

ASSURED HEARTS BEFORE GOD AND PROMISED BLESSINGS
IJNO.3:19-24
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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The confidence that we as professed believers have that we have passed from death unto life, the blessedness and reassurance of knowing that we are reconciled to God, and are in a gracious standing with him, is not only desirable, it is even necessary, if we are to live before God free from fret and worry of a continual uncertainty.
2. It is not “a point we should long to know”; it ought not to “cost us continuous anxious thought.”
3. It should be a settled thing; the evidence of it should be clear and sufficient. It should keep on being a settled thing, for the evidence should be maintained, and should be effectively persuasive upon us day by day.
4. And it must be fully understood that assurance is attainable. And John delivers us from any mistaken idea we might have when he, in our text, sets before us the true grounds or basis upon which our hearts may be assured, reassured, and or persuaded, before God, and have confidence toward God.
5. There is no need for us to wonder and even express doubt about our present salvation and hope of future salvation as some professed Christians do when asked, “Are you saved?” by saying, “I don’t know; I hope so!”
6. Compare Paul’s confident statement in 2Tim.4:6-8.
7. Surely with Paul’s statement properly understood and 1Jno.3:19-24 believed and practiced, we, too, can live in hope with assured hearts before God, and with confidence toward God. Cf. 1Jno.2:28.
8. Now let us examine the text of 1Jno.3:19-24, which tells us about assured hearts before God and promised blessings, which we have chosen as our topic.
9. Here John goes back or goes on to speak of the two things which are well-pleasing in God’s sight – the two commandments and the obedience to which our approved, acceptable relationship to God depends (1) we must believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and (2) love one another, V.23.

II. DISCUSSION

A. 1ST, THE BASIS ON WHICH OUR HEARTS ARE ASSURED (REASSURED) BEFORE GOD, AND THUS HAVE CONFIDENCE TOWARD GOD, Vv.19-21.

1. V.19: “And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.”
 - a. “Hereby” – by this behavior – refers to what precedes, not to what follows; i.e., by what has just been said, we are enabled to know that we are of the truth, and have the means by which to assure (reassure) our hearts before God. Cf. Vv.14,16-18.
 - b. If our love of the brethren is not merely in word or in tongue, but truly in deed and truth, in this we shall know (come to possess, have the knowledge) that we are of the truth.
 - (1) Knowledge of our own spiritual condition and consequent assurance before God is the result.
 - (2) Not a reference to a smug self-righteous, but to a calm inner confidence which John calls boldness. See V.21.
 - c. “Of the truth” is, in significance, the equivalent of the phrase, “of God,” so often occurring in the Epistle.
 - d. Possessed of, having this knowledge, we “shall assure (reassure, persuade, placate, convince, still or quiet any fears of) our hearts before him.
 - e. This love is the evidence, the proof, of being (standing) begotten of God; the evidence that we are of the truth; that we are of God.
 - f. The order of the original is “And before Him we shall assure our hearts.”
 - (1) “Before Him” is put first for emphasis, and thus stresses the fact that it is in God’s presence that the experience is enjoyed, a circumstance impossible for the one who refuses to exercise love and compassion toward a brother.
 - g. The heart here stands, not for the seat of affection, but for the conscience, as in Ac.2:37.
 - h. This is the blessed result of true brotherly love; it is “blessed assurance.”
2. V.20: “For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.”
 - a. First, the simple truth taught in this verse as I understand it.

