

1 John 3:19-23 May 24

19 And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.

20 For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.

21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.

22 And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.

23 And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.

We have talked much about assurance in First John. And such a wonderful topic that is. John wants us to know that those who **are Christ's** experience a **solid confidence** in this fact.

At the same time, John knows just how deceptive we human beings can be toward **ourselves** and **each other**. And isn't that the **tricky part** we have been dealing with? How can we have confidence, without fearing that our confidence is based on a self deception? How can we **know for sure** that we are truly the people spoken of in verse 1 of this chapter, the people who are called the **Children of God**?

I believe that is the wonderful goal of John in this passage. He wants us to have confidence. But he wants the confidence to be based on something real, something tangible, something definable, something demonstratable.

He says,

And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.

And what is the **THIS** he speaks of? It is clearly the **agape love** he spoke of in verses 16-18.

Here is the million dollar question regarding **solid assurance** of our salvation. When we see the need of a believer, will we reach out to meet it without regard to the expense because we love this person's Savior?

That is the question at the heart of this assurance.

Remember in the RC Sproul assurance series we watched when the Covid 19 restrictions were first put into place? RC gave argued that **if we love God at all**, that is proof that God must have **changed** us, must have **saved** us. Then he talked about how when a person is saved, their behavior also changes accordingly over time.

I think First John is telling us one of the **most telling changes** that is also the most solid evidence telling us if we love God or not.

We do not see God. We can have all kind of sentimental feelings toward a God that we do not see. But those pesky people He loves..... Now that is another thing. Our sentimental attachments for them are going to be tested and proven to be true or false. What will we do to **meet their needs**? How will we respond when those people take us for granted, or do not give us what we want, or are insensitive or thoughtless. How will we respond when they lie to themselves and try to get us to believe it? What about when they are impatient with us or misjudge what **we** need? How about when meeting their needs means letting go of something we feel we can't live without. We could go on and on. We know what we are like.

The way I read it, **this is the supreme test of our love for God**. It is far easier for us to trick ourselves on whether we **obey God's commandments** or **we believe what His word says**. It is much harder for us to fool ourselves regarding our love for one another, when we are actively fellowshiping with our brothers and sisters. That love is going to be tested actively and consistently.

So do you want confidence before God that you are His? Look at what John says. How do you love those that God has surrounded you with?

What need are you aware of that you are not willing to meet, no matter what it costs you?

What needs are you currently meeting that is not what you would normally do?

When you think of others in the church, are you continually asking yourself, what might they need? How can I find out? How can I meet it?

How much time do you spend thinking about how others in the church are **failing to meet your needs** verses how much time you spend thinking about **how you can meet theirs**?

What do those closest to you see and hear?

We ought to understand by now that none of us will love perfectly. And it is wonderful that we are part of a body because, if everyone does their job, the needs will be taken care of. Not all of us do certain loving things well. Even when we are called to do them, we are always glad when someone more gifted can chip in and get the job done.

So those things are all true. That is ok.

The question is somewhat like our brother Sproul asked. Do we love our brothers, self sacrificially, for no other reason than that God loves them and loves us, **AT ALL**?

If we see **true agape love** in our hearts delivering the goods to another believer for those reasons, we know for sure that **we did not put it there**. I hope that this is encouraging to us this morning. I don't know how many times God has used you all to reach out to meet my need. I genuinely feel that if I had a demonstratable need, and you could meet it, it would be met. Now you might bring a different perspective to it. You might show me that what **I say I need** is not what I **really** need. You may need to jerk me out of my locked perspective and show me a different view of the thing I think I need. So you might not accept my verdict of what I need without a discussion. But if you **believed that I needed it**, I trust that **you would provide it**.

I hope you see that in your own lives. I hope you see ways, maybe even this week, that you did things for other believers. You saw a need and you reached out to meet it. You did not expect anything in return because you were not doing it for an immediate pay off. You did it because you love God and you trust Him completely to reward you. There is no hook. There is no expectation of reciprocation. There is no leverage gained. It is just love, and nothing else. This is the **commonplace exceptional behavior of a believer**. That is the miracle that touches humanity when God moves upon a person. People who **do not love God** often do incredible acts of kindness toward other humans. But there has to be another compelling reason, a reason that appeals to their own view of themselves. Those reasons can be very complicated and look a lot like Christian virtue. But a believer does this for no other reason than God is pleased by it.

