

## The Power of a Confident Heart

### 1 John 3:21-24

In our last study together in First John, Chapter 3, we looked at the problem of a condemning heart. We saw that a condemning heart can come either from by actual sin in our life, or it can be caused by the attack of Satan. The truth we saw last week is that God does not condemn our heart, we do or the devil does. God will convict us of sin by His Holy Spirit but He does so because He loves us, not because He condemns us. We saw that the usual result of a condemning heart is a tendency move away from fellowship with God and with God's people.

What do we do as a Christian when our heart condemn us, when our conscience accuses us? We saw that if we have sinned, the Holy Spirit convicts us and we must immediately and fully repent and confess that sin. As we forsake our sin we experience God's forgiveness and cleansing. If our condemning heart is from our own guilty conscience or from a Satanic accusation we must return to the truth of God's word and believe what God has promised. God loves us. Jesus has died to forgive our sin. We need to believe the promises of God and by faith take our stand on the truth of God's word.

God wants to set us free from sin and guilt. He wants to empower us to love again. When we begin to love again, and to actively show that love to others, God reassures our hearts and we begin to have confidence before God. Self-giving love expressed in real loving actions toward others reassures our hearts that we are right with God. "**My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth,**" says John, "**And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.**" {1 Jn 3:18-19}.

God moves us to give ourselves in love to others in need or help someone in trouble, to repay good for evil, or give back kind words instead of sharp ones. The result, John says, will be a sense of reassurance. If we are really in Christ, rivers of love and peace will begin to flow out from our hearts again, and it will be impossible to remain condemned. That reassurance, as we saw, is the first result of the practice of love.

There are more results that follow in this section, beginning with verse 21 to the end of the chapter. Let's read it now:

**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.**

John says in v.21, "**Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.**" You will notice that this is the positive side of the case. This is the situation when our hearts do not condemn us. We have solved the problem of a condemning heart by dealing with our sin and recognizing the truth that we are in Christ. If your heart does not condemn you, then what happens? Confidence.

Paul says in his letter the Philippians, we are those "**who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,**" {Phil 3:3b}. Our confidence is not in

ourselves but in God living in us and through us in love.

Now in practical terms, what is the result of that kind of experience? Here are four results of spiritual confidence.

A. **The Power of Confident Prayer** (vv.22a).

1. V.22 says, "**Whatever we ask we receive from him.**" John says one result is answered prayer. We will have the experience of a daily adventure of confident prayer. I will know the excitement of actually seeing God working in my life and in the lives of those that I care about and for whom I am praying. We will experience the daily assurance of asking and receiving from God.

How many of you know that this is really the normal Christian life? Answered prayer is what God intended us to experience every day. Heb.4:16 says, "**Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**"

We have boldness before God when we pray. If you have boldness before someone, it implies that you are in a close relationship with them, that you have a clear right to come before them. There is no fear of rebuke but a good understanding between you. Thus, to have confidence or boldness before God implies that you have a clear understanding of your right to come before him.

Long ago two boys on the banks of the Mississippi River watched a mighty paddle wheeler majestically move down the river. As it drew near, one boy laid down his fishing pole and began to wave frantically and yell. The other lad scorned the effort of his friend to get the attention of the paddle wheeler, but suddenly the giant vessel began to slow down and then turned toward the bank.

In amazement, the second boy wondered aloud how his friend could possibly flag down a massive paddle wheeler. The excited boy simply told his bewildered friend: "My father is the pilot." Source: "Proclaim," 1983 #4, p. 15.

That is what John is getting at here. Prayer is to grow out of our relationship with our heavenly Father. The more we know God, the closer we are to Him, the more we will believe the truth God has declared in his Word. And we will have no questions about our right to come.

Now we know that we do not come on our own merit or position before Him, for we know that we have no such ground. We come on Christ's merit. We come "in the name of Jesus," and thus we can have boldness, just as Jesus had boldness before the Father. All through that wonderful three-year ministry of His, Jesus was perfectly confident in his conversations with the Father. He said, "**Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me,**" {John 11:42}. Jesus came with boldness based on His relationship with the Father. That abiding closeness is the spirit out of which prayer grows.

2. Why don't Christians pray with confidence like that? The Bible teaches us in 1 Th.5:17 to "**pray without ceasing.**" Jesus taught that men "**always ought to pray and not lose heart**" (Luke 18:1). Yet we often go long periods

without prayer or we pray so weakly and full of doubting. Why are we like this? Because something is still condemning us. Because we are not abiding in close fellowship Jesus. And so we really don't believe prayer will change anything. We have no confidence when we pray.

But what does God want for us? God wants that, "**Whatever we ask we receive from him.**" Do you have that kind of confidence in prayer? Or does that seem out of reach for you? It doesn't need to be. God has a way to get you to that place of confident prayer.

