They feel unworthy to such an extent that they feel that they can't come into God's presence, even though it is not God who has condemned them. God has not barred them from approaching Him, but it's their own heart that makes them feel that way.

**John was a compassionate teacher, because he keeps addressing his church as 'Beloved'. He realizes that when you're preaching and you're trying to expose those who are guilty of false assurance, that you can inadvertently cause genuine believers to doubt their assurance.**

John wants to guard against this. He wants to uncover the false assurance that the false teachers had as they spread their lies; and the false assurance that some of those believers may have had when they believed those lies. But what he does not want to do is create a bad conscience in a true child of God. What many do not realize, and the trap that some believers fall into, **is that a lack of assurance does not necessarily mean that you have a lack of salvation.** Sometimes preachers and teachers can leave the impression that if you're saved, you should know that you're saved based on a feeling or an emotional response. The bible teaches that we can know, and that we should know that we are saved. But just because we don't, at a moment, feel an assurance, does not necessarily mean that we are not saved – just as a feeling of assurance doesn't necessarily mean that we are saved. The problem may not be a lack of salvation; it may a guilty conscience for something that we have done toward our brethren - but it could also mean that we have an over-sensitive conscience.

The question naturally arises: can we, as Christians, trust our conscience? Jiminy Cricket would say: 'Always let your conscience be your guide'. Is that good theology? We need to beware of mistaking or supposing that our conscience, when it speaks, is the voice of God. Our conscience is a gift from God, but our fingers and our feet are gifts of God - yet our fingers can steal, and our feet can lead us astray. We would do well to remember that our conscience, under many evil influences, can impose cruelties and sins that have been perpetrated not only in individual lives, but in churches and religions throughout the history.

To illustrate this point, Acts chapter 26 gives us a brief look at the life of Paul the apostle before his conversion. In telling his story he said in 26:9 that in persecuting

the church, he was obeying his conscience. He thought within himself that he was doing that which was right. Two chapters back in Acts 24:16, in his saved state said: 'Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void to offence toward God, and toward men'. On both occasions he was exercising his conscience and obedience to it. We see that before his conversion there was an evil influence on his conscience that he mistook as being God's influence. However, after his conversion and understanding of God's word, he knew better, because God's word had renewed his mind.

We need to realize that our consciences are not the voice of God, and we need not always heed our conscience as being such, but a conscience that has been trained by God's word, can and at times will help us to understand when we get on the wrong path. But that feeling of guilt should lead us back to God and His word, not into a deeper feeling of guilt. The Bible teaches us that our conscience can be seared when we despise it, when we don't listen to it, when we drown out its voice, when we plug our ears to what it is telling us. God says we can sear it, and cauterize it, and sterilize it, until it is no longer effective. Sometimes we can just dull our conscience down, not listen to it. We could be ignorant in our conscience because we have not been educated in the word of God and, because our conscience has not been regulated by the teaching of the Scriptures, our conscience can be in error - that's what Jesus said to the religious teachers of His day in Matthew 22:29: '*Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures*'. They thought they were obeying God, but they were ignorant of the true teaching of the word of God - it was not regulating their conscience.

John Milton, in his great work 'Paradise Lost', calls the conscience 'the umpire of the soul'. Any fan of football or baseball will know that umpires and referees can be mistaken. It is the same with our conscience: if we are ignorant of the rules of the game, we can make mistakes when we follow what our conscience tells us. So, what is the answer? We must train our conscience. The way we train it is to constantly expose it to the truth of the Bible. This is so important, especially if you find yourself to be one of those self-doubting Christians, a person with a guilty conscience, a true child of God that has a condemning heart. One of the best gifts that God can give a person is a sensitive conscience - but you must always remember to temper your conscience by the teaching of God's word. Regulate your conscience by the Scriptures. The reason is because the devil can use your sensitive conscience as a weapon in his hand, as the great accuser of the brethren, to condemn you and to rob you of your confidence toward God.

