

How Can I Know?

Lesson 7: Confidence Before God -- 1 John 3:19-24

Some of the most sincere Christians you will ever meet are also the most tormented. Not because they are living in scandalous sin, but because they cannot quiet the voice inside that keeps accusing them. They pray and wonder if God is listening. They serve and wonder if it counts. They examine their hearts and find so much that is mixed and imperfect that they conclude God must surely be displeased. Their conscience has become a relentless prosecutor, and they have forgotten that there is a higher court, and a Judge who knows them better than their own hearts do.

John writes to people like this, and what he says is astonishing. "We shall reassure our heart before him," he writes, "for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything" (1 John 3:19-20). Read that again. When your own heart condemns you, John does not tell you to argue with it or to ignore it. He points you to someone greater than your heart: God Himself, who knows everything, including every reason your accusing heart has overlooked, and who has already provided for your sin in His Son.

And then John opens up the freedom this brings. When the heart no longer condemns us, we have confidence before God, the kind of confidence that transforms prayer. We come to Him not as cowering defendants but as beloved children who know they are welcome. John even ties this confidence to answered prayer, to a life that keeps His commands and believes in His Son and loves the brethren, and finally to the great gift of the Spirit whom God has given us, a witness within that we belong to Him.

This lesson sits near the heart of our whole study, because assurance is not only a matter of doctrine; it is a matter of the heart standing before God without terror. John wants to lift the sincere believer out of the prosecutor's chair and set him down in the Father's presence as a welcome child. He does not do this by lowering the standard or excusing sin, but by pointing to a God who is greater than our hearts. Read these verses, and let your accused, weary heart find rest.

Group Discussion: John writes that "whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything" (3:20). Why do you think sincere believers so often live under a constant sense of self-condemnation? What does it mean that God is greater than our condemning hearts?

Personal Reflection: Think about how you come before God in prayer. Do you approach Him with the confidence of a welcome child, or with the hesitation of someone unsure of his standing? What does your manner of prayer reveal about whether your heart is at rest or under self-condemnation?

Read 1 John 3:19–24

Study Questions

1. John says we will “reassure our heart before him” (3:19). What does it mean to reassure or quiet our hearts before God, and why do believers need this so often?
2. How do you typically approach God in prayer, as a welcome child or as an uncertain defendant? Describe what your prayer life reveals about whether your heart is at rest before God or under a cloud of self-condemnation.
3. John offers a remarkable comfort: “whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything” (3:20). How is it good news that God knows everything and is greater than our condemning hearts?
4. Sometimes a guilty conscience is pointing to real, unaddressed sin, and sometimes it is an unfair accuser to be answered with truth. How can you tell the difference in your own life, and how should you respond to each?
5. John connects a clear conscience with bold prayer: “if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God, and whatever we ask we receive from him” (3:21–22). How should we rightly understand this promise about answered prayer?

6. A condemning heart can quietly poison your boldness, your joy, and your willingness to serve. Where has self-condemnation been holding you back from drawing near to God or stepping out in obedience? What would change if you truly believed you were welcome in His presence?
7. John summarizes God's command in two parts: "that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another" (3:23). Why does John bring belief and love together as a single command, and what does this teach about genuine faith?
8. Confidence before God grows as we actively keep His commands and love His people, not as we passively wait to feel better. What is one specific act of obedience or love God is calling you to that would, in John's words, help your heart no longer condemn you?
9. John says we know God abides in us "by the Spirit whom he has given us" (3:24). What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the believer's assurance, and how does John's teaching guard against both ignoring the Spirit and claiming new revelations or miraculous signs today?
10. Look back across this lesson on confidence before God. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses, and the single truth from 1 John 3:19–24 that you most need to carry into the coming week.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Romans 8:1, no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus; Romans 8:14–17, the Spirit bearing witness that we are children of God; Hebrews 4:14–16, drawing near with confidence to the throne of grace; Acts 2:38–39, the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit; 1 John 5:14–15, confidence that God hears when we ask according to His will.