LOVE ONE ANOTHER, Pt. 3
1 JOHN 3:19-24

Many people struggle with the question of whether or not one is saved. John Piper gets to the central issue about assurance when he writes:

The most agonizing problem about the assurance of salvation is not the problem of whether the objective facts of Christianity are true (God exists, Christ is God, Christ died for sinners, Christ rose from the dead, Christ saves forever all who believe, etc.). Those facts are the utterly crucial bedrock of our faith. But the really agonizing problem of assurance is whether I personally am saved by those facts. [“The Agonizing Problem of the Assurance of Salvation”]

It is this topic of assurance that John addresses repeatedly in the book of 1 John. He is writing to assure those who have been saved about the security of their salvation and he is writing to confront those who claim Christ and still joyfully engage in lifestyles of sin that they do not have fellowship with God or Christ.

John provides assurance for those who are doubting and wavering throughout the book, and we find one of those sections in the passage before us today. In the last half of chapter three, John has been teaching and explaining the implications of the simple declaration, “love one another” (v. 11b). And in verses 19ff, he draws those implications to a close by affirming assurance for those who love. His point is that —

A N E S S E N T I A L E V I D E N C E O F O U R L I F E I N C H R I S T IS O U R L O V E F O R O N E A N O T H E R.

As a reminder, in chapter three John made six assertions about love in the body of Christ (vv. 11-15). And then he followed that with an example of Biblical love and an application for how to love biblically (vv. 16-18). And then finally he ties all this to assurance of the believer’s salvation (vv. 19-24), which he does by answering three unstated questions that might arise in the believer’s mind:

1. **How Do We Know We Are Saved and Have Assurance?** (v. 19)
2. **How Do We Deal with Our Condemning Hearts?** (vv. 20-21)
3. **What Does God Promise to Those Who Believe?** (vv. 22-24)
   - He promises to answer our REQUESTS (v. 22)
   - He promises to COMMAND (v. 23)
   - He promises to REMAIN (v. 24a)
   - He promises His SPIRIT (v. 24b)
1. How Do We Know We Are Saved and Have Assurance? (v. 19)

- Notice how John begins verse 19 — we will know… That is, all believers — John included — can have a certain and sure knowledge about their relationship to the truth (i.e., that the individual is rightly connected to the true God through a true salvation).
  ✓ It is encouraging to see that John includes himself in this discussion; he can have assurance and so can the doubting readers in Asia Minor. All believers can have this same knowledge.
  ✓ In fact, John says, we will know — that is there is a certainty to what John says. The believer doesn’t have to be confused or wonder; he can and will know. In fact, the way John constructs this word, it might be translated, “we will know ourselves…” That is, it will be self-evident within the believers — their actions will make them to know the reality of their faith.
  ✓ John uses two different words that mean and are translated know in this letter (they’re probably used synonymously). By know he doesn’t mean, “you will comprehend in your mind but never grasp in your heart and emotions that you are in the true faith.” No, he means, “you will with certainty experience the assurance of your faith. We will know.
  ✓ What will these believers know? They will know they are of the truth. John uses similar language in 2:21-22 to indicate who is related to God and who is related to Satan. Jesus said He testified to the truth and that those who were connected to that truth obey Him (Jn. 18:37). So here, John means that he and his readers will know that they are identified with the true message of God — they are in a saving relationship and fellowship with God because of Christ.
  ✓ And then John also says, we will assure our heart before Him. The word assure means to be convinced or persuaded. So the believer in Christ will come to a confidence in his heart (conscience) that he has been acquitted of his sins. He is safely in God’s family — and confident of that fact.