And that is why it is such a telltale sign of true belief. It is impossible to have this love without God intruding into a person's life. In fact, it is such a litmus test that John says this:

John 13:34-35 (NKJV)

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

³⁵ By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

It is clear that this is a different kind of love than the world is used to. It crossed all boundaries- color, age, gender, politics, economic status, position, personality, history, appearance, everything. Whoever **Christ died for** is required to be treated **the way Christ treated them**. Where that kind of love is truly active, it is noticeable. Sometimes the world does not recognize **real church** because its members are devoid of **real love**.

Agape love is a **miracle** in this world of humanity. It is exceptional. It is unusual. It is **non-sensible**. It is **costly**. And it is **commonplace** to every believer.

Now the next verse poses a problem.

20 For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.

This is one of those verses that is fun to look at commentaries on. They normally place themselves on one of two sides.

One side says that if our hearts condemn us, God will **counter** that condemnation and he overrides anything for the good that our hearts may say **in condemnation** of ourselves. He is acting as our **defense attorney**. And He is very good at what He does.

The other side says, if you think that **your** self condemnation is bad, it ain't nothing compared to the condemnation of God who knows the whole story, not just the part we are admitting to ourselves. He is acting as the **prosecuting attorney**. And He is very good at what He does.

We know that both of these perspectives could be true because Scripture says both at different places. Sometimes we can have a hyperactive conscience that condemns us of things that we are **not really guilty of**. When that happens God can stand with all the truth at His disposal and declare us innocent of that which we have **falsely accused ourselves of**. And that is a wonderful comforting thought.

We also know that **God's judgment** of every single human being is completely **just** because it is based on complete knowledge of every act- what was done and why it was done. So those who falsely say "Lord Lord" don't have a chance when God condemns.

For us the question is, so **which one is this?** What does the context lead us to believe this text is emphasizing.

Well the text has been emphasizing the difference between the true and the false. In verses 10-17 the emphasis has been upon knowing the false. It is emphasizing the source of all this false Christianity. Verse 18 calls us to **do otherwise, to be true**. And verse 19 tells us that real love is the verdict of where our hearts really are. Do we love or do we not love?

Love assures our hearts.

Verse 20 deals with what if our hearts are **not assured**.

Verse 21 deals with what if our hearts **do not condemn us**.

Given that the topic is the assurance that true love for others brings, it would make sense that verse 20 is talking about an accurate **lack of assurance** and verse 21 is talking about an accurate **sense of assurance**.

Then verse 21 goes on to asking with confidence based on our status. Verse 22 says that the basis of the confidence is that we do the things God says. This seems to imply that **those without confidence cannot ask of God** because they are not doing what God says. So I think that our heart, in verse 20, is accurately condemning us. And God is even more certain in his condemnation of us if we are not people who love the brethren.

If we take it that way, what this is is a severe warning to **those who do not love fellow believers**. It is a warning to those who see a need, they know it is a need, but they refuse to meet it.

Maybe they refuse to meet it out of a sense of pride. We think we can appeal to God here and say- **but look at how this person has treated me**. Look at what **I did** and **how they repaid it**. Look how this person will **not ask me** to meet this need. Look how they did not **meet my need**. Or look at how this person **got into this mess**. I had to do all these right things, and this person didn't care what they did. They had no regard for what you said.

Or look at how stupid this person was to get into this need.

Again, we could go on and on. The question is- **is this person a believer?** Do they have a **demonstratable need?** And **will you meet it?**

If our hearts are telling us that we are guilty of not loving, that isn't the half of it. God Himself will join in heartily and lay out all the evidence in judgment if it comes to that. John is calling God's people to repent of this lack of love before it is too late.

If we are in the state of being unloving, we have no reason for assurance. We have no reason for confidence before God. We have no reason to think that a miracle has happened in us. We are acting just like the rest of the world. We are viewing life from the **economy** of measuring **what I give by what I will get**. Love does not go by an economy. Love gives because it is right, period. No room for pride. No room for restitution. No hooks. No gimmicks. No self praise. Just giving because of Jesus.

An economy measures the value of what it gives compared to the value of what it receives. Agape love has no economy. It is evaluated by grace. Did it give that which was not deserved? This is insanity to the world. But it is as common as air in the Christian world. In fact, it **is** the spiritual air that we breathe.

