

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, August 21, 2024 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



THAT YOU MAY KNOW – A STUDY OF 1,2 & 3 JOHN

Blessed Assurance

1 John 3:19-24

“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. ²⁴ Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.” – 1 John 3:19-24 (NKJV)

BACKGROUND AND SETTING FOR 1ST, 2ND, & 3RD JOHN:

- (1) **AUTHOR = The Apostle John** – Tradition holds that John was sentenced to death in a boiling vat of oil, yet he emerged unharmed from the experience. Again tradition tells us that John lived into old age perhaps dying sometime after AD 98... He is thought to have died in Ephesus – But in fact the mystery and unknowns concerning John’s death and what happened to him are not known and are varied...
- (2) **DATE = A.D. 90-95** - As with most books in the Bible, we cannot know for certain when and from where these epistles were penned. As to a date, it is commonly believed to have been written close to the end of the 1st century, with a fairly wide possible time frame... somewhere between 90-95 A.D.
- (3) **PLACE OF WRITING = Ephesus** – It is believed by most Biblical scholars that John wrote these letters from Ephesus, the place believed to be where he died. It is usually accepted that John wrote them late in his life.

- (4) **RECIPIENTS = Different audiences** - The Epistles of John were written to various audiences. They were all written after John was an old man living in Ephesus.
- (5) **PURPOSE = Multiple purposes** - In terms of a positive stated purpose, John actually gives us reasons why he wrote these epistles:

One of the key concepts and purposes of John's letter, 1 John, is assurance of faith.

3 Stated Positive Purposes for These Letters:

1. **That your (our) joy may be made complete = 1 John 1:4,** *"⁴ And these things we write to you that your joy may be full."* How may a Christian's joy be full if they lack assurance of faith, or if they are unsure that they are even a Christian and assured of salvation? Why do you think that is?
2. **That you may not sin = 1 John 2:1-2,** *"My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world."* What affect does sin in the life of a Christian have on his or her assurance? Why? What is John telling us here that might help?
3. **That you may know that you have eternal life = 1 John 5:13,** *"¹³ These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God."* Why do you think this (assurance) might have been a stated purpose of John's writing? Why so important?

Perhaps, nothing paralyzes, incapacitates, and stunts the growth of a believer/Christian quite like a lack of assurance. Our passage is another of the places in this letter when John hits on the subject of assurance.

"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. ²⁴ Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us." – 1 John 3:19-24 (NKJV)

We've all heard and perhaps known of the many reasons that Christians may lack assurance, and not doubt John is directly addressing many of these in his letter...

Can you share some reasons that you believe some may lack assurance? Here are some you may never have thought of before that probe a bit deeper...

Some Deeper Reasons Some Lack Assurance: (There are provided by Dr. John MacArthur's piece, "Why Christians Lack Assurance" at Grace to You)

(1) Some lack assurance because of being under strong preaching of God's holy standard - To put it another way, if you're in a church where the preaching is weak, where the Law of God is not held up, where holiness is not exalted, where the standard for the gospel is not proclaimed, it's unlikely that you're going to have a battle with a lack of assurance. If you're in an environment where there's a minimalist kind of gospel and all you're told to do is pray a prayer, as we were talking about this morning, invite Jesus into your life and nothing is ever questioned as to the depth and legitimacy of that faith, it's not likely that you're going to struggle with assurance the way someone might in an environment where the Law of God is upheld, where the holiness of God is upheld, where the essence of true faith is proclaimed, where a call for genuine repentance is at the heart of all gospel invitations. It is under that strong kind of preaching that people struggle with assurance. **Wherever demanding preaching and demanding teaching forces people to acknowledge a high and holy standard for the believer, it can lead to a lack of assurance in disobedient and sinning Christians. And I think it's fair to say the pulpit is rightly the creator of anxious hearts.** That's part of the duty of the preacher is to make the heart anxious. Why? So that, as **2 Corinthians 13:5** says, you examine yourself to see whether you're in the faith.

But as I said, much of the preaching today is neither strong or convicting, doesn't set a holy standard at all, rather it waters down the truth, tells people what they want to hear rather than the truth of what they need to hear, tickles itching ears, communicates an "I'm okay, your're okay" mentality, and potentially sends many a man to hell. It is often the aim of "seeker-friendly" preaching that doesn't want to make anyone too uncomfortable.