- (1) Macknight On The Epistles: “But if our conscience condemneth us as deficient in love to our needy brethren, certainly God, who is a more perfect and impartial judge than our conscience, and knoweth all our actions, will much more condemn us.”
 - (2) E. M. Zerr, Comm.: “If we fail to do our known duty, we will have ‘a guilty conscience’ and be self-condemned. If our own knowledge of neglect causes us to feel condemned, we may be sure that God will condemn us also because he knows our hearts.”
 - (3) While our conscience sits in judgment on us condemning us when we fail to do what we believe to be right or do that which we believe to be wrong; God, even more so is in a position to properly and rightly judge us. He knows all things, even our hearts; he can’t be deceived; “Your sins will find you out,” Num.32:23; Gal.6:7,8; Psa.139:1-12.
- b. 2nd, a very common and popular, but, in my opinion, a very false explanation of V.20, both by our brethren and by others.
- (1) Guy N. Woods: “If, in spite of the assurances provided, we yet suffer the uneasiness which springs from our own imperfections, let us remember that God is greater than our heart; he knows all things; and he will deal with us, not according to our conscience, but in harmony with the eternal and unchangeable principles of right. Knowing all things, he knows us better than we know ourselves, and he will deal with us accordingly. Let us then not be disturbed by the promptings of conscience, but conform, as far as possible, to the standard of right, with the assurance that he will approve our course at the last day.” (emphasis mine, ejd)
 - (2) Strange that Woods goes on to make the following comment on V.21: “If, in addition to the assurance we have from God that we are approved of him, we thus experience even greater confidence of the fellowship that is ours.”
 - (3) Gill, Bible Study Text Book, College Press: “No child of God has any right to a guilt complex. Even though he may hold in the recesses of his heart the remembrance of the

most heinous sin, one begotten of Him need not live in constant horror of death or terror of facing God.

“Even if our heart knows something real and terrible against us, God is greater than our hearts, God knows both the deed and the reason. He does not make excuses for our guilt, and neither should we. But he does make propitiation for our guilt in the blood of Christ, and we cannot but accept it. No matter how terrible the sin nor how far reaching the hurt, when it is given over to God to be washed away by the blood of Calvary, we have no right to hold it any longer as our own.

“...one of the greatest blessings of the Christians life is realized forgiveness. In V.20, we have come face to face with the reason this is so.” (though much of way he say here is so, if not all of it; this is not what V.20 has reference to! Ejd)

- (4) Vine, Comm.: “That is to say, if we have something upon our conscience by which we are self-condemned, such as failure to exercise love, ‘God is greater than our heart and knows all things,’ and the Apostle has already shown how, through the efficacy of the blood of Christ, we may be cleansed from our sin and enjoy fellowship with God (1:7,9; 2:1)” (While this is true, this is not what John has reference to in V.20, ejd) ... whether we are conscious of failure or not, God is greater than our heart and knows all things. This should lead us to remember that, even if we have a conscience void of offence, there may be something which God knows, and, on the other hand, if there is something upon our conscience, it can be put right before Him who knows about us. The great thing is to be happy in God’s presence... That God is great than our heart probably means that He is greater in the matter of judgment, and that He knows the character of our sin absolutely. It may mean also that He is greater in the matter of compassion, and so we have the assurance that we are in the hands of One who deals with man in compassion as well as in His absolute knowledge.” (emphasis mine, ejd)
- (5) In reality, all of these men are actually saying: In spite of all the assurance we have, we can never be quiet sure, or

be free of fret or worry; that always we still have a lack of confidence or assurance before God; for, in reality, we are never really completely free of the guilt of sin. But, “If one is in Christ and his general life is one of godliness and whose motive principle is the light of the N.T., he is walking in the light. Thus, the blood of Christ is present to cleanse away the mistakes and incidental sins he commits. Hence, if this man is a worker in the Lord’s vineyard and his life as a whole is one of obedience to the law of Christ, he does not need to worry about the mistakes he might make, or thinks he might have made, which he does not realize; for the blood of Christ will take care of it and wash them away.

(6) Some even use 2Tim.1:18 to try to justify mercy or forgiveness of sins being extended to us in the day of judgment.

(a) But “mercy” here refers to eternal reward at that day, not to forgiveness of sins at that time. Cf. Jude 21; Tit.1:2.

(b) There is no catholic doctrine taught here! No kind of 2nd, chance doctrine taught here or elsewhere in the N.T.!

3. V.21: “Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.”
- a. Macknight On The Epistles: “*Beloved*, to shew you what an excellent virtue benevolence is, I tell you a second time, (v.19) that *if our conscience doth not condemn us*, as deficient in love to our needy brethren, *we have confidence with God*, that we have so far performed our duty to them.”
 - b. Our works do not *justify* us; but they are witnesses that we are really in communion with Him who justifies; they seal our faith with the signet of sincerity. Thus they become for us a subject of confidence toward God.
 - c. That is, we are able to look up to God in freedom from dismay and terror, enjoying the consciousness of His approval, and that fellowship with Him which brings His peace and power into our lives.
 - d. For “boldness” see 1Jno.2:28. With the expression “toward God” Cf. Ac.24:16.