- Now how is it that we will come to know this assurance? John says, by this. By what? By what he has said, or by what he is about to say? Grammatically, it could be either, but it seems clear that John is looking backwards, saying, “when you love one another with deeds and truthfully (v. 18), you will know that you are living in the truth of the gospel (and are genuinely saved by Christ).
  ✓ Too many people who have been saved by Christ lack confidence in that salvation.
  ✓ Too many people who have been saved have a false confidence that they have been saved.
  ✓ John is saying that there is a clear way to know whether or not one has been saved: do you genuinely love the people of God and demonstrate that love in what you do for them (vv. 17-18)?
Do you wonder whether you have been saved?

➢ What do you think about God’s people? Do you love His people? Do you love to be with them in worship and other times? Do you intentionally and joyfully sacrifice for them? (Do you see God’s provision for you as a means for you to bless others?) These are signs that God has changed your heart and converted you, transforming you from a natural man to a spiritual man. Cf. Jn. 13:34-35; 15:10, 12, 14. Love for other believers serves as a testimony to unbelievers and assurance for believers.

➢ Or do you like to avoid His people? Are you rarely in worship and look for opportunities to get out of worship? (People who claim to be believers and participate in worship once every two years have reason to question their salvation.) Do you believe God has given you much so you can hoard it and then expend it on your own selfish desires? These are signs that God has not changed your heart — it is still a natural (ungodly) heart and is giving evidence of the natural (unregenerate) man.

How do you know if you’ve been saved? Do you truly love God’s people in what you do? [Aside: it’s with good reason that John says, “when one truly loves with actions (v. 18)…then he knows he is in the truth (v. 19). True faith is reflected in true actions.]

• How do you know that you have been saved? Someone knows he is saved by Christ when he loves Christ’s people with Christ’s love. There is a second question, and it relates to a failure to always love others perfectly —

2. How Do We Deal with Our CONDEMNING Hearts? (vv. 20-21)

• John affirms in verse 20 that there are circumstances in which our hearts condemn us.

✓ By this he affirms that as we look at our lives we are rightly convinced that we have failed to love as we could and should. Our conscience has a charge against us and convicts us of our guilt. This is an affirmation that every believer — our, including John — is guilty of not loving.

✓ There is no excuse. We had an opportunity to love and we didn’t. How many times have I looked back at my day or week and said, “I could have called _____ or encouraged _____ or helped my daughters or prayed with and for _____ and I didn’t…” I had an opportunity to love and I didn’t do it. I have recognized a need to do this more effectively so I’ve made a “people to contact” list on my calendar — and too often (even when someone has been on my list) still haven’t contacted those people in a timely or loving manner. It takes work and we will fail.
• But notice the connection between this phrase and the previous verse — even when condemned by his conscience, one can still be sure that he is of the truth and saved. How can John say that?
  ✓ Because God is greater than our heart. Yes, our heart and conscience rightly condemn us, but that is not beyond the power and authority of God to forgive and redeem. God’s grace and comfort in salvation are greater than our self-condemnation.
    ➢ Every time the believer fails to love, he can go to God in confession (remember 1:9?) and be sure that God will righteously forgive him. His salvation is not lost; but his sin is forgiven and he is cleansed. Our sin as believers is not greater than God’s power to forgive.
    ➢ The believer who fails to love (all of us!) needs to look outward and upward to God for comfort, not inward in self-justification. If we attempt to justify ourselves, we will always wrestle with guilt and doubt; if we always take our sin in confession to the Lord, we will always have forgiveness and can have the assurance John speaks of in v. 19.
  ✓ And John can also say that even when condemned by our conscience we are saved because God knows all things. He does indeed know all things — nothing escapes His notice (Ps. 139:1ff).
    ➢ Some might view this as only further judgment and condemnation and hopelessness.
    ➢ But John makes this statement in an attempt to comfort his readers.
    ➢ God knows every secret in our hearts. He knows our failures and every misstep. But He understands our motives, desires, and inner yearnings of our hearts. And as one writer says, “He remembers His saving intentions and purposes for each of us.”
    ➢ When you read God knows all things — that means that He knows all of your sins; but it also means that He knows all your desires and intentions to live righteously for Him (even when they are flawed and imperfect). And even more, He knows that the righteousness of Christ has been imputed to you and that is the only basis of your good standing with Him.
    ➢ Even when our conscience rightly condemns us, we can be assured of our salvation because our obedience is never the cause of our salvation. Obedience is the result of our salvation and it serves to affirm what God has done, but because our obedience can never be perfect (Mt. 6:48), our obedience cannot ever be the basis of our salvation. The cause of our obedience is Christ’s work on the cross. Alone.