The truth is, God's Word and His presence in gospel preaching will make us uncomfortable. And while the pulpit is to be a purveyor of a message that creates anxious hearts, the pulpit is also to be the creator of comfort and that's why we preach the full Word of God, to bring some balance. The preaching of the Word, I believe, is the supreme means of grace in the life of the church in its worship. But where there is that strong preaching, there will be a battle with assurance. And I'll tell you something, it's not bad to have that. It's good, because how else are we drawn to the important issue of self-examination?

(2) Some might lack assurance because they can't accept forgiveness - They can't accept forgiveness. They really are tyrannized by their emotions, feeling they're too bad to be saved. There's just too much garbage in their mind. There's just too much sin that they can't get rid of... the weight of it, the guilt and shame they can't get away from.

Dr. John MacArthur tell this story... He says, "I always remember a story my father used to tell about a man who came to his pastor, and he was concerned about all of the sin in his life. And so he said, "I don't know how bad a sinner I really am." And so the pastor said, "Well, every time you consciously commit a sin, go hammer a nail in the barndoor." And I don't know how long it was before the man came back and said, "There's no more room for nails." And he said, "Now if you want to understand the forgiveness of God, it's like pulling all the nails out." And the man was able to lead – the pastor was able to lead the man to Christ. And he said, "Now, every time you do something in your life, I want you to go to the barn and pull one nail out." Well many months went by. Little by little the nails came out. And one day he said to the pastor, "The nails are out." And the pastor said, "Isn't that wonderful?" He said, "No, the holes are still there."

There are some people who don't get over the holes. You know? All the scars (holes) of the past. This is because – there's a reason for it, this is because conscience speaks against forgiveness. It really does. I mean, it is the essence of conscience to berate you. It is the essence of conscience to accuse you. It is the essence of conscience to hold you up before the bar of God as wanting. That's what God designed your conscience to do. Your conscience never should let you off the hook. Your conscience is not designed to mollify or pacify you, and it does not go away when you become a Christian.

In fact, it functions after you've been saved better than it did before, because it was purged and purified, the Bible says. And it's clean now and it's clear, and it has a function and that function is to waken your heart to sin, and it will never let you off the hook. Conscience knows nothing of forgiveness. The more you're exposed to the preaching of the Word of God, the more you're exposed to the Law of God, the more you know about sin, the more active your conscience is and the more your conscience berates you in a relentless fashion and yields nothing to the issue of forgiveness, the more possible it is for you to feel the loss of assurance. By the way, your conscience knows nothing about mercy. And that's good. God will give you mercy; your conscience won't. It is relentless in plaguing you about your iniquity. And you can be thankful for it. Right?

(3) Some lack assurance because bad theology contributes to a lack of assurance - They do not comprehend the gospel and the plan of salvation... I'll say it again, bad theology will always contribute to a lack of assurance. I just mentioned an example of that a moment ago. If you believe you can lose your salvation, then, of course, you can't enjoy assurance. But there is more than that. Somehow the whole reality of grace and the whole reality of mercy and forgiveness in Christ is not comprehended. To go beyond that and say people do not understand the wonder and the glory of the great doctrine of justification. Well I would venture to say that most people sitting in most churches who think they're Christians don't even understand the doctrine of justification, and that is the doctrine which inherently is the gospel which must be believed. They have had emotional experiences. They have come to Christ in a measure of faith. They have prayed

a prayer. They have some feelings of well-being. But no matter how vivid and how passionate and how powerful feelings are at the moment – the crisis moment when one prays a prayer or “accepts Christ” – emotion, powerful as it may be, vivid as it may be, emotion is no safe storehouse for your assurance. It’s a really bad place to store your assurance. Your assurance cannot be based upon an emotional experience, it has to be built on a true understanding of the saving work of Jesus Christ.

I would venture to say that most people hold on to some kind of experience as the evidence of their salvation, rather than a true and a deep understanding of the great doctrine of justification. Do you understand what really happened when God saved you? Do you understand that you were a sinner and God knew it? You were condemned by Him as a just and righteous and holy Judge. Do you understand that that penalty had to be paid? Do you understand that God substituted His Son to pay the penalty that His wrath required, and that He paid it in full? And God was so satisfied with the Son for the payment, that He raised Him from the dead and exalted Him to His right hand and gave Him the name Lord, which is above every name. Do you understand that the work of Jesus Christ was complete? That sin was fully paid for? That when He died He died bearing the punishment for all your sins? And when you put your trust in Him, God credits all His righteousness to your account?

(4) Some lack assurance because they don’t know the exact time of salvation - That’s kind of silly. Isn’t it? I might not be saved because I don’t know when it happened. Nobody knows when it happened. You might remember when you prayed a prayer or felt a response or said something, but you can’t see the regenerating work of God. You can’t see Him creating a new nature in you and a new disposition. This is an invisible miracle.