Consider this this morning? Is your heart condemning you because there is a believer that has crossed some line which is too far for you to love them? Is there a need that does not appeal to your heart because you have closed your heart to them, while still believing they are a Christian?

If so, John is calling for repentance in this dangerous position. Give it up. Submit to God and reach out to meet the need if it is in your power to do so. Now we go on to the next verse where we can find wonderful encouragement.
21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.

Can you look at your life and see clear evidence that you **have done** and are doing things that honestly look **nothing** like your fleshly nature. The things your pride or selfishness or ego would demand **have no sway** with the decisions you are making. And you are giving up your **time** or your **money** or **things of value to you** to meet another's need. If you can see this, and you do not know of anywhere that you **will not give up what you have** for the benefit of another believer, if this is true and your heart does not condemn you, you are in a truly wonderful **condition** and **position**.

It appears from this text that the **crowning evidence** of a person's salvation comes from their love of their brothers. It is that one thing you can rely upon to tell you if you are a believer or not. It is the best evidence of whether those around us are believers or not. James told us a few weeks ago that we all stumble in many ways. We all have varied weaknesses that seem an annoyance or a burden to those around us. Stuff of the old nature creeps out of us in word or deed. None of us completely bridle ourselves. So we cannot measure our lives based on any kind of **perfect track record**. But we must have **something** to measure. We must have **something** to look at that says-hey, I really am changed. In the midst of this terrible struggle I have with sin, with my own evil impulses, I can look for this evidence. Do I love brothers? I mentioned a few weeks ago that Mike, our previous friend and preacher held this as the most important evidence in his life of his salvation. He knew himself very well. He knew what was Mike-ish and what was not, what his old nature would produce and what it would not. And he knew that his life being dedicated to the spiritual benefit of those around him did not come from Mike. It had to come from God.

That is the kind of wonderful blessing we have when we see that God is changing us to people who, from the heart, want what is in other's best interest. It is the crowning evidence of salvation.

So how do we talk to ourselves when our heart is condemning us? We do it like this. First, we do not say that **we have not sinned**. We would be a liar. And it is assumed we have already confessed our sin and requested God's forgiveness. But the evidence is still there of our evil history, our intentional failures. Now what do we do with that. We don't say that it is not true. We don't say that it does not matter. We don't say that it is not evidence of

something. But we **do say** that it is not a **final** evidence. It is not **conclusive** evidence. We can say-

Yes that is true of me and I deeply bemoan my failures. I call them what they are. And I have confessed them to God and am continually living in a state of repentance, turning from them.

But there is another evidence that must come into play in the courtroom of my heart. And it is just as true as the **evidence of my failure**. I am a different person than I was. I love the brethren. I find myself drawn to them.

Martyn Lloyd Jones says- **"I love their society and their company. I cannot look and see my brother or sister suffer without helping them. I find myself loving them, thus, in practice, and because I do that, I must be a child of God. I would not do it otherwise. The fact that I am thus loving the brethren is a proof that I have passed from death unto life. It means that I no longer belong to the world. It means I am a child of God."**

Now there is something to notice here. Look at what John does **not** tell us to do when our heart condemns us. He does not tell us depend upon our theology. He does not say- have you prayed a prayer to receive Christ? Was it sincere? Well then, if you have that memory you are good. Just appeal to that. Remember that. John knows the danger we all have of self deception. He knows how good we are at sinning under a shroud of an illusion, where we can be **forgiven of sin** while at the same time having **no change of attitude toward it**. John does not appeal to an evidence so readily open to our **own lies about ourselves**. We may all have known people who remained addicted to drunkenness or pornography or sexual immorality, maybe even clearly living in an active and committed state of sin, who talk lovingly and longingly about the cross and how glad they were that Jesus had saved them. Their **theology** becomes their **assurance**. What they **know about God** is their **evidence of salvation**. John does **not** appeal to such a thing. It does not matter how we sentimentally regard the cross if coming to the cross does not change the core of who we are.

The evidence John points out really does go to the core of who we are. People who **love like Jesus** loves **have** to be saved. Now the rest of John couches all of this in the **factual person of Christ** and the **teaching** that He gave us. We evaluate everything based on that truth, not just some idealistic idea about love or Jesus. But true agape love exuding from a human being is the greatest evidence of being a child of God.

This gives us a **confidence** born of **evidence**, born of **proof**. And it is a **wonderful** confidence. It is not based upon what **we** have done as much as a change **done to us** that would produce such things.