- e. Boldness towards God is the effect of the assurance of heart mentioned in V.19. On the other hand, the effect of the boldness itself is given in V.22.
- 4. For emphasis, take note that Vv.19-21 deal with the judicial function of the conscience, revealing the fact:
 - a. In V.19, that conscience exercises a judicial function in man.
 - b. In V.20, that when, in the exercise of its judicial function, conscience condemns us, much more are we condemned by the Holy, Omniscient God.
 - c. In V.21, that when, in the exercise of its judicial function, conscience does not condemn us, we regard God with inspiring confidence or boldness.

B. 2ND, THE BASIS UPON WHICH, WITH CONFIDENCE, WE KNOW WE CAN ASK AND RECEIVE OF GOD WHATSOEVER WE ASK, V.22.

- 1. Here is further proof that the assurance mentioned in Vv.19,21, and the basis upon which we may have this confidence or boldness before God and toward God, is well grounded.
- 2. The promise of V.22 is, of course, conditional: We may receive whatsoever we ask of God if or “because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.”
- 3. The promise of the passage is, of course, to be understood within the limitations of his promise regarding prayer elsewhere set forth. Cf. Jas.1:5-8; Jno.15:7; 14:13; Jas.1:25; Psa.66:18; Prov.28:9; Jno.9:31; Jas.4:2,3.
- 4. The verbs of the passage “ask,” “receive,” “keep,” “do,” are all in the present tense and emphasize continuous action:
 - a. Whatever we keep on asking.
 - b. We keep on receiving.
 - c. Because we keep on keeping (doing) his commandments.
 - d. And habitually practice the things that are pleasing in his sight.
- 5. Doing the things that are pleasing in his sight is more than keeping his commandment. The latter is included in the former.
 - a. The practice of God’s will is a higher standard than mere obedience to precepts.
 - b. The believer must always seek to do that in which God delights as well as to overtly obey His commands.

- c. The believer's obedience must be from the heart – a loving obedience – not merely a matter of subjection because commanded.
 - d. For obedience to his commands may be a matter merely of subjection without the heart being in it; while doing things that are pleasing to God is a matter of love. Cf. Jno.8:29; Mt.15:7,8; Col.3:22,23.
6. Where there is justified boldness or confidence toward God, there is, therefore, assurance in approaching him in petitionary prayer.
- a. Confidence in salvation, being of the truth, being of God, must precede justified confidence in prayer.
 - b. Such assurance must come before assurance that God hears and answers prayer. Cf. Jno.9:31; 1Pet.3:21.

C. 3RD, TWO SPECIFIC COMMANDMENTS, OR TWO PARTS OF ONE SPECIFIC COMMANDMENT, OF GOD TO WHICH JOHN REFERS, WHICH WE MUST KEEP IF WE EXPECT TO RECEIVE WHATSOEVER WE ASK OF HIM, V.23.

1. 1st part, "That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ," V.23a.
- a. Once again we are reminded of the antichrists who denied that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. As a result:
 - (1) They had gone out from the believers, 1Jno.2:18,19.
 - (2) They were branded as liars, 1Jno.2:22.
 - (3) They had not the Father, 1Jno.2:23.
 - (4) They were branded as seducers, 1Jno.2:26.
 - (5) They were branded as false prophets who were not of God, 1Jno.4:1-3.
 - (6) Their prayers could not be heard and answered, 1Jno.3:22,23.
 - (7) They did not dwell in God, nor God in them, 1Jno.3:24; 4:14,15.
 - (8) They did not stand born of God, 1Jno.5:1.
 - (9) They have not and cannot overcome the world, 1Jno.5:4,5.
 - (10) They can have no justified hope of eternal life, 1Jno.2:22-25; 5:11-13.
 - (11) They have made a liar out of God, 1Jno.5:10-12.
 - b. The name of Christ here is put for him and for all for which he stands; to believe in his name is to accept him for what he is and

all that he does; it does not mean simply the name by which he is called; it means the whole nature and character and majesty and authority of him.