Those today who teach that, the remembrance of a past event, the remembrance of a childhood prayer, the remembrance of a baptism as a legitimate basis for the believer’s security and assurance are wrong. The exact time is never the issue. There are some people who don’t remember their birth. I don’t. My mother told me about it, but I don’t remember it. That doesn’t mean I’m not alive.

(5) Some lack assurance because they still feel the flesh strongly and wonder if they have been transformed - They feel the pull of sin. They sometimes feel the pull of doubt. They feel the hankering after the past life and the world and the old relationships. They feel the pull of recycled sinful experiences, dragged back through their consciousness. And they wonder if the presence of all of that doesn’t indicate that they are not a transformed person, they are not a new person in Christ where old things are gone and new have come.

But what they're really experiencing is the battle of Romans 7. Right? And in Romans 7 Paul says there is a principle in me that's in my flesh, and it's there all the time and it's powerful and it's relentless, and it makes me do what I don't want to do and not do what I want to do. And there's another principle in me and it's the love for the Law of God. And the Law of God is holy, just, and good, and I love that Law and I want to do that Law, but I find this war going on in me. And he even says, "O wretched man that I am, who is going to deliver me from the body of this death." In ancient days when somebody murdered a victim, one form of punishment was to strap the corpse of the victim to the killer and as the corpse decayed, the decay ate its way into the living murderer and took his life in a horrific way. Paul said, "That's how I feel sometimes, like I'm this new man strapped to a corpse that's eating at me." But that's what it means to be a Christian in an unglorified state. That's why Romans 8 says, "We wait for the redemption of the body." That's why Paul said, "I can't wait till I receive that glorified body."

Oh, I think it's easy to know. Paul knew because he loved the Law of God and he hated the sin that he saw in him. Before you came to Christ you loved the sin and hated the law of God. It's about an affection. Isn't it? That's why Jonathan Edwards wrote so much about religious affections because they really are the mark of salvation. You once lived in sin and you relished it and you loved it. Now you desire deliverance from it. You once were self-confident and trusted in your own goodness, and now you judge yourself as a sinner before God. You once wanted nothing to do with God and you wanted to run away from His authority or rebel against it. Now you want everything to do with Him. You desire Him, you desire to know Him and to yield to Him and to please Him. And that's the indication that you're new. You used to deny that you're a sinner, now you confess that you're a sinner. You used to have no interest in cleansing your heart, now you long to have it cleansed. You used to run from any attitude of penitence and now there is penitence in your heart upon any and every sin. And so it's that affection that runs toward the law of God, toward God Himself, toward Christ.

BLESSED ASSURANCE, JESUS IS MINE (Hymn #334)

Fanny Crosby (1820-1915) is heralded as one of the world's most prolific and talented hymn writers/composers of all time. Blind from shortly after birth, Fanny nonetheless wrote 8,000 hymns in her 95 year life time. It might seem unlikely that a blind hymn writer, living in a slum most of her life and taking care of the poor and needy (though blind) and a wealthy woman living in a mansion in one of the most affluent part of New York City would have anything in common — but Fanny Crosby, the blind hymn writer, was a humble woman with a number of distinguished friends. Grover Cleveland, who later became President of the United States, met Fanny Crosby as a young man, and they became lifelong friends.

The wealthy friend of Fanny Crosby, living in the mansion in the affluent neighborhood in New York was a woman by the name of Phoebe Knapp. Phoebe Knapp was the daughter

of a Methodist evangelist. When she was just sixteen years old, Phoebe married Joseph Fairchild Knapp, a young man who went on to found the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. The Knapps were extremely wealthy. They worshiped at the John Street Methodist Church in lower Manhattan, which is where Fanny Crosby also attended as an active member in her adult years — and so a friendship was born between Fanny Crosby and Phoebe Knapp. Phoebe, the wealthy matron, often invited Fanny, the blind hymn writer, to her palatial home. Phoebe enjoyed music, and had a music room furnished with a collection of musical instruments. During one of Fanny's visits, Phoebe invited her to the music room, where Phoebe sat down at the keyboard and played a tune that she had written. "What does that tune say to you, Fanny?" Phoebe asked? Fanny clapped her hands in delight and said, "That happy tune says to me, 'Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!'" And so a hymn was born as a collaboration between the two women, that was to become one of Christendom's most beloved hymns. *Blessed Assurance* was published in 1873.