**Can we trust our conscience?**

To answer that question, one more question needs to be asked and answered. We need to ask the question: what is the specific truth that regulates a sensitive conscience? We find it at the end of verse 20: *'God is greater than our heart, and knows all things'*. If we are conscious of a momentary failure, of a partial transgression - at some time in our Christian experience and know that we have let the Lord down, and we are continually reminded of it, and we have a condemnation attitude toward our self - does that mean that we no longer love the Lord? Does that mean that we have forfeited His grace, that we no longer have a claim upon His name, that He's letting us go and maybe we are no longer saved? Here's the answer, 1 John 1:9, *'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness'*. Because God is greater than even our condemned heart, He not only understands the way we really are in all of our sin that we can't even see with our eyes, but He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Let's look at a Bible character that illustrates this. Remember Peter, and how often he let Jesus down? Look at the scene in John 21:15-17, where Peter was with the risen Lord. He had denied Jesus in the courtyard three times with oaths and curses. Now Jesus Christ pierces his eyes with His holy eyes, and three times asks the question to determine the real nature of Peter's love. Peter had denied him three times, and three times Jesus asked: *"Simon Peter, do you truly love me?"* At that third question, Peter broke down and blurted out these heartbroken words: *'Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you'*.

Peter knew that the Lord knew what he did in betraying Him, Jesus had prophesied it! As the Lord was being taken away, Peter saw Him looking towards him, and their eyes met. Can you imagine the condemnation that Peter felt, as he met the eyes of Jesus and as he heard the cockcrow, and as he walked away knowing that he's betrayed his Lord who he said that he would die for and follow to the grave. Peter knew that Jesus knew all about him, more than he could ever know; but he also knew that Jesus loved Him. Now I want us to understand that: though our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and He knows all things. Though we may have a heart that is condemning, maybe a bad conscience toward God because of something that we have done, God knows about that it! But God also knows if we really love Him! Deep down, underneath all of that condemnation, He knows we're His and that we Him.

It's not that God minimizes or disregards our failures; He knows them better than we know them. Yet the amazing thing is that He acquits us. Here's the big question that John is trying to get to: **Why then should we listen to our**

**condemning heart? If God is greater than our heart, and God knows all about us and what we've done, yet He still undertakes to forgive us our sins, why should we listen to our condemning heart?** He is the just One and the Justifier of those who believe in the Jesus of the scriptures.

Paul said in Romans 8:31-39, *“What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”<sup>7</sup>No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord”*. If God is for us, that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies'. God is the Judge! God is the Prosecutor! We see in verse 33 that for the child of God, no matter how they feel condemned in their heart, there is no charge coming from God! Verse 34 says ‘Who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Not only is there no prosecutor with a charge, but there's no judge condemning us for Christ is the only one who can condemn us, the only one without sin who can cast the first stone at us - yet He is the one who died for us, He's not going to condemn us!

Verse 35: 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?'. The prosecutor can't charge, the judge cannot judge against us, and therefore there'll be no jailer coming to the dock and taking us away to separate us from the love of God in Christ. It cannot be done! John wanted his audience to hear this no matter how their hearts were feeling. God has forgiven you if you're a child of God! If God does not condemn you if you walking in the light, why should you condemn yourself?

That should make us rejoice -as this book tells us, we should have confidence towards God. God doesn't want us to feel condemned, even though when we do He's greater and He forgives us - He wants us to have the truths of his word in us to give us a confidence toward Him.

**How do I move from being a condemned Christian, to a confident Christian?**

That's John's desire and here is the importance of his message in verses 20- 24: though we fall from time to time as Christians, the Master knows truly if we love Him. Therefore we need to, as quickly as possible, take our bad conscience to the blood of Christ, as 1:9 says, confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, to restore us to fellowship - and then, to know that we are the children of God after doing that, we need to keep ourselves from falling. That's the secret. If you want to be a confident Christian: you confess your sin, repent of it, and keep yourself from falling.

**So let us look at this confident Christian** that we find in verses 21-24: *“Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us”*. We have confidence toward God. If your heart is condemned, you bring your heart to God and you believe the truth of the Gospel that the blood of the Lamb is able to cleanse you from all sin, you confess your sin, and you seek - as Paul said - to have a conscience void of offence to men and to God. If you do that, you will develop a God-given confidence in your Christian life.

**John says that this confidence will affect three things.**

**The first is that a Christian confidence will affect our approach to God.** Verse 19: *'Hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him'*. Here is the way we can know when we come into the very immediate presence of God that we are confident, we're at peace, we don't feel condemned; we don't feel like running away from His presence - confidence before the very face of the Holy God of heaven!

This word 'confidence' has been used already by John, and it will occur two more times in this letter. The first and the third instance of it refer to confidence before God when the Lord Jesus comes again at the Throne of judgment - in 2:28 and

4:17. Imagine, we, as children of God live and walk as He walked, and are not ashamed of the testimony that we have, when Christ comes and we stand before the Judgment Seat, we'll not be ashamed but we'll have confidence, we'll be able to lift up our head and look Him in the eye!