• Verse 21 addresses a contrary situation — there are times when our heart does not condemn us. That is, there are circumstances when a believer can rightly examine his life and heart and say, “I am not under condemnation and judgment…” On what basis can he say that?
  ✓ Notice that John begins this verse by addressing the believers as beloved. There is a hint for why they are not condemned. Certainly they are loved by John. But why does John love them? John loves them because both John and they are first loved by God (4:19) and because both John and they are brothers in Christ. In other words, there is no condemnation because of Christ’s love.
But John also gives another reason why they are not condemned: when he says, *if our heart does not condemn us…* he is using the present tense — right now, presently, we do not have condemnation from our hearts. Our consciences are clean. And the sense of the negative is, “our hearts have stopped condemning us.” That is, we did have inward condemnation, but it is no more. It’s gone. It’s been removed. Why has it been removed? Forgiveness (1:9). The believer does not claim sinlessness, but he does claim fellowship because of Christ (Rom. 7:25 – 8:2).

In fact, John says he is **confident** before God. Cf. 2:28; 4:17. “The person who has been cleansed from sin and continues in love… has freedom of speech w. his Master who rules the whole world. [LEGNT] Cf. also Eph. 3:12; Heb. 4:16; 10:19.

Don’t miss John’s message — even when the believer sins, he can be confident before the Lord that God has redeemed him.

The believer has assurance because he is resting confidently in the truth that the death and righteousness of Christ are sufficient to keep him in his salvation whenever and as often as he sins.

Let me also remind you of four cautions:

1. These are not means to **become** saved. This is what happens in someone who is saved. This is what God will do in a saved person, so it is clear that person is saved.

2. This is not permission to sin. The believer hates sin and does not want it, though he will still sin (1:6 – 2:1; Rom. 6:1ff).

3. Beware of hearing the wrong thing in these verses. John is writing to encourage people who had been upset with doubts because of heretical teaching. The heretics didn’t care about sin (and one of their sins was that they hated people in the church) and still claimed assurance in their salvation; John was writing to confront them with their error.

   ➢ But even more, the false teachers had upset some who were genuinely saved making them think they were not saved. They hear “love one another” and all they see is the imperfections of that love and not the progress and change and growth in that love. John is writing to affirm to them that they really (truly) **are** in the faith.

   ➢ Here’s a principle to remember: in general, those who are concerned about the presence of sin in their lives and hate their repeated sins, really are saved; and those who are apathetic about their ongoing sins and even enjoy indulging them, are not saved. So if you are wrestling w/ sin, fighting against it and hate it, take comfort that this is one of the great marks of salvation.

4. Don’t hear this exhortation as, “I must always love everyone fully and perfectly or I’m not saved.” You will fail to love — sometimes catastrophically. But look at the trajectory of your life. Are there signs of growth, change, and progress that can be attributed only to Christ? And when you fail, do you confess and seek reconciliation? If so, then though you are imperfect, there are indicators that Christ and His Spirit are at work within you.