I find this hymn especially important for Christians and the church, because so many struggle with doubting their salvation and questions of assurance. Most have experienced “doubts” about their salvation, wondering if they are really saved, or if they have lost their salvation... it that is even possible.

HYMN LYRICS AND QUESTIONS: “Blessed Assurance, Jesus Is Mine” (Hymn #334)

*¹Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine! O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God, Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.*

*²Perfect submission, perfect delight! Visions of rapture now burst on my sight;
Angels descending bring from above echoes of mercy, whispers of love.*

*³Perfect submission, all is at rest! I in my Savior am happy and blest,
Watching and waiting, looking above; filled with his goodness, lost in His love.*

Chorus:

*This is my story, this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long;
This is my story, this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long.*

Questions from the song “Blessed Assurance, Jesus Is Mine”: The following are some questions to be considered from the song “Blessed Assurance, Jesus Is Mine” regarding assurance for those who may struggle with doubting their salvation.

(1) In verse 1 of the song what things might Fanny Crosby be suggesting are the things that give a Christian who struggles with “doubt” assurance of their salvation and how might each give that assurance in the face of doubts? Answer: “Blessed

assurance, Jesus is mine! O what a foretaste of glory divine! Heir of salvation, purchase of God, born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.”

1. **Heir of salvation** - In stating that one is an “heir” it means that they belong to God’s forever family and will as such one day received the inheritance of a family, which in this case is ultimate salvation, Christian will never be disinherited. 1 Peter 3-5 says, *“³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.”*
2. **Purchased by God** - We have been bought with a price, the precious blood of Jesus Christ, we belong to Him and He will never turn us away... we belong to Him... He bought us and He owns us. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, *“¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.”* That price was the ransom that was paid for us and our sins. Jesus paid the ransom for us giving us an eternal inheritance. I love how Hebrews 9:15 says it, *“For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a **ransom** to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.”*
3. **Born of His Spirit** - We have been born again, into His forever family and His Spirit lives in us guaranteeing us as His. 2 Corinthians 1:20-22, *“²⁰ For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God. ²¹ Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, ²² set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.”* And in 2 Corinthians 5:5, Paul tells us, *“⁵ Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.”* And in Ephesians 1:13-14, Paul’s words powerfully give us this assurance, *“¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.”* Wow! As believers we have had the Spirit of God born in us and that “guarantees” our salvation and right standing with God.
4. **Washed in His blood** - Again, we have been bought through the precious blood of Jesus Christ and our sins, past, present and future, have been washed away... the only thing that can separate us from God is our sin and our sin has been atoned for. When God looks at us know He looks through the blood of Christ and sees us as not guilty and as His own. John tells us in 1 John 1:7, *“If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies (washes) us from all sin.”* Peter speaks of this precious blood and the hope it gives

us in 1 Peter 1:18-21, “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰ He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. ²¹ Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.” And the writer of Hebrews said it this way in Hebrews 9:11-15, “¹¹ But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation. ¹² He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. ¹³ The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. ¹⁴ How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! ¹⁵ For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.”

- (2) In verse 2 of the song “Blessed Assurance, Jesus Is Mine,” what does Fanny Crosby suggest she receives as internal aids in dealing with doubts about salvation and finding assurance? Explain how each might aid in assurance of one’s salvation.

Answer: “Perfect submission, perfect delight! Visions of rapture now burst on my sight; Angels descending bring from above echoes of mercy, whispers of love.”

1. **Echoes of mercy** – What might she be suggested with the idea of “echoes of mercy” and how might we receive these?
 2. **Whispers of love** - What might she be suggesting with the ideas of “whispers of love” and how might we receive these?
- (3) In verse 2 and verse 3 what do you think Fanny Crosby might have in mind with the phrase “perfect submission”, and what might this have to say concerning our assurance of salvation in the face of doubts?

Answer: I think the idea here has to do with our yielding and surrendering to Christ. If we are living a yielded, surrendered, submitted life in Christ... letting Him be Lord and have His way in us, and living in submission to Him we will have assurance. Our doubts about our salvation are answered and that kind of life confirms that we are His. As she says in verse 3 of the song “all is at rest.” In other words, we will have a peace about our salvation and won’t be struggling with questions of assurance.

John begins chapter 3 by exclaiming (3:1), “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are.” God wants His children to feel His arms of love around them, even when they go through difficult trials.

The enemy of our souls knows that we will not feel close to God if we doubt our standing before Him as beloved children...