And we have confidence toward God. And how does John apply this? The next verse is about prayer. But in reality this whole text is about prayer. Look back at verse ¹⁹ **And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.**

Notice the words- **before Him**. That is where this is all carried out. We come **before God**. We have an awareness that we are in His presence. We are in a state of wanting to commune with God and communicate with God. But we want to know that we even have a chance to be heard. With all the **negative evidence** against us, we need **some reason to believe** we are one of His. Because if we **are not**, we might as well not even bother to pray. But if we **are** we know that He will hear us.

Well the confidence of love in our lives gives us that confidence that we are truly His child and He will hear us.

²² **And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.**

²³ **And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.**

Now we know that all manner of craziness can come from taking verse 22 out of context. People will pray for a million bucks or a big house or a nice car or a new wife and base it on Whatever we ask we will receive. That is nonsense.

James 4:3 (NKJV)

³ **You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.**

No, this confidence doesn't open the doors to God's Walmart store. But it does assure us that **what we are so longing for in Jesus name**, in Jesus stead, in Jesus will, will not be held back from us because we are an enemy of God instead of His child. No. We are his child and we will receive what we ask when we ask according to our Father's wishes.

We can be confident that we are in a solid relationship with Christ. We are His child and will be treated as such, with **all the privileges**.

Now look here how John circles back around. He just gave us the solid proof of love. But that love comes in a package. It has to. It is not an isolated quality of a believer. It is not like this believer he speaks of does not obey. He does not believe. He does not trust God. But, oh yeah, he loves. No. There is no one like that. The other evidences that prove our salvation are co-existent. The person who is loving is also doing what Christ said to do- maybe most preeminently to love. But that is not the limit of it. What we **do** has changed because **who we are** has changed. There are evidences of submitted

behaviors throughout the believer's life. We **DO THINGS** that God likes because we love Christ because He first loved us.

Then in verse 23 John states the essence of the commandments. This is the commandment. If you want one commandment to live by, start with this one. It covers all the rest.

believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another

Remember when Christ was asked what the greatest commandment was? Jesus responded by saying this:

Matthew 22:37-40 (NKJV)

³⁷ **Jesus said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."**

³⁸ **This is the first and great commandment.**

³⁹ **And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'**

⁴⁰ **On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."**

Jesus was only asked for one commandment but He gave 2. And the two are essentially, love God and love people. I think that is similar to what John says.

believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another

Love God and love people.

If John were to just say, Love one another, he might as well tell us in our natural born state to **jump to the moon**. While it is important, something must happen to us first. A miracle has to happen to us to enable us to do this supernatural thing. Believing on Christ is a prerequisite for loving one another. So you could look at it as being one command. He is saying **Come** to Christ so you can **love** like Christ. The two are linked too tightly to separate. And it may be one of the simplest ways to describe what a believer does. He is one who believes in Christ and, because of that, loves his brothers. And if a person did nothing more than that, he would fulfill all the commandments. Because he would only do good and never do harm to anyone because of His relationship with Christ.

It is no wonder that John honed in on this command.

I know we have talked about love over and over. It is like we are wearing this topic out. But it really is essential. And we cannot understand First John without grasping its importance.

Do you have assurance in your walk with Christ? Is it based on a change in who **you are** that is proven by significant changes in **what you do**? Especially proven by loving other brothers when there is nothing in it for your flesh to do so?

We are offered that assurance. And it is a solid one that gives us confidence in our praying.

Are your prayers being hindered? Could it be that your confidence is wavering because your fellowship with God is being interrupted by a **lack of love** toward one of His children. If you even think that is a possibility, it would be a good time to initiate contact with that person and do whatever you can to reconcile. If you have sinned against them, go. If they have sinned against you and you have not clearly explained **how** they have sinned against you, go. If they are in the body, carry that process through to completion. Do not let the burden be on the other party to contact you if you have not gone through the motions prescribed by scripture.

Love matters. Our relationships matter. And again, don't wait on the other party. That is not admirable or permissible. It is disobedience. If you are harboring something that is disturbing fellowship, go.

If you prayerfully search your heart and find nothing like this, and you see ways that you commonly love other believers just because you love Jesus, you can be confident before God when you come to Him in prayer. You have proof that you are a believer. Bask in the relationship that you have with your father that was provided by your brother, Jesus Christ. That is the point of what John is saying.