And that is:

#### B. The Power of Confident Obedience (v.22b).

John gives us the conditions of confident prayer. It reminds me of that little sign, "When all else fails, follow the directions." If you have been failing in your prayer life, start following the directions.

1. And here it is, verse 22: "**because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.**"

Now there are many people who misread that badly. They read it as though it says in effect, "If you go to church, read your Bible, tithe your income, and witness to your friends, these are the things that are pleasing to God, and if you do all these things faithfully, God will answer your prayers." But that is not what it says, and that is not what it means. Activity of any kind is not necessarily pleasing to God. This is where we often make a mistake.

God is not a cosmic Santa Claus. We don't get our pray lists answered by being a good little boy or girl. We cannot make God do what we want by any religious rituals or good deeds that we perform. God not just concerned about our performance. He is most concerned about the attitude of our hearts.

When we have a heart that is devoted completely to God in love we will "**keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.**" And in verse 23 John tells us what God commands: faith and love.

#### C. The Power of Confident Faith and Love (v.23).

1. Note that v.22 speaks of "**commandments.**" That is plural speaking in general terms. In v.23 we find "**commandment,**" singular and specific. The "**commandment**" of v.23 is a summary of all the "**commandments**" of v.22.

2. Interestingly, this singular commandment really sounds like two commandments. We are first to "**believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ**" and second to "**love one another.**"

3. Though this may seem like two commandments, it is really one. "**Believe**" is in the aorist tense referring to a once-for-all decision to trust in Christ. "**Love**" is in the present tense referring to a continuous action. We have believed in Jesus in the past and our faith is now visibly evident by our active and continuous love for "**one another.**"

You see God does not give us a whole long list of dos and don'ts. He simply says believe and love. Don't you see how it is really a matter of the heart, not a matter of following rules? We are not talking legalism here, we are talking

about a love relationship with God through faith in His Son Jesus Christ. A heart that receives God's love will love God in return. A heart that loves God will love others.

4. V.18 says we are not to merely love "**in word or in tongue**" but "**in deed and in truth.**" V.19 says "**by this we know that we are of the truth.**" By what? By our love!

5. When your heart does not condemn you, you are confident before God, your prayers will be answered, your faith and your love spill over out of your life to bless others!

Next John tells us the real power behind all of this:

#### D. **The Power of the Holy Spirit's Filling** (v.24).

Keeping God's commandments to believe in Jesus and love each other shows that we are living in close fellowship with God. John says in v.24, "**Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him.**" John teaches us that not only do we abide in God but God abides in us. He says, "**by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given to us.**"

When John says, "**by this,**" he is referring to all that he wrote about before. "**By this,**" in other words, by this reassurance of heart, by this evidence of answered prayer, by this flowing out of love to another in active deeds and thoughts -- by this we know that he abides in us and it all comes by means of the spirit of God who indwells us. As Paul says in Romans 5, "**The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given unto us,**" {Rom 5:5 KJV}. That is the power of our relationship with God.

2. There is a lot of confusion about the Holy Spirit. John has already described Him as our "**anointing**" (2:20, 27). If you are a Christian, the Spirit lives within you. Rom.8:9 says, "**Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.**"

3. We don't have to wait for the Spirit, long for the Spirit or earnestly desire the Spirit. He lives in us. We simply have to surrender to Him. Paul tells us in Ephesians, "**And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.**" That's an imperative. We must continually and constantly allow God to fill us with His Holy Spirit.

How do I do that? I don't. God does. The only thing that I can do is to yield to God so His Spirit can fill me. That means I let God continue to control more and more of my life. What does it take to do that? Surrender. Yield control to Jesus through His Holy Spirit who lives in you. Stop trying to be confident in yourself and to do it your way. Give up and let God live through you. That is how God wants to work in and through you.

You see, if we are confident before God we will objectively know His truth and subjectively experience the Spirit's filling in our lives.

This week I ran across a great prayer of surrender by John Wesley. He called it his Covenant Prayer. As you listen to it, ask yourself: is this where my heart is today?

Precious Lord, let me be Your servant, under Your command.

I will no longer be my own.

I give myself up to Your will in all things.

Make of me what You will. Rank me with whom You will.

I put myself fully in Your hands.

Put me to doing...or put me to suffering.

Let me be employed for You... or laid aside for You.

Exalted for You... or brought low for You.

Let me be full...or let me be empty.

Let me have all things... or let me have nothing.

I freely and heartily yield all things to Your pleasure and disposal.

And now - O glorious and blessed God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - You are mine... and I am Yours. So be it! Let this covenant, which I make here on Earth today, be ratified in Heaven. In Christ's Name, I pray - Amen.

Would you dare to pray a prayer like that? I will tell you this: you will not have the kind of confidence in God, confidence in your prayers, and confidence in love until you are ready to surrender to God's Holy Spirit with that kind of prayer. That is the power of a confident heart.