- The enemy accuses us in an attempt to drive a wedge between us and God (Rev. 12:10; Zech. 3:1-4).
- In addition, at times our conscience condemns us as we compare ourselves with the holy standards of God's Word.
- We know that we should love others, but in our hearts, we struggle with anger or bitterness or hatred toward those who have wronged us.
- We know that we should pray for God to bless this difficult person with His salvation, but inwardly, we'd rather see him punished.
- When we have those thoughts, either our guilty conscience or the enemy comes in and says, "A true Christian can't have thoughts like that! You're not even saved!"

John is in the second cycle of applying the three tests of authentic Christianity that we have been looking in this first letter:

3 Tests of Authentic Christianity: (from 1 John)

- (1) The moral test of obedience**
- (2) The relational test of love**
- (3) The doctrinal test of faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ**

During the first application of the tests, John paused after the second test to give a word of assurance about his confidence in his readers' spiritual condition (2:12-14), as well as a warning about the danger of worldliness (2:15-17). Here, in the second application of the tests, John follows the same pattern. He has repeated the first test of obedience (2:28-3:10) and the second test of love (3:11-18). Before he goes on to the third test of believing the truth (4:1-6), he interjects this word about assurance.

Our text in 1 John 3:19-24 falls into two sections:

2 Sections in 1 John 3:19-24:

- (1) The condemning heart and the basis for assurance (1 John 3:19-20)**
- (2) The confident heart and the blessings of assurance (1 John 3:21-24)**

John is saying that... *(get this and remember it... it will help you)*

When our hearts condemn us, we must rest on the basis of assurance; when our hearts are confident, we will enjoy the blessings of assurance.

Before we examine the text more carefully, I should mention that there are two very different approaches to these verses. On the subject of assurance of salvation, R. C. Sproul (*Essential Truths of the Christian Faith* [Tyndale], pp. 201-202) points out four possibilities

4 Possible Approaches on the Subject of Assurance of Salvation: (1 John 3:19-24)

- (1) There are those who are unsaved and they know that they are unsaved... they don't make any claim of salvation**
- (2) There are people who are saved but do not know they are saved... they doubt their salvation, perhaps due to a troubled conscience**
- (3) There are people who are saved and know that they are saved... they are grounded enough to have a strong sense of assurance of salvation**
- (4) There are those who are not saved but confidently believe that they are saved... they have false assurance**

As I understand our text, John is mainly addressing the second group—those who are saved, but they're having doubts because of their awareness of falling short of God's commandments. John wants them to know the basis and the blessings of true assurance. Let's look at what he tells us...

WHEN OUR HEARTS CONDEMN US, WE MUST REST ON THE BASIS OF ASSURANCE (1 John 3:19-20)

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."
 – 1 John 3:19-20 Okay! Back up! John says, "*Buy this...*" By what? We have to ask the question... we have to watch and pay attention to what he is telling us here.

John's meaning in these two verses is that a person who is troubled with doubts and self-condemnation must take himself in hand and confront himself with what he knows to be true about God's work in his life and what is true of God's greater knowledge of his heart. As James Boice puts it (*The Epistles of John* [Zondervan], p. 122), "... faith (which is the opposite of doubt), being based on knowledge, must be fed by it." John makes two points:

2 Point Concerning Assurance and What We Know to be True:

- (1) Assurance is based on the knowledge of God's work in our lives (1 John 3:19-20a)**
 – Notice verses 19-20a, "*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...*"
 There are some difficult grammatical and interpretive problems here that would be tedious to explain in this message. Suffice it to say that I think that the way that the NASB and the NIV translate the verses gives an adequate sense of the meaning.

When John says, "*by this*" (v.19) he is referring back to verses 17-18, where he talks about love expressing itself in practical good deeds. "*¹⁷ But whoever has this world's*

goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? ¹⁸ My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.” John’s point is that self-sacrificing love is the mark of the Christian, whereas self-centered hatred is the mark of the world. Thus, in verse 19 John is saying, **“When you are troubled by doubts and self-condemnation, don’t focus on your failures. (After all, what Christian hasn’t failed at times?) Rather, focus on the many times that God’s love has flowed through you since you became a believer. Let these acts of self-sacrifice be your evidence that you are of the truth, and cease doubting.”**

- It is helpful at times to examine our failures and learn from them.
- Why did I sin in that way? How can I avoid that sin in the future?
- But it is not helpful to dwell on your sins and become introspective to the point of depression.
- You’ve got to know your own heart here.
- Due to personality or other factors some are more prone to be introspective.
- Some are by nature such perfectionists that if they do not come up to God’s perfect standard of love, they condemn themselves, even after they’ve confessed their sins.
- While we should maintain a sensitive conscience and not tolerate any disobedience or sin, at the same time we need to accept our human limitations.
- Our overall focus should be on what God is doing in our lives, not on our failures.

