

Your Heart: Condemned or Confident?

1 John 3:19-24

1. Confidence. You know it when you see it. I like trivia games shows on TV. Most of us are familiar with the TV game show first hosted by Regis Philbin then by Meredith Vierra called, *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*. It has made famous the question, "**Is that your final answer?**" As the questions get progressively harder, as the prize money at stake grows larger and as the "lifelines" are used up, you can visibly see the contestants lose their confidence. They sweat, drink water and chat nervously with the host. Most are likely to give up long before they reach the million-dollar question. Sometimes, we find that they knew the answer to the question but did not have the confidence to attempt it.

2. Confidence is vital to success in any area of life. We have to believe in order to achieve. Whether it is advancing in your career, investing your money or competing in sports, you must be confident in order to win. NFL coach Mike Ditka was quoted as saying, "**Before you can win, you have to believe you are worthy.**"

I like the story John McKay told about the supreme confidence of the legendary University of Alabama football coach Bear Bryant. He said, "**We were out shooting ducks, and finally, after about three hours, here comes one lonely duck. The Bear fires. And that duck is still flying today. But as Bear watched the duck flap away, he looked at me and said, 'John, you are witnessing a genuine miracle. There flies a dead duck!'**"

3. Confidence is a key to success in our spiritual lives as well. But our confidence is not so much in ourselves as in our God. The shepherd boy, David, is a great example of confidence in God. Someone said, "*The army of Israel thought Goliath was too big to defeat; David thought he was too big to miss.*" David's confidence was in God. He said to the giant Goliath, "**This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. ... All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the Lord's...**"

The Bible has many verses that speak about confidence:

- Proverbs 3:26 says, "**For the LORD will be your confidence, And will keep your foot from being caught.**"
- Proverbs 14:26 says, "**In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, And His children will have a place of refuge.**"
- Paul wrote in 2 Cor.5:6-7, "**So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight.**"
- He wrote in Phil.1:6, "**...being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.**"
- Hebrews 10:35 says, "**Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward.**"

4. In 1 John we already saw in 2:28 that one of the reasons we want to "abide" or remain in close, intimate fellowship with Jesus is that "**we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.**"

5. In today's passage we will deal with confidence in our spiritual lives. We will examine *the problem of a condemning heart* and *the power of a confident heart*.

I. The Problem of a Condemning Heart (vv.19-20).

“And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.”

Verse 19 ties us back to John's emphasis on living a righteous life and loving our brothers in Christ. In chapter 3 John has shown us two important evidences that we are children of God. John stated them clearly in verse 10, **“In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.”**

John's concern here is that we would **“know that we are of the truth,”** that we would be confident in our relationship with God, that we would have assurance of our salvation. And John says that two evidences especially assure us or condemn us: (1) practicing righteousness and (2) loving our brothers.

But what happens if that evidence is lacking? John tells us in v. 20 that our heart will condemn us. The word for condemn (*kataginosko*) literally means to "know against". In other words our heart or our conscience is aware that there is a contradiction between what we say we believe about God and how we are living. We say we are children of God, but we sometimes sin and we sometimes fail to love our brothers and sisters. And when we become aware of this contradiction we have uneasiness, a sense of gloom about us, a gnawing at the core of our being. It is a humbling feeling--and most of us have felt it and some are probably laboring under it right now.

Why do our hearts condemn us? Here are some possibilities:

A. Our Hearts Condemn Us because of Sin.

1. In v.20, John says, **“For IF our heart condemns us...”** A more literal rendering says not *if* but *when* our hearts condemn us suggesting that from time to time our hearts *will* condemn us.
2. The **"heart"** in Scripture often does not refer to the organ in our body that pumps blood, but to our inner-consciousness our conscience. The more we live in truth, the more we abide in Jesus, the more sensitive our hearts and consciences become to God.
3. The Holy Spirit inhabits you and works with your conscience, your **"heart."** Recently someone came to me and said, *"Pastor, I'm doing all the things I should be doing. I'm in the Word, I'm praying. I'm trying to obey, but something doesn't feel right."*
4. This person had a condemned heart. Something was wrong in his life and the Holy Spirit was pricking his conscience. This is very good! When you are doing all you know to do and you still feel distant from God that means you are sensitive to God's presence! God allows us to feel condemned so we can get back to where we need to be.

The more we grow spiritually, the more sensitive we will be to God. It is like having your eyes dilated. You walk out of the optometrist's office and have to wear dark glasses because your eyes are sensitive.

5. When your **"heart condemns"** you, don't ignore it or lie about it. Why? V.20 says, **"God knows all things."** He knows what you think and what you do. Sometimes your heart condemns you so that you might know something needs changing in your life.

6. Peter swore he would never forsake Jesus but denied Him three times. His heart condemned him, the Gospel says he went out and **"wept bitterly."** Yet in Galilee, Jesus restored Peter and gave him the commission to **"Feed my sheep."** Because Peter repented of his sin and confessed it, Jesus restored him. When heart condemnation over sin results in confession, God forgives and cleanses us.