- c. He who truly, sincerely believes in his name obeys him; he expresses that faith in obedience to him. Cf. Lk.6:46; Mt.16:24,25; Mt.7:21-23.
2. 2nd part, “And love one another, as he gave us commandment,” V.23a.
 - a. Faith in Jesus as the Son of God and brotherly love go hand-in-hand; they fit together like hand and glove; the latter grows out of the former.
 - b. Note the emphasis and importance that Jesus placed on brotherly love in Jno.13:34,35.
 - (1) We must love the brethren with the same selfless, sacrificial, forgiving love with which Jesus loved us. Cf. Eph.5:1,2.
 - (2) Brotherly love is the badge of discipleship.
 - c. Note the emphasis and importance John places on brotherly love, 1Jno.2:9-11; 3:10,14,16,17; 4:7,11,12,20,21; 5:1.
 3. Putting these two parts together, we find the great truth in Christianity, or a great principle often emphasized in the N.T.: that the life of the Christian depends on right belief and right conduct combined.
 - a. We can't have one without the other.
 - b. It is impossible to separate faith and practice, or dogma and duty, or faith and the obedience of faith, and still have a saving faith.
 - c. Faith is the ground not only of brotherly love, but of all obedience; it is that which leads to and produces it.
 - d. And obedience is that which perfects and validates faith. Cf. Jas.2:20.

D. 4TH , THE BASIS UPON WHICH WE DWELL IN GODD AND GOD IN US, AND THE MEANS BY WHICH WE KNOW HE ABIDES IN US, V. 24.

1. “And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him,” V.24a.
 - a. Obedience to God as summed up in believing on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and loving one's brother in Christ (V.23) is the basis of continued fellowship with God. Cf. 1Jno.1:3.

- b. God's dwelling in us and our dwelling in him, or continuing to enjoy fellowship with God, and living a righteous life are inseparable. Cf. 1Jno.1:6.
 - c. "He that keepeth" describes what is to be the characteristic habit of the believer; he that keeps on keeping his commandments. Cf. Jno.14:23; Jno.15:4-8; 17:20,21,23,26.
 - d. Here, obedience to his commandments is not simply the cause or the condition, but the ***proof*** or the ***evidence*** that the ones keeping his commandments are dwelling in Him, and He is dwelling in them. Cf. Jno.6:56.
 - e. Where there is habitual obedience to his commandments, there is a living, abiding, spiritual union between that soul and God.
2. "And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us, V.24b.
- a. This is the first actual mention of the Holy Spirit in the Epistle, though the "unction from the Holy One," and "the anointing which ye have received" mentioned in 1Jno.2:20,27 were references to his Person and work in believers by means of miraculous spiritual gifts.
 - b. This part of V.24 declares three things:
 - (1) God abides in us.
 - (2) We have actual knowledge of his abiding presence.
 - (3) We possess this knowledge by means of the Spirit which God has given us.
 - c. This verse does not reveal to us the manner of the entrance nor the mode of the Spirit's dwelling, but the ***fact*** of it being given to us whereby we know that God abides in us.
 - d. The assertion that the Spirit dwells in the faithful child of God does not justify the assumption that his indwelling is personal, immediate, direct, separate and apart from the word of God any more than the assertion that both the Father and the Son dwells in us and that we dwell in them justifies such a conclusion.
Example:
 - (1) Both the Father and Son are said to come unto and make their abode with him that loves the Lord and keeps his words, Jno.14:23; Cf. 1Jno.3:24.
 - (a) Personal indwelling?
 - (b) Immediate indwelling?
 - (c) Direct indwelling?