Probably if I were to ask, “Name five times you’ve failed,” you wouldn’t have any problem coming up with your list. But if I said, “Name five times you’ve experienced God’s victory,” you’d have to think harder.

John is saying, **“Look at the specific deeds of love that God has done through you, and be assured.”**

- If you can’t think of any such deeds of love, you may need to examine whether or not you truly know Christ.
- If you have experienced God’s love in Christ, then you ought to love others (3:16; 4:11).
- If you never see opportunities to show God’s love to others, you are too self-focused.

Many people come to church with the mindset, “I need to get my needs met.” In fact, they live each day with that selfish focus. They get frustrated or depressed because others are not meeting their needs. **The proper way to come to church or to live each day is with the mindset, “Lord, use me to meet someone’s needs.”** When you live that way, you find that the Lord does meet your needs. When you live to love others, it comes back to you “a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over” (Luke 6:38). So John says, “We will know by this—by our loving deeds—that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him.”

(2) Assurance is based on God's **greater knowledge of us (1 John 3:20b)** – Notice the second part of **verse 20** there in our passage, **"²⁰ For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things."** A second truth by which we may assure our hearts is that of God's greater knowledge of us. I agree with **James Montgomery Boice** (p. 125), that John is saying, **"... whatever our hearts may say, God knows us better than even we ourselves do and, nevertheless, has acquitted us. Therefore, we should reassure ourselves by His judgment, which alone is trustworthy, and refuse to trust our own."** As I said earlier, some take this to mean that God's judgment of our hearts is more rigorous than our judgment, not more merciful. But that does not fit the context here.

Two other texts illustrate and reinforce what John is saying here...

Two Passages that Illustrate God's Greater Knowledge:

(1) **John 21:15-17** – **"¹⁵ So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Feed My lambs.' ¹⁶ He said to him again a second time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Tend My sheep.' ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?' Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, 'Do you love Me?' And he said to Him, 'Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed My sheep.'"**

Do you see it? Jesus met Peter after the resurrection, after Peter's shameful denials that he knew Jesus. To restore him, Jesus asked Peter (John 21:15), **"Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?"** Peter replied, **"Yes, Lord; You know that I love You."** Jesus replied, **"Tend My lambs."** Then, Jesus repeated the question (21:16), **"Simon, son of John, do you love Me?"** Peter answered, **"Yes, Lord; You know that I love You."** Jesus said, **"Shepherd My sheep."** Peter had denied Jesus three times, so Jesus asks a third time (21:17), **"Simon, son of John, do you love Me?"** Peter was grieved, probably because he was recalling his awful sin. But note his reply, **"Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You."** Jesus said, **"Tend My sheep."** ***If effect, Peter said, "Lord, as far as I know my own heart, I do love You. But, You know me better than I know myself, and I appeal to Your knowledge."***

(2) **Romans 8:1 & 31-34** – **"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." ... ³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us." In verse 1, Paul affirms, **"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."** Then, in vv. 31-34, Paul wrote these**

reassuring words, “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.” He goes on to state that there is absolutely nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That is the thrust of John’s point in our text. If you know that you are God’s child through faith in Jesus Christ, then even when your heart condemns you for falling short, God is greater than your heart. He knows that He has justified you. If you have sinned, by all means confess that sin and come back to Him. But don’t allow yourself to go on in guilt and condemnation. Assurance is based on the knowledge of how God has already worked in your life and the knowledge of God’s greater knowledge of your heart. He saved you even though He knew every sin that you ever would commit. He wants all of His children to be assured of His great love.

After giving this basis for assurance to the condemning heart, John goes on to give the blessings of assurance that come from a confident heart...

WHEN OUR HEARTS ARE CONFIDENT, WE WILL ENJOY THE BLESSINGS OF ASSURANCE (1 John 3:21-24)

“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. ²⁴ Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.” – 1 John 3:21-24

John says (3:21), “Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God.” This confidence leads to two blessings, that of answered prayer (vv.22-23) and an abiding relationship through the Spirit (v.24) In support of the interpretation that I am advocating, B. F. Westcott (*The Epistles of St. John* [Eerdmans], p. 118) writes, “The thought here is of the boldness with which the son appears before the Father, and not of that with which the accused appears before the Judge.”