B. Our Hearts Condemn us because of Satanic Attack.

1. Sometimes we feel condemned in our hearts not because of sin but because of stress and the attacks of the enemy. Our enemy Satan often attacks our faith. He attempts to dislodge us from faith in Jesus Christ, to overthrow us and disarm us and invalidate our effectiveness as Christians. This is why 1 Pet.5:8 says, **"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."** In Revelation 12:10 Satan is called, **"the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night."**

2. Every believer needs assurance from time to time. V.19 says **"We know that we are of the truth and shall assure our hearts before Him."** No matter how much Scripture we know, no matter how often we come to church, worship and sit under the teaching of the Word, no matter how much we give or how much we are involved in ministry, we all need to be reassured.

How do I know when my conscience is echoing the voice of God and when it is echoing the voice of Satan? How do I know that the uneasy gloomy feeling in the pit of my soul is the conviction of the Holy Spirit and not the accusation of our adversary the devil?

The Holy Spirit does convict us of sin in our lives, but he always does so as a way to bring us back in line with God. His conviction is always over a particular behavior that we can deal with by confessing and repenting. On the other hand, our heart, or the devil can give us condemning thoughts that are a vague feeling of guilt or shame not necessarily connected to a behavior that we can correct. The conviction of the Spirit leads us back to God, the condemnation of our heart that comes from Satan draws us away from God.

So if we experience conviction, we should do something about it – we should confess our sin and stop the behavior that the Spirit is convicting us of. If we have done that and we still experience condemnation over it, we should tell our hearts (or the devil) that we have nothing to be condemned for since Jesus has cleaned us up and forgiven all our sins.

Romans 8:1 (NIV) says, **"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."** In John 3:19-20 Jesus says, **"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned."**

Paul experienced the judgment or the condemnation of many people in his ministry; this is how he responded to one group that was placing their judgments on him:

1 Corinthians 4:3-4

I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. 4 My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.

If we are going to teach our hearts not to condemn us, we need to stop judging even ourselves and allow only God to judge us – he is faithful & he is just – he will tell us what needs to change in our life, not because we are worthless, but because we are of great worth to him.

The reason we must love one another in deed and truth and thereby reassure our hearts before God that we are of the truth is this: if our heart condemns us for lack of love it is because **“God is greater than our heart and knows all things.”** In other words, our heart or our conscience is an echo of God's opinion of ourselves. If our conscience, imperfect as it is, can sense a contradiction between what we profess and what we practice, how much more God, who knows all things.

My guess is that there are three types of people represented in this room right now. There are three possible results of a condemned heart:

- (1) **The Hardened Heart.** There are some here who have hardened their hearts, whose consciences have been seared into silence. Your conscience has been silent for too long and you rarely feel guilt over anything that you do. This is a dangerous place to be.

Those of you who know that your conscience has been inappropriately quiet for too long—open up your heart today. Be honest with God. Let His Holy Spirit soften your heart and speak to your conscience. Repent, confess and let God cleanse your heart and mind. In Ezekiel 36:26 (NIV) God gives this promise to those who will repent and return to Him, **“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”**

- (2) **The Guilt-Ridden Heart.** Then there are some whose hearts are tender, whose consciences are active, but you have a wrong view of God. You labor under a blanket of guilt that never goes away. You are depressed and broken and defeated. You confess your sins, but never feel like you did it well enough to actually be forgiven; you look at how you love your brothers and sisters and you feel that it's never perfect enough to please God

If your heart has been inappropriately condemning for quite awhile, and you feel stuck, no matter how much you pray or read scripture; my admonition to you is to seek out help from a trusted friend, or a pastor—someone who can help you come to the assurance of the truth of God's word. Because God is in the business of reclaiming and rehabilitating our conscience. Remember, **“God is greater than our heart and knows all things.”** God is greater than a guilt-ridden heart. His grace is greater than our sin. He does forgive. Accept His forgiveness now.

There is nothing more valuable than a conscience that condemns us when we are wrong and there is nothing sweeter than a conscience that is at rest once we've

repented. God wants us to have free and responsive hearts, "**Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God**" (1 John 3:21).

(3) **The Forgiven Heart.** The third type of people are some of you whose heart condemns at the right time for the right reasons. Your conscience is actively attuned to a God who is holy and also compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in loving kindness. When you sin or fail to love as you should, your conscience condemns you, and the Holy Spirit informs you that God is against your sin. But you thank God for your conscience. You turn to God in confession and you trust the promise that God will forgive you and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. If the harm you did is something that can be restored through a word or a deed you will rely on God's help to be reconciled to the person you hurt. And then your conscience will be quieted, and you will be free to love and to pray once again.

A pastor told about a lovely lady in his congregation named Marcy Harper. Marcy lives in a retirement village and because of her health is only in church services on rare occasions. Yet, she still finds ways to assure her heart. She actively loves. When the pastor went to visit his own mother in the hospital, he saw a card on her bulletin board from the Church... signed by Marcy's hand. Whether it is sending cards to those in need or praying for her church, Mrs. Marcy finds a way to love not just in word, but in action. That assures her heart. Need some assurance? Act in love. Forgive. Serve. Give. Obey. It's the cure for a condemning heart.

Are you confident before God? Is that your final answer?