

ASSURANCE AND CONFIDENCE
(SUNDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2018)

Scripture: Deut. 15:1-11; 1 John 3:19-24

INTRODUCTION

The Christian Faith is logical but foolishness to the unbeliever. Our text is also perfectly logical, based on the work of Christ. Why do we then need this instruction? We don't always think and act as we should.

Love, assurance, obedience are basic to the Christian faith and yet they can be advanced concepts. We need this instruction which is why it is so often repeated in this letter.

This is our fourth week in 1 John 3. This chapter begins and ends with God's love and assurance.

Look at verses 1 and 24.

What have we seen already in this chapter?

- 1) vv. 1-3: **We are the beloved children of God now and even more glory awaits us!**
- 2) vv. 4-8: Challenging section – **The glory of our Lord and Savior, Hallelujah, what a Savior!**
- 3) vv. 9-18: **By this we know love**; it is the love of God in Christ that sets the standard for true love.

Verse 18 is the context and connection for the final part of the chapter.

Call to love – Who loves as fully as we are commanded? What God commands is not in vain. Not a game. Obedience is good, right, proper response. Obedience is part of assurance. But whose obedience could ever be sufficient?

Our final verses of 1 John 3 deal with the important issue of love and assurance.

Look for love in your life. Even more look to the Triune God and His grace as your full assurance.

1 John 3:19-24 – 3 parts: 19-20, 21-22, 23-24

1) LOVE IS PART OF ASSURANCE BUT NOT THE ULTIMATE ASSURANCE, VERSES 19-20

Simplicity and great depth to our text. Some commentators bring out things of great depth. What we can say and see more clearly is that there is in our text a rich OT background and in the foreground the work of Christ and the new covenant.

For example: Deut. 15:7-9¹

New commandment to love (2:7-8) and the new covenant – Christ the sacrifice (3:16), we have passed over (3:14), God is bringing together His people and true love must characterize us (17-18).²

19 – By this we know... Looking backward or forward?

Probably best in this case what comes before.³ True love for others is part of assurance. This assurance is always connected with Christ – we know that we are of the truth.

Yarbrough:

To love, then, in both word and deed is to know more clearly that the source of one's identity and life as a believer is the truth— which is to say, in John's frame of reference, Christ. John's first word of assurance points readers to Jesus.⁴

Love for others in deed according to truth – **shall assure our hearts before Him**. Verb assure – in other contexts translated as persuade (Paul's ministry in Acts).

One commentator suggests the idea is not simply of comfort or assurance but the verb assure here has the idea of **encouraging sacrifice for others**. Might be something to this.

Do you always want to do what you know you should do?

¹ Smalley, 202, sharing the insights of J. M. Court, JTS 33 [1982] 508–517, especially 512.

² Smalley, 213.

³ Smalley, 200.

⁴ Yarbrough, 210.

But then we remember what Christ has done – we are encouraged and assured of being part of the truth.

This is not how most understand, but should be kept in mind.

Notice the words – **before Him**. We always stand in the presence of a holy and righteous God. Now we often fail in keeping this in mind. And when we do, we sometimes are filled with uncertainty and even dread.

Part of our assurance is that we love as God commands.

John Calvin wrote:

Then love is accessory or an inferior aid, a prop to our faith, not a foundation on which it rests.

For it is ever meet and proper to consider what the Apostle handles; for as he condemns feigned and false profession of faith, he says that a genuine assurance before God we cannot have, except his Spirit produces in us the fruit of love.

Nevertheless, though a good conscience cannot be separated from faith, yet no one should hence conclude that we must look to our works in order that our assurance may be certain.⁵

Verse 20: For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Condemn – shares part of the root for the verb **to know** in verse 19. Not a common verb.

Condemn – if we are honest, we know that we fail in always loving as we should. We fail in completely obeying any of God’s commands at the level of absolute perfection.

What do you find interesting about verse 20? God’s greatness, we might think, would not lead to assurance but only to further condemnation.

For the believer, however, we are to find refuge in God’s greatness and His knowledge.

John here is not trying to beat up his readers but give them assurance.⁶

Psa. 147:6 The LORD lifts up the humble; He casts the wicked down to the ground.

⁵ John Calvin, s.v. 1 John 3:19.

⁶ Smalley, 203.

Psa. 149:4 For the LORD takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the humble with salvation.

Yarbrough:

All this suggests that if the heart is weighed down with the conviction of wrongdoing, the place to turn is not farther inward but outward and upward toward God.⁷

Here we keep in mind again the start of 1 John 2.

1John 2:1 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.

C. H. Spurgeon is quoted as saying that he was so sure of his salvation that he could grab hold of a cornstalk and swing out over the fires of hell, look into the face of the devil and sing, "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!"⁸

Probably your own testimony is not so poetic or memorable. It doesn't have to be if you are looking to Christ.

What is the first fruit of the Spirit?

Gal. 5:22 ¶ But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

The assurance of love is not in vain.

However, this love as Calvin says should be a prop. It is an accessory, not the ultimate grounds for assurance.

This you must find in the Triune God and His blessed working of grace.

2. WE CAN HAVE CONFIDENCE BEFORE GOD, VERSES 21-22

1 John is very dense – much is stated in just a few words.

⁷ Yarbrough, 211.

⁸ Green, *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*, 312 (#1163).

V. 20 – heart condemns us

V. 21 – heart does not condemn us

What is going on here with this quick switch? It is best to see that John is describing one who finds assurance in God's greatness and knowledge.⁹

This leads to **confidence** toward God. **What an amazing thing to state!**

There is the false gospel of assurance – God's only purpose to make you happy. Moral Therapeutic Deism

But in Islam and other false religions there is no ultimate confidence. On what basis could there be?