- (2) 2Cor.6:16, "As God has said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them."
 - (a) Personal indwelling?
 - (b) Immediate indwelling, apart from the word?
 - (c) Direct indwelling?
 - (3) "That Christ may dwell in your hearts," Eph.3:17; Cf. Col.1:27.
 - (a) Personal indwelling?
 - (b) Immediate, through no medium? Direct?
 - (c) How? "By faith." Cf. Rom.10:17; How was the word received? Rom.10:9-18; Jno.14,15,16; 17:20,21; Ac.1;2; Eph.3; Gal.1.
 - (4) Saints are said to be "in Christ," Phil.1:1; Col.1:2. How?
 - (5) God dwells in us, and we dwell in him, 1jn.3:24; 4:12,13,15,16. Again, how?
 - (6) From these, are we justified in inferring that God, in some mysterious, incomprehensible, direct way, has, in his own person, taken up his abode in us, or that we in the same kind of way have taken up our abode in him and his Son?
 - (7) Why, then, should we fall into similar error with reference to the Holy Spirit, the 3rd Person of the Godhead?
 - (8) Furthermore, if we have either one of the Persons of the Godhead personally indwelling us, then we are inspired! Which, of course, is not and cannot be the case!
- e. How, then, does the Holy Spirit indwell us by which we know that God abides in us when we keep his commandments? The answer is three-fold in nature from Pentecost to the present for you and me. The 1st two applied to those of N.T. days, the 3rd applies to us today.
- (1) Through the spoken word of God personally preached by the Holy Spirit inspired and Spirit-guided apostles fulfilling their mission as Christ's sent ones, Jno.14:26; 15:26,27; 16:7,13-15; 17:8,18,20,21;20:19-23; Mt.28:18-20; Mk.16:14-19; Lk.24:45-49; Ac.1:1-8; 2:1-4; 1Jno.1:1-3; See Mt.16:16-19; 18:18; 2Cor.5:17-20.
 - (2) Through miraculous spiritual gifts given to believers in the early church through the laying on of the apostles' hands prior to the complete and fully written revelation of the word of God to be used by them in the application of the word, and to expose false teachers, when an apostle of

Christ was not present, 1Cor.12,13,14; 1Jno.2:20,27; 1Jno.4:1; See Ac.8:18; 19:5,6; Rom.1:11; 2Tim.1:6. Also, see 1Cor.13:8-10.

- (3) Now it is through faith in and obedience to the word of God revealed through and written in the N.T. by the Spirit-filled and Spirit-guided apostles of Jesus Christ, the only motivating force in immediate contact with the individual believer, Eph.3:1-11; 5:17; 1Jno.1:1-4; 2:1-3.
 - (a) Cf. Jno.8:31,32; Col.3:16; Psa.19:11; Ac.11:14; Heb.4:12.
 - (b) This is true because:
 - (1) The apostles of Christ no longer live in person to continue their personal work here on earth.
 - (2) Spiritual gifts have ceased to be given or to function, having served their purpose and their time, 1Cor.13:8-10.
- f. This fruitful indwelling of the Holy Spirit is the seal of God's life in the soul of the believer.

III. CONCLUSION

- 1. Once again it's evident that John is still emphasizing the absolute necessity of two specific things if we are to know that we stand begotten or born of God as his children; that we are of the truth; and in order to know that he abides in us and we abide in him.
 - a. That we believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.
 - (1) This, of course, the lying antichrists denied – refused to obey!
 - b. That we practice brotherly love, in order to abide in the light, without which we are in darkness and are walking in darkness where there is no fellowship with either the Father or the Son.
- 2. Remember:
 - a. If one does not believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God:
 - (1) He shall die in his sins.
 - (2) He hath not the Father; he is not of God.
 - (3) He hath not life now; and hath no promise of eternal life.
 - b. If one does not practice brotherly love:
 - (1) The love of God does not abide in him.
 - (2) He abideth in death.

- (3) He is not of God.
 - (4) He is not of the truth, and no genuine heart assurance or reassurance before God, or no genuine confidence before God.
 - c. If we don't obey these two commands of God, we cannot receive what we ask of God. Furthermore, we do not dwell in him, nor he in us!
 - d. Brotherly love in its beneficial results:
 - (1) Assurance of conscience before God, or the bliss of a heart that does that does not condemn, Vv.19,21.
 - (2) The privilege of being heard when we pray because we are keeping and doing that which is pleasing in God's sight, Vv.22,23.
 - (3) The privilege of communion with God – thus dwelling in him and he in us – the key not of the Epistle, V.24.
 - e. Remember also that practicing genuine brotherly love in deed and in truth is a form of doing righteousness which identifies us with being or standing begotten of God.
- 3. Assured hearts before God and promised blessings rests, not solely upon the grace of God, but also upon our faith in Jesus as God's Son and obedience to his commands, including brotherly love, which is a form of doing righteousness and therefore being righteous, 1Jno.3:7.