In this particular instance, John is referring to confidence in prayer, verse 19, that confidence in His presence. Then he refers to it again in chapter 5 verse 14 that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he hears us'. One scholar has spoken of this confidence and described it like this: 'It is the boldness with which the Son appears before the Father and not that with which the accused appears before the judge'. There are two types of boldness there: the boldness of the accused prisoner shaking his fist in rebellion towards the judge, but John is speaking of the boldness of a son who, with confidence and adoption, comes to his father knowing that his father is for him and he is for his father, and there is nothing between their affection. This confidence is approaching God and being at peace in His presence and this is John's point: you cannot be at peace and confident in the presence of God if you're not at peace with your brother. There it is. It would be nice if we left that out, but we cannot because John doesn't - in fact, that's the point of what he's saying. If you want to be a confident Christian, if you don't want to have a condemning heart, a bad conscience, if you want to develop confidence in your Christian life and your approach to God - not only will you be at peace with God, but you will be at peace with your brethren. If you're not at peace with your brethren, you cannot have peace with God. That's serious stuff.

If your conscience condemns you because of the broken fellowship with God because of sin, and you haven't taken steps to make it right, then you can't look God in the face, you will find it hard to pray, you will find it hard to study, you will discover that attending the assembly has become nothing more than just putting the time in - and you will know there is no real vital relationship with the Almighty.

**Secondly this confidence will affect your answers to prayer** - verse 22: '*And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight*'. John is saying that if our conscience does not condemn us, we have confidence to come to God; but we have not only confidence to come to Him, but to call upon Him and to request things of Him, and have the confidence to believe and expect that we're going to get them! Why is that? Because we're not only right with God, we're right with our brother. This is one of the reasons why Christ died, to not only give you a pure conscience toward God, but to give you a good conscience toward your brother. In effect, what he is

concluding is that you are denying one of the reasons why Jesus died if you're not right with your brother! Jesus shed His precious blood to make us right with God, but how often do we dwell on the fact that He didn't just shed His blood to bring us to God, but that we should come to God with our brother by our side.

Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 5:23? *'Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there remember that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift'*. The implication is: don't come and worship God and think that you can have face-to-face communion and look into His eyes, if you cannot look into the eyes of your brother. That is not to keep you away from God's presence, that is because you're to go and be reconciled and experience God's presence in the fullness that you've never done before, or at least with that sin between you and your brother and you and God.

It doesn't just affect a brother-to-brother relationship, or sister-to-sister, it also affects the husband and wife relationship. 1 Peter 3:7, says, *"Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers"*. Our relationships need to be right, not just in the Assembly but in the home, if we want to see our prayers answered, if we want to go to God with a confident heart, knowing that we can look into His eyes because not only can we look into the eyes of our brother, we can look into the eyes of our spouse.

We must remember that when and what we ask for must be must be tempered by 5:14 that says we have confidence in Him, **when we ask anything according to His will** He hears us. If we approach God and there's nothing between us and God, and there's nothing between us and our brother, and us and our wives and our husbands, we'll be filled with God's presence as we approach Him – we will not ask for anything that's outside of His will.

**Then thirdly it gives us a confidence through abiding in Christ, and Christ abiding in us.** Verse 24 says: *"Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us"*. When your conscience is right with God because it's been washed by the blood of the Lamb, and you've confessed your sins, that is agreeing with God concerning your sinful nature, and you've been to your brother and reconciled, to your wife or your husband and put all things right, there is an abiding - and it is this confidence of our heart that is clean and pure, a conscience that is clear, that

causes Christ to abide in you and you in Him, and it is the presence of the Holy Spirit!

For a brief moment, look for evidence of the Spirit's working in your life. John makes it very clear that the cause of Christ's abiding, and the condition of Christ's continual abiding is obedience. Only that obedience will bring assurance to your heart. Are you a person who lacks confidence? Do you lack assurance of your salvation? Do you feel that you're a child of God after examining your heart, but you have a heart that condemns you? Rejoice, because God is greater than your heart.

But if you're a person who harbors a hatred to your brother or to your sister, or there's an animosity between you and your spouse, you need to know that it has affected you because it's hindering your approach to God, it's hindering any answers to your prayers, it's hindering the abiding of the Spirit in your heart, and you abiding in Christ and manifesting His fruit. What do you need to do to experience the assurance you desire and that God promises to those who walk in the light? Eternity hangs on that decision.