This is illustrated by a story of a Roman emperor who was parading through the streets of the capital in a victory celebration. Roman soldiers lined the parade route to keep back the cheering masses. At one point along the route there was a small platform where the royal family was sitting. As the emperor approached, his youngest son, who was just a little boy,

jumped down, burrowed through the crowd, and tried to run out to meet him. One of the guards caught the boy by the arm and said, “You can’t do that! Don’t you know who that is? That’s the emperor!” But the boy quickly replied, “He may be your emperor, but he’s my father!” (From “Our Daily Bread,” July, 1977.)

John wants us to know that if we are God’s children, we have that kind of confident access to the Father’s presence. He outlines two blessings that result from this confidence:

2 Blessing That Result from this Confidence:

(1) Confidence before God gives us the blessing of answered prayer (1 John 3:22-23) -

“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.” John makes a staggering claim (3:22), “and whatever we ask we receive from Him...” John was not coming up with a new doctrine of prayer here. As in so much of First John, the apostle is reflecting the words of Jesus in the Upper Room, where He told the apostles (John 14:13-14), “Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.” (He repeats the same promise in John 15:7, 16, and 16:23-24.)

To be honest, I do not completely understand or experience these promises to answer *all* of our prayers. I realize that there are conditions attached to the promises.

- The Bible never teaches that we can pray for selfish wishes and they will be granted in Aladdin’s genie fashion.
- To pray in Jesus’ name is to pray in accord with His will. As in the Lord’s prayer, we are praying (Matt. 6:10), “Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”
- Furthermore, John adds (1 John 3:22) that the reason we receive whatever we ask is, “because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.”
- God does not answer the prayers of the disobedient.
- To do what is pleasing in God’s sight refers to living with a God-ward focus, seeking to please Him beginning on the heart (or thought) level (1 Thess. 2:4).

In verse 23, John sums up God’s commandments in one command with two prongs, “that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us.” The verb tense of “believe” points to the act of faith at salvation, whereas the tense of “love” indicates ongoing love for one another.

This is similar to Paul’s words in Galatians 5:6, “For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.”

- When we trust in Christ and walk in love, He promises to answer our prayers.

- Also, we need to understand that God does not answer our prayers in our way or in our timing.
- To teach us in His school of faith, He sometimes makes us wait on Him for years.
- Sometimes He answers by giving us what we really need, which isn't always exactly what we were asking for!
- Where I struggle with these promises (I'm being very candid here), is when I ask for something that is for God's glory and according to His revealed will, but He doesn't answer.
- I have prayed for the salvation of people who have died without being saved.
- I have prayed for the restoration of Christian marriages that have ended in divorce anyway.
- I have prayed for the repentance of sinning Christians who did not repent.
- My only answer to these difficulties is that I do not understand the mysteries of God's ways, and so I do not always pray correctly.

When Jesus predicted Peter's denials, He said, *"I have prayed for you, that your faith would not fail"* (Luke 22:32). I probably would have prayed that Peter would not have sinned at all, but Jesus didn't pray that. Concerning Jesus' prayers, Martyn Lloyd-Jones observes (*Children of God* [Crossway], p. 131), *"God answered Him and granted His requests, and the nearer we approximate to Him, in the same way we can be certain that our requests will be granted."* So as we grow to "do the things pleasing in His sight," we will see more and more of our prayers answered.

(2) Confidence before God gives us the blessing of the abiding relationship through the Spirit (3:24) - *"²⁴ Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us."*

John has already spoken about our abiding in Christ, but this is the first time he has mentioned God's abiding in us, which Jesus taught also (John 15:4). As in John 15:10, so in our text, obedience is the condition of the abiding relationship. As we walk in obedience to the Lord Jesus, we enjoy close fellowship with Him and He with us. His life flows through us, producing fruit that pleases Him.

John adds in 1 John 3:24b that the way we know that He abides in us is *"by the Spirit whom He has given us."* Although John has already referred to "the anointing" that abides in us (1 John 2:27), this is his first explicit mention of the Holy Spirit. This serves to introduce the next section, with its emphasis on discerning God's Spirit from evil spirits. At first glance, it may seem that John is referring to an inner, subjective sense of the Spirit's presence in our lives. But, John Stott argues that this is not so. Rather, John is saying that the Spirit's presence in our lives is manifested objectively in our life and conduct. Stott writes (*The Epistles of John* [Eerdmans], p. 151), *"So if we would assure our hearts, when they accuse and condemn us, we must look for evidence of the Spirit's"*

working, and particularly whether He is enabling us to believe in Christ, to obey God's commandments and to love the brethren; for the condition of abiding is this comprehensive obedience (24a), and the evidence of abiding is the gift of the Spirit (24b)." Thus John comes back full circle to knowledge as the basis for assurance.

