

Series: The Confident, Loving Church – week 17

CDOBC – beginning on 2/14/10

Title: **“Peace for Restless Hearts”**

1 John 3:19-24 ~ July 4, 2010

OBJECTIVE: To help those who doubt their faith and point them to Christ and their transformed life.

Announcements

- Welcome / guests – communication cards
- Gospel Rescue Mission – Christmas in July food drive
- Summer Book Study – “Purpose Driven Life” – see website for details
- Voter registration – today and next Sunday 7/11

Confidence...boldness...what a difference they make in every area of life. Being involved in sports for most of my life, I am familiar with the effects of confidence – when rightly applied and believed – and when wrongly applied and believed. I can remember from my earliest years of playing organized baseball the lack of confidence I had when facing a pitcher I thought was dominating. In those cases, the lack of confidence I had resulted in timid swings and many unproductive at bats. I can also remember a stretch when I was a teenager that I was something like 14 for 15 over 3-4 games...nothing was too hard to hit...the ball appeared to come to the plate in slow motion...it looked larger than normal to me...confidence oozed out of my pores.

Confidence in sports or at work is one thing...but confidence about one's faith and their standing before God is crucial!

Reality is that many Christians struggle with having confidence about their faith. Specifically, they lack confidence that they are indeed saved...they wonder if their “salvation prayer” really worked...they wonder if they need to do something more...they wonder if God heard their prayer...they see sin in their life and their guilt persuades them that a *true Christian* would never do such things. In their heart of hearts, they doubt the reality /

sincerity of their conversion – or they doubt the lasting effect of their conversion.

Turn to 1 John 3:19-24

Confidence in God's grace vs. 19-20

“This then...” refers back to the previous section – specifically vs. 18

Vs. 18 – “Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.”

When you look at your life – and your heart or your conscience condemns you – when it accuses you of insincere faith or illegitimate faith (*i.e.* “*A real Christian wouldn't do that!*”), what are you to do? Well, John tells us here that one of the things we should do is look at the love we have for other believers – especially our actions toward them. One of the clear points of evidence that the love of God is in you is seen in how you love other Christians.

John has been dealing with this issue since 2:28 -

This is a very interesting detail in the Greek. In our English Bibles, the word translated “reassure our heart” ESV – “assure our hearts” KJV / NASB – “we set our hearts at rest” NIV is in the active voice – which means this is something we must do ourselves. So, when our heart or conscience condemns us, we must take control away from our heart or conscience, and overwhelm it with the truth of Christ and His forgiveness of our sins. In other words, we need to make sure the truth is informing our conscience – that our thoughts are based not on our ‘feelings’ but on the truth of Christ and the truth of our actions.

The last sentence (of vs. 20) was interpreted by many of the church fathers and the reformers as a dire warning to overconfident Christians. They viewed it in terms of telling Christians that no matter how you might console yourself about God's judgment of you, He knows everything – and no stone will go unturned at the judgment.

However, the Apostle is trying to give comfort and confidence to his reader's faith in this section – and the interpretation of the church fathers and reformers don't follow that thought/goal. Most scholars over the past few hundred years have understood this reference to God's omniscience to mean our heart is not the ultimate judge – God is – and God has promised His grace, mercy, and forgiveness to those who have faith in Christ. So, even when our life discourages us in our faith, we need to rest in God's promises. He knows everything about us – and yet He has forgiven us because of our faith in His Son.

Confidence in prayer vs. 21-22

Some Christians don't struggle with doubt about their faith – on the contrary, they have confidence when approaching God. Their confidence is regarding both their standing / position before God (because of their faith in Christ) and in answered prayer.

Prayer is often misunderstood, and John clarifies how we can pray with confidence. He echoes the words of Jesus, John 14:13-14

“And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. ¹⁴ You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”

Other N.T. writers wrote of this same confidence in approaching God –

Eph. 3:12

“In Him and through faith in Him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.”

Heb. 10:19

“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus...”

2 Cor. 3:4

“Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God.”

To be clear – if you have confidence before God, your confidence is first and foremost in what Christ has done on your behalf through His death and resurrection. Secondly, your confidence can be due to the love you have for other believers and the truth of God. If this describes you, then you should have confidence in your prayers. Why? Is this some sort of quid-pro-quo arrangement with God – that as long as you do certain things His way that He will be our genie in the bottle and give us what we want?

No.

If you have confidence before God, it means that you are living an obedient life that pleases Him. John makes this clear in vs. 22 – “...because we obey His commands and do what pleases Him.”

