

Confidence Before God

I John Series
I John 3:19-24
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INTRODUCTION

A. Confidence is something we all seek, but the very thing that so often eludes us

1. Confidence is missing when we are filled with self-doubt and constantly worried and fretting over our ability to accomplish the things we want to do
2. We suffer terribly at the hands of missing confidence
 - a. we are paralyzed with fear and dread
 - b. we become negative and pessimistic
 - c. we become more interested in blaming someone or something than succeeding
 - d. we end up failing – often because we didn't try, or didn't try very hard
3. Confidence, however, is an enabling quality
 - a. fear is overcome because we are not afraid to try
 - b. we become positive and optimistic – believing the best of possibilities
 - c. we avoid the blame game and become more interested in succeeding
 - d. we do succeed – because confidence encourages us to try

B. Confidence is important in every area of life, but it is vitally important in our walk of faith

1. The confident Christian has resources and power that many can only dream about
2. The unconfident Christian is a sad sight
 - a. on the one hand, he purports to believe in God and in a savior; but on the other hand, his God is small and impotent, and his savior is less than he needs
 - b. on the one hand, he offers the world good news; but on the other hand, he himself is often filled with everything bad, negative, painful and destructive
3. The fact of the matter is that confidence is a blessing we can use
 - a. confidence is the result of faith
 - b. faith exercised produces greater confidence

C. John knew that his readers would struggle with confidence before God

1. Partly because of the every day stresses of life
2. Partly because their faith was in question by false teachers who spread a philosophy that cast in doubt faith in Jesus Christ as had been revealed through the apostles
3. John helps us think about how to stand confidently before God

I. THE ASSURED HEART 3:19-20

A. The preceding section is important to our focus today

1. 3:11 – the message we heard from the beginning is that we should love one another
2. 3:14 – we know we have passed from death to life because we love our brethren
3. 3:16 – we know love by what Jesus Christ has done for us
4. 3:18 – let's not love in mere word of tongue, but in deed and truth

B. Still, there are times in every Christian's life when doubt creeps in, when our own consciences condemn us and hold us responsible for failing to do what is right

1. The conscience is that part of us that forces reality upon us
2. Conscience is a hard judge, one not easy to fool
3. We might be able to convince everybody else that we are without sin, but if it's working right, we won't fool our conscience
4. In fact, the very presence of a conscience is evidence of spiritual life and health

C. Your conscience will hold you prisoner

1. It will remind you of those unloving words you said
2. It will even remind you of the unloving thoughts that you allowed to go unchecked
3. It will certainly remind you of the unloving behavior you displayed
4. Conscience will keep bringing up all these things, regardless if they are public or private
5. You can deny, ignore, out-fox, or convince others that their assessment of your words behavior isn't true, but your conscience won't listen to your excuses

D. This is particular difficult for people who have very sensitive consciences

1. I've known people to listen to a sermon that only vaguely applied to them, yet they are the ones who responded in repentance when it should have been the person near them who did so
2. The more spiritually minded we are, the more likely it is that our consciences are working very well
3. In one way, this is certainly good, for the conscience has a wonderful, God-given purpose
4. in another way, it's bad because our consciences tend to hold us guilty and condemn us

E. How in the world is anyone supposed to have confidence before God when we've got a conscience That strips us of any feeling that we've done well in obeying God's will?

1. 3:19 – John says that there is something that assures our hearts before God
 - a. it is knowing that we are of the truth
 - b. but knowing we are of the truth is based on loving in both action and truth, not just in word or tongue
 - c. we ought to be confident when we find ourselves doing what God wants us to do
2. But, what about when we know we aren't doing thing perfectly – that's when conscience can become a terrible burden, not help us be confident
 - a. 3:20 – we can still be confident before God even when our heart condemns us
 - b. how is that possible? When our heart condemns us, isn't it just telling the truth?
 - c. yes, but we need to know something – God is greater than our hearts and knows all things

F. How a God greater than our hearts and who knows all things gives confidence

1. Usually, we equate God's knowledge about us with knowing about our sin
 - a. that certainly is true
 - b. but it is also true that God knows the other side of the coin too
2. Think about king David
 - a. 1 Samuel 13:14 -- "But now your kingdom shall not endure. The LORD has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you." NASB95
 - 1) David was a man after God's own heart – this is the quality that made him a great man of faith
 - 2) David was not a sinlessly perfect man – so we know he wasn't acceptable to God on the basis of his words or actions
 - 3) God knew something about his heart
 - b. 1 Kings 8:17-18 -- "Now it was in the heart of my father David to build a house for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. "But the LORD said to my father David, 'Because it was in your heart to build a house for My name, you did well that it was in your heart. NASB95
 - 1) David wanted to build a temple, but God did not allow him to do so
 - 2) Temple building was for Solomon to accomplish
 - 3) Yet Solomon understood something about God's view of his father – that he did well because it was in his heart
 - 4) God knew what was in David's heart, and approved of it

3. Confidence comes from knowing what God knows, not just what our consciences tell us
 - a. is there evidence in your life that loving your brethren is more than cheap talk?
 - b. do you see where the love of Christ is growing in your heart?
 - c. be real – it's not that we want to ignore our consciences, but along with honest failure, do you see that the godliness of love is really, truly, actually there?
 - d. if so, then here's something that will make you confident – God is greater than your heart (read – conscience)
 - e. are you afraid that God will somehow miss the real intent of your heart?
 - f. stop killing yourself with doubt and fear
 - g. if God can see your sin, he can also see the evidence of love in your heart, and when we know this, we will know we are of the truth

II. WHY CONFIDENCE IS SO IMPORTANT 3:21-22

A. Again, it isn't that we want to get to the point that our conscience doesn't function or bother us

1. That's not a spiritually healthy alternative
2. Illustration (David Jackman: The Message of John's Letters, p. 105)
I do not think that John is saying in verse 21, 'Some Christians never have a condemning heart, so they can be confident before God.' Rather his meaning is that when we deal with our condemning heart on the grounds of God's truth and love – even though it recurs a dozen times a day – we can become sure that the Lord accepts us in spite of all our faults, and that we can therefore come to him in prayer.

B. Confidence comes when we once again put the focus on what God has done for us in Christ Jesus

1. we are a saved people – not on the basis of our goodness, but by his blood
2. our consciences are right to condemn us, but we are forgiven, redeemed, saved
3. the evidence of that fact is seen in the outworking of God's will in our lives as we become like Jesus and love our brethren
4. even when we fail, we have an advocate with the Father, and his blood keeps on cleansing us from our sins
5. Our prayers then become an exercise in confident living, knowing that God will provide

CONCLUSION 3:23-24

A. Let's sum up with John's words

1. The two, indispensable commands
 - a. believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ
 - b. love one another just as he commanded us
2. There is the faith as concisely stated as you can find it
 - a. I would suggest to you that many today would be uncomfortable with John's summary
 - b. we want more specifics, but John was concerned with fundamental concepts
3. It matters that you believe in the name of Jesus Christ
 - a. if you believe, you will possess a confident trust in his work on your behalf
 - b. if you believe, you cannot remain the same person you were – you must yield in obedience to Jesus – what Paul would call the “obedience of faith”
4. It matters that you love your brethren
 - a. you cannot be like Jesus without being like Jesus – and Jesus loves his people
 - b. if you want to see the practical evidence of faith in your life, look for the evidence of love

B. Keep the commandments and you will abide in him and he in you

C. Invitation