CONCLUSION

The first anchor for assurance is always faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. If your trust is in Christ, God has promised you eternal life and He has promised never to allow you to be snatched out of His hand (John 3:16; 10:28-30).

A man once told D. L. Moody that he was worried because he didn't feel saved. Moody asked, "Was Noah safe in the ark?" "Certainly he was," the man replied. "Well, what made him safe, his feeling or the ark?" The point is, if you're in Christ, it's not your feelings that save you from God's judgment. It's Christ who saves! Faith puts you on the ark! Make sure you're on board!

But, the problem was that the false teachers claimed to believe in Jesus, but their claim was just empty words. By their deeds, they denied Christ. So, throughout First John, the apostle gives these tests of authentic faith. Do you obey God's commandments? Do you love the brethren? Do you believe in the name of God's Son, Jesus Christ, including His sacrificial death for you?

You may think, "Yes, but I don't do those things perfectly. I often fall short." It's to you that John writes these verses. Do you see evidence of God's working in your life through your loving others? Do you see answers to your prayers? Do you enjoy fellowship with Christ as you live to please Him? If so, know that God is greater than your heart. He wants you to be confident in His love. He wants to assure you that you are His child.

According to the Bible, assurance of salvation rests on four unshakable pillars. The truth is, we can be sure about where we will spend eternity. We can know with certainty that when we die, we will go to heaven. But how can we be sure? Many people struggle with the certainty of their salvation, especially new believers.

How can we know where we stand with God? The Bible teaches that the assurance of salvation rests securely upon four unshakable pillars...

4 Unshakable Pillars of Assurance of Salvation:

(1) Pillar 1: God Cannot Lie - First, assurance is based on the absolute trustworthiness of Scripture. Throughout the New Testament, we read God's promises to save all who will believe upon His Son. The Bible says, "*Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.*" (Romans 10:13) This is a promise! All who have committed their lives to

Jesus Christ may have the firm confidence of salvation based upon the infallibility of God's Word. Jesus said, *"The one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out."* If you come to Jesus with genuine repentance and faith, He promises that He will save you. We can know Jesus has received us because, quite simply, He said so! When the Bible speaks, God speaks. And what God said, He will surely do. He will save all who call upon Jesus Christ. You have His word on it.

- (2) **Pillar 2: Jesus Paid It All** - Second, assurance rests on the finished work of Jesus Christ. When Jesus died on the cross, He bore our iniquities, enduring God's wrath, and cried out, *"It is finished!"* By this, He meant that the full atonement for all our sins-past, present and future-has been made. His work of redemption now completed, our entire sin debt is paid in full. Just as salvation comes from believing in Christ alone, so does assurance. As we trust in Christ's perfect sacrifice for our sins, the certainty of eternal life floods our hearts. No matter how great your sin, God's grace is greater still. The Bible says, *"Come now, and let us reason together. ... Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool."*
- (3) **Pillar 3: The Great Convincer** - Third, assurance comes through the inward witness of the Holy Spirit. A divinely produced gift, assurance is bestowed by God's Spirit to all true believers. It is the Holy Spirit's ministry to convince our hearts of our salvation. In actuality, no preacher, evangelist, parent or friend can give us assurance. Neither can we work it up within ourselves. Only the Holy Spirit Himself can give us the absolute certainty of our eternal salvation. The Bible says, *"We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He has given us."* ... *"By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit."*... *"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God."* This means, the Holy Spirit who convicted, called and converted us also convinces us that we belong to Christ. It is the Spirit's inward witness that persuades us of the genuineness of our salvation.
- (4) **Pillar 4: New Life in Christ** - Fourth, assurance comes through the evidence of a changed life. Ultimately, assurance is confirmed within us as we see God conforming us into the image of Jesus Christ. All who have been born again will see clear evidences of a new life in Christ. While we will never become perfect in this life, we will, nevertheless, experience a changed life. It is this inward transformation that provides strong confirmation of our salvation. The book of First John details what are the vital signs of our new life in Christ. The Apostle John writes, *"We know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments."* In other words, we may be certain that we know Christ as we see within us a desired and willing obedience to God's Word. Likewise, John writes, other vital signs will follow: Love for other people, love for God, refusing the world, understanding biblical truth, righteous behavior, opposition from the world and answered prayer. As we see this spiritual fruit produced in our lives, we may be confident that Christ lives within us.