Confidence – such a beautiful and powerful word.

Used 31x NT. Translated as confidence 3x in 1 John and 1x as boldness.

1John 4:17 ¶ Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.

Hebrews 3:6 – boldly to the throne of grace

Heb. 10:19 – boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus...

This truth of confidence is almost too wonderful to consider in light of our sin and God's holiness. What a gift that God gives to those who rest in the truth of Christ and His work.

Verse 22 states that confidence leads to coming before God in prayer.

There are two things from v. 22 to consider.

- 1) The **generous nature** of the promise - whatever we ask we receive from Him
- 2) The **because** – we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight

These two aspects must be brought together to be understood properly.

⁹ Yarbrough, 212.

Separating them leads to dangerous theology – **God becomes a genie or our debtor.**

What does bringing them together do? What John is describing is the blessing of a deep and intimate relationship with God. We come with confidence but not flippantly. We come not based in our own righteousness, but seeking to obey God and do what is pleasing we come before him.

The prayer that John describes is based on the example of our Lord – totally **non-self-indulgent**, focused on serving our great God.¹⁰

There is not time to explore the richness of this subject, but what a precious promise.

Whatever we ask we receive from Him...

Not like Amazon which delivers in a day or two. God may answer immediately or in 20 years.

Not as we always envision. We pray, thy will be done.

God will answer, according to His will, and as you truly need.

In faith, fully trust and rest in this.

3. BELIEVING, LOVING, ABIDING, AND KNOWING BY THE SPIRIT, VERSES 23-24

These final verses bring this section to a close.

Obviously we know that chapter divisions not inspired, but these verses do have a concluding aspect to them in terms of John's flow.

Fair amount of repetition in 1 John.

Faith and love – verse 23

Faith and love again in 4:7-5:13.

¹⁰ Yarbrough, 213.

1John 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

1John 5:13 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.

John must have a reason for this repetition.

Repetition can be an important part of learning.

Certainly, John was not just randomly putting things together.

Let us look at verse 23

This language might surprise us in part.

Not always the language we use.

But consider this.

What is a commandment?

A commandment is an expression of God's will, what He wants us to do.

Here we have a summary statement.

The Father calls us to believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another as Christ gave us commandment.

These are not two ways or equal paths of salvation.

But in light of the false teaching and divisive actions of those causing problems, this is significant instruction.

Of course we have here no contradiction or lack of harmony with Paul or any other place in Scripture.

Rightfully we distinguish between believing unto salvation and obedience in that salvation is not based on our obedience but the obedience of Christ.

We also confess that true belief leads to true obedience.

From verse 23 we can say: true belief is that faith in the Son of God as He is revealed in Scripture.

True belief is not just an intellectual exercise but a personal commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ.¹¹

Verse 23 can be connected with John 13.

John 13:30 Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night.

John 13:31 So, when he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him. **32** If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately. **33** Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, "Where I am going, you cannot come," so now I say to you. **34** A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. **35** By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

We must believe in Jesus as He has revealed Himself, as the Word of God describes.

And then as Jesus commanded, we must love one another.

This is the great testimony to the world that we are the disciples of Jesus.

Do you see why John writes verse 23?

Verse 24 is also closely connected also with the teaching of Jesus.

Our relationship with God is not just a legal contract.

You obey and you get good stuff.

It is also not just a relationship that we determine.

How many people want to define how they will relate with God?

Or how many people say, this is how I like to think of God...

¹¹ Yarbrough, 2150

No, God sets the terms in terms of how we must come before Him.

It is a relationship of faith and obedience.

It has nothing to do with merit or achievement. It is all of grace.

And in the grace of God we seek to obey Him.

What other response would God desire of us?

What do godly parents desire of their children? Obedience.

Obedience not to get things. Obedience because they want to honor God and honor their father and mother.

Notice the rich language of this verse.

he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him.

This language reflects the words of Jesus in John 14-16.

John 14:23 Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.

And this rich language speaks of the even greater blessing that awaits the return of Christ.

Rev. 21:3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God.

As John wrote earlier, the fulness of what has been promised has not yet been revealed.

We cannot understand the fulness of the glory to come, even as we don't always appreciate the blessings that God now gives to us.

Consider the end of v. 24.

And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

What is John saying?

Is the sign of abiding the presence of the Spirit?

Is the knowledge that God abides in us given by the Spirit?

The best understanding here is that the Spirit is the means that God uses to confirm the truth of which John is speaking.

We know through the working of the Holy Spirit that we abide in Christ and Christ in us, even as we seek to trust and love.¹²

It is very likely that John writes this way in part to deal with mystical appeals to possession of the Holy Spirit.¹³

The Spirit's work in our life is not just an emotional work.

It is not special knowledge.

It is the confirmation and conviction of God's truth in your life.

There is a story of a boy flying a kite so high that it disappeared into the clouds.

A man came by and asked, "Why are you holding on to that string?"

The boy said, "I've got a kite up there."

"Well, I don't see it," said the man.

The boy replied, "Well, I know it's there because I can feel the tug."¹⁴

This might not be the best illustration, but at least in part it can be used to describe the work of the Spirit.

It is not always in some outward, dramatic fashion.

The Spirit ministers internally in confirmation of the wonders of God's grace to us.

CONCLUSION

¹² Yarbrough, 216.

¹³ Ibid., 216.

¹⁴ Green, *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*, 311-312.

Logical but not natural.

True love is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, not our own natural desire or inclination.

You will not always “feel” like loving as you should. You love when you truly look to Christ and in faith seek to obey Him and follow His example.

Look for love in your life.

Even more look to the Triune God and His grace as your full assurance.

Prayer

Hymn 155

BENEDICTION: PHILIPPIANS 4:19-20

And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.
Now to our God and Father *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.