W. Hall Harris gives a good explanation:

“This is not to say that an obedient lifestyle on the part of the believer merits or guarantees answered prayer. It simply means that, insofar as believers’ consciences make no accusation against them, and they are living in obedience to God’s commandments, their will and God’s will coincide, and thus they may reasonably expect to receive the answers to their requests.” (Exegetical Commentary on 1 John, by W. Hall Harris,

<http://bible.org/seriespage/exegetical-commentary-1-john-311-24>)

This is not a quid-pro-quo – but symmetry of wills –

Illus. *Brian asking to take out the garbage...Jessica asking to do the dishes*

Don't be mistaken...your prayer life is encouraged or hampered by your lifestyle. If you are living in obedience to God, your prayer life will be rich and rewarding. If you are living in disobedience to God, your prayer life will be lacking in reward and you will have no confidence when you bring your concerns to God.

The simple commands of God vs. 23

John makes this so simple. Believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ – and love one another (as He loved us – John 13:34-35). First, let take the command to believe. Let's look closely at what John calls us to believe. It's both simple, and yet complex at the same time.

Believe. What does it mean to believe? Faith and belief are synonyms in Scripture. The writer of Hebrews defines faith for us – “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” Heb. 11:1

Our belief / faith is not without a bedrock of fact – of historical reality – but the full truth about Christ goes beyond the realities recorded in history – and they go beyond the realm of scientific proof. Forgiveness of sins, His indwelling presence among us, His return at some point in the future, our eternal home in Heaven – these things we can't confirm with scientific methods, but we believe in them and hope in them with all of our certainty. John uses the aorist form of “believe” – which points to a completed act – the point of one's conversion where they first placed their faith in Christ.

But he doesn't stop there, but he further describes our belief. We are to believe:

"...in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ..."

This is a short phrase, but it has a library full of meaning and explanation. **Name** – in the first century – was not only a method of identification, but it summarized everything about the person. So, to believe in the *name* of Jesus Christ, meant that you believe everything about Him. It means that you know Him well beyond the letters that make up His name, and that you truly believe in His total character and being.

Next, John says "His Son, Jesus Christ"

Now this is a lot to cover – but absolutely vital for us to understand and it was absolutely vital for John's initial readers to understand this because of the denial's the Gnostic false teachers had promoted about Jesus.

When John speaks of the Sonship of Christ, this is a term that points toward the uniqueness of Jesus – and it points to His shared essence with the Father. The name "Jesus Christ" drives home the title and office of Jesus – that He was the promised Messiah. He was not just a great teacher – a wonderful and insightful prophet or a popular speaker and healer - He is the fulfillment of the promise in Genesis 3 of a future deliverer – the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3) and the promise to David (2 Sam. 7). It is "...at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Phil. 2:10-11

So, when John says that the command of God is "...to believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ", this is no flippant or insignificant command. On one level it is very simple to understand, but it's simplicity does not mean it lacks depth

and spiritual significance. It's about the person, nature, and work of Christ.

The second part of the command is to "...love one another as He commanded us." The "He" here is Christ – and most likely points back to the words of Jesus recorded by John in John 13:34-35.

Confidence from the Spirit's presence in our life vs. 24

One of John's favorite themes is in this verse – our ability to abide in God – and His abiding in us. In one sense this is a bit subjective – but in many ways, this is an objective reality in the believer's life. Of course, it's subjective in that it's spiritual – it's not a scientifically verifiable truth – that the Spirit of God lives in the believer. On the other hand, it's a very objective truth that can be / should be observable in the believers life because it is by the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit that the believer – you and I – are to love other Christians – that our life is transformed and renewed by the truth of God and we begin to live an obedient life. These are observable facts in someone's life – facts that point to a spiritual reality – the reality of God abiding in us and our abiding in God.

Application

Make sure your emotions are controlled by God's truth. vs. 19-20

Your heart / conscience is only reliable as it is based on God's Word and the changes in your life. Your feelings should not be the guiding force in your life – the truth of God's Word should be that guiding force.

Have confidence in your life as you enjoy the Spirit's presence.

God wants you to have confidence in your faith. He wants you to be secure in your salvation. This confidence comes from your faith in Christ (vs. 23) and from your obedient life (vs. 22). This does not mean we are *content* in our faith – we need to strive daily to obey the Lord more – but we need not confuse confidence with contentment.

“If God is for us, who can be against us?” – Rom. 8:31

Close in prayer – transition to communion