The believer can not only have confidence in the presence of God, but he has even more…

- God promises to answer our REQUESTS (v. 22)
  - The certainty of God’s response to the requests of His children is emphasized by the structure of this sentence — **whatever we ask we receive from Him**. God will not hear the prayers of the unbeliever or the person out of fellowship with Him (Ps. 66:18), but for the believer, He is a prayer hearing and prayer answering God (5:14-15). We can also be confident of this.
  - Why does God answer the requests of the believer? Because He is a loving Father. And because the believer is obedient to Him — **keeping the commandments and doing the things pleasing in His sight**. Those two clauses address the same basic principle — the believer in Christ is obedient to God and in being obedient He pleases God (because that obedience is why he was redeemed). This does not mean that the believer’s obedience obligates God to respond to his requests or that the obedience merit’s God’s response; but it does mean that because he obeys God, the believer is in fellowship with God and because of that fellowship God responds.
  - One writer has said it well — “obedience is the indispensable condition, not the meritorious cause of answered prayer.” [Stott]
  - God answers our prayers because we are in relationship with Him. While there may be a delay in the receiving (and the answer may be “no — that’s not best”), but the believer may be certain that when he asks, he will receive.

- God promises to COMMAND (v. 23) — If keeping God’s commandments and being pleasing to God are a condition of Him answering our requests, then a logical question is, “what has He commanded?”
  - He commands that we **believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ**.
    - This is the first time that John uses the verb believe in this book. The idea is that this is a definitive, once-for-all kind of belief. It is a total and complete commitment. John is calling for his readers to definitively address the question of their salvation. Do they genuinely believe in Christ? Cf. Rom. 10:9-10.
    - To believe in the **name** of Christ is the same as believing in the person. It is to believe in the essence of who He is.
    - The belief is on **His Son Jesus Christ** — (1) He is the eternal Son of God; (2) He is God incarnate, the man Jesus; (3) He is God, the Messiah, Christ. This addresses all the heresies of the false teachers (2:22-23).
    - Have you made sure your faith in Christ? Are you trusting Him alone for your salvation? Have you decided to follow Jesus? Are you resolute in your trust of Him?
✓ He commands that we *love one another.*

➢ Notice *and* — this phrase is connected both grammatically and theologically to the preceding phrase — a definitive faith in Christ results in a progress life of loving others.

➢ “Love” is a present tense — it is an ongoing, perpetual habit for the believer. It is a resolute commitment to love in word and action those who may be difficult to love.

➢ And the command is reciprocal — *one another.* We love everyone else, and we love even if we are not loved in return. The one who doesn’t feel the need to be loved must still love others; and the one who is craving love must love even if that love is not given. (Beware of either tendency, both of which are forms of selfishness and lovelessness.)

✓ John finishes this verse by saying, *just as He commanded us.* The two commands are really one command. One cannot believe in Christ and not love Christ’s people. And one cannot love Christ’s people without first loving Christ. Cf. Mk. 12:28-31.

✓ This is a command of God, but it is also a gracious provision — God has directed us to what we need to do to be pleasing to Him (and in that sense it is a *promise* to give us a command).

• **God promises to remain** *(v. 24a)*
  ✓ For the one who *keeps His commandments,* a two-fold promise is made — the believer abides in God and secondly, God abides in the believer. There is a reciprocal relationship here as well. We are His and He is ours (cf. 4:12, 16). The word *abide* means to live or dwell and has the connotation of fellowship. There is a real intimacy and connectedness between the believer and God. They are unified together.
  ✓ But even more, it indicates our permanent union with God. We stay with Him and He stays with us. He is unchanging in His presence with His people.
  ✓ John 15 ties together many of the principles in these verses:
    ➢ When we abide in Him, He will produce His fruit (including loving others) in us *(v. 5).*
    ➢ When we abide in Him, He will answer our prayers *(v. 7).*
    ➢ When we love others and Him and obey Him, we demonstrate the reality of our salvation *(v. 8).*
    ➢ We know of His abiding presence by the gift of the Spirit *(vv. 26-27ff).*

• **God promises His Spirit** *(v. 24b)*
  ✓ Interestingly, this is the first time in the book the Holy Spirit is mentioned; but it initiates a significant section on the work of the Spirit in the believer *(4:1ff).*
  ✓ The believer can do what he does because the Spirit has been given to him.

**CONCLUSION:**