

Blessed Assurance – 1 John 3:19-24

Introduction – We come to a wonderful passage in this epistle that speaks to the heart of why John is writing this letter. Every Christian has moments of a worrisome heart over their assurance. When one hears the warnings of Jesus, “*depart from me, I never knew you,*” there are times one considers his own life and is vexed over his own shortcomings, hypocrisies, and sins. John wrote to assure the faithful and to direct them away from the teachings of those who followed the spirit of antichrist, those who had departed from the true faith of the apostles. But tender hearts hear the condemnation and can be rattled themselves. John seeks to assure just such disciples – ordinary Christians like us with ordinary failings, ordinary struggles, and ordinary temptations.

What Shook Them and What Shakes Us? – John declares to those who teach that assurance does not require striving for righteousness, keeping God’s commands, loving one another, or believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, that they have no basis for assurance at all. But many who remain may themselves be shaken for any number of reasons. Some look back, having grown up in the church, and never remember a day they had a crisis-conversion. They have no flashy testimony. Others are shaken when they come to a deeper understanding of the sovereignty of God and realize that becoming a Christian wasn’t something they did, but was all entirely the gracious work of God. Some are shaken as well as they grow in their understanding of the holiness of God while realizing how complacent they have been in their decent, middle-class, moralistic lives, all of a sudden seeing everything they have offered God as nothing more than filthy rags. God would speak to us in these situations – here in this passage.

The Place of Blessed Assurance (v19) – God is God and God is holy. In the midst of these truths, John does not write to shake their assurance, but rather to firm it up (5:13). John directs us as to where to find this assurance. It is not to be found off on your own, but “*before Him,*” that is, in His presence, in His throne room, and in the name of Jesus. Connected to v 18, we are told that loving in deed and in truth provides assurance before Him. Remember, God is perfect, but He is not a perfectionist. The contrast in v18 is not to a utopian perfectionism but against the false teachers who have left the true faith, twisting the teachings of the apostles.

Your Heart and God’s Assurance (v20) – Some of the original readers (and maybe some of us) have felt condemned by their heart because of the false teachers causing them to think that we haven’t achieved a special, mystical and spiritual level of knowledge or experience of the Spirit. Some of the original readers (and most likely all of us) have felt condemned by our hearts when we take God’s Word and His commands seriously and realize our shortcomings. Verse 20 says if you think your list is long, how much more do you think God knows? The point is that God is not astonished at your failings. He knew you perfectly when He elected you, when Jesus died for you, and when the Spirit quickened you to new life. This is how there is assurance in discovering rightly that you are far worse than you realize.

Bold Assurance (vv21-23) – Having settled real or false guilt in the gospel of Jesus, believers find real assurance of salvation. The kind of confidence that a clean heart brings to God is an outspokenness, a frankness, a plainness of speech. We can speak our mind to God in His presence (consider the Psalms), pouring out our hearts, concerns, fears, needs, dreams, desires, temptations – everything. In this assurance, we request anything of Him and He requests anything of us. He never denies except to give better and we grow in loving to do that which pleases Him, living self-consciously before the face of God (Coram Deo) in all aspects of our lives. This assured disciple is more confident than the high priest, boldly entering into the holy of holies (Heb 10:19). This assured disciple finds there is no tension between love and obedience (v23, and John 15:10).

Assurance from the Spirit (v24) – John makes clear again that someone who is keeping the commands of God is doing so because he is abiding in Christ and Christ in Him, a mutual indwelling. And the reason we know that Christ abides in us is by the Spirit whom He has given us. The presence of this Spirit is not some subjective experience (like the antichrists were teaching) but rather the true change of what one believes and does because of the Spirit. Rom 8:13-14 echoes this teaching. 8:14 says that “*as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God*” and 8:13 describes what these sons of God are being “*led*” to do: “*to put to death the deeds of the body.*” And so, this Spirit-wrought assurance is objective, as objective as seeing fruit on a tree (Gal 5:2-25). This blessed assurance is ours because we can observe the work of the Spirit in us leading us into an objective belief in Jesus and an objective love for the saints, growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Another way to say this is that Jesus loves you in spite of your sin and is at work in you by His Spirit to will and to do according to His good pleasure. Say “amen” to this and it is yours.