

Assurance – Part 3

Holy Assurance

This week we continue in 1 John 3:19-24 where John writes concerning assurance of salvation. Last week we explored 3 of the six holy affections I wanted to spend time on - love, heart and conscience and how they are related to assurance of salvation. Love is the foundation of all other holy affections and our love for Christ and other Christians is an outward sign of a heart and soul that has been regenerated by God. Even though our heart fails us at times with dark thoughts and desire for sin, the Apostle John tells us in verse 20, “for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart.” The regenerated heart activates our conscience and it begins to function as it should. The conscience of unbelievers has been clouded by the low values of society and the lies of Satan. For those God calls He awakens their conscience to holiness. It is the alarm system for the boundaries we are to live as holy before God. In verses 23 and 24 we find the key to our assurance, “This is his God’s commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.” God is greater than the evil Satan has brought into the world; He is greater than your sin. Having a relationship with God through Jesus is the only hope for mankind to be able to live holy and apart from the corruption of this world. God does require obedience, not perfect obedience for we will not be perfected until heaven, but a

heart of obedience. This desire to be obedient is a heart issue. One does not take sin lightly because God covers our sin in the sacrifice of Jesus. But, at the same time you avoid morbid self-condemnation. You continually go back to Christ and the holy affections of your renewed soul. A believer consciously works to exhibit love for God's people. Love is the evidence of a grateful heart given to you by God's grace.

This begs these questions: Are you thankful to God? Does your heart reach out in holy love to God? Is God the One you desire to honor and to please? No matter what your conscience and your heart may say to you, God is greater than your heart. He knows more about what's wrong with you than you do. He also knows the holy affections that are there as a result of His transformation of your life. Be encouraged even when you are convicted by your sin. God has provided for your repentance and cleansing from sin.

The benchmark of our growth is our love for God. By His love, we are able to love the brethren and by His love we are made thankful for His grace. God is greater in knowledge, greater in holiness, greater than our hearts and He has promised us that we are His and He is faithful to His own.

This morning we continue with 3 more holy affections of the heart. Prayer changes our heart and mind giving us the desire to be obedient. A prayerful heart with a desire to be obedient surrenders to the power of God's Spirit – this is faith. This morning we will investigate prayer, obedience and Spirit instilled faith.

Prayer

Most likely, even though we are saved sinners, the distractions of the world continue to plague us. A consistent prayer life is difficult. Does anyone here feel they pray too much? Certainly, not me! Most of us know we can do better at prayer. Routine and discipline helps improve our prayer life. Martin Luther wrote to his friends in 1535 saying, “It is a good thing to let prayer be the first business of the morning and the last at night. Guard yourself carefully against those false, deluding ideas which tell you, ‘Wait a little while. I will pray in an hour; first I must attend to this or that.’ Such thoughts get you away from prayer into other affairs which so hold your attention and involve you that nothing comes of prayer for that day.” If one spends time at the beginning of the day in prayer it sets up the mind and heart for the day. The Apostle Paul encouraged the saints in Thessalonica to “pray without ceasing.” (1 Thessalonians 5:17) If I have spent time with the Lord in the morning it is easier to pray without ceasing throughout the day as God puts people and concerns on my heart. When I start the day in prayer it gives me the right attitude for the day and enables me to “give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thess. 5:18) The trials of the day affect me less and I am able to keep my focus on Christ. I am able to better travel through the day and “... not quench the Spirit” (1 Thess. 5:19) but allow the Spirit to direct me through the day.

As we spend time in prayer God washes away the shallow prayer talk of the first minute or so to take us to the depths of our heart and concerns and hurts and needs. We can become bold in prayer for we are coming closer to God’s heart and His desires become our desires. Look in your Bibles at 1st John 3 beginning in

verse 21, “Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; ²² and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.” I want to take time to explore what John wants us to see in this statement. “Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us.” Our conscience and heart condemns us as we fail everyday, but God gave us His Spirit to encourage us, to say to us, because of your heart of love for Christ you are forgiven, you do not have to sink into depression and you do not have to feel condemned. Prayer brings this cleansing, forgiveness and grace to one’s heart. We are speaking and listening to God who loves us warts and all.

As a pastor I struggle, should I not be living at a higher level more consistently? How do I pray more? I can be overwhelmed with self-conviction. In addition there is conviction by some people who look at a pastor and expect him to be perfect, which is unrealistic, for a pastor is a saved sinner. They seem to be waiting for any slip up. This can almost paralyze one with fear. Other people see a pastor as perfect despite their failures and sins and this is scary for there is too much license and lack of accountability. Before you start feeling sorry for me, is this not the same two outlooks the world has for Christians, for you, that is, if you are openly Christian in your life style. How do we deal with this? We keep our balance and the right perspective by studying of the Word and spending time in prayer.

Prayer builds our faith and confidence. We gain confidence not in our ability but in God’s. In our society we are told we are self-made. Pull yourself up by your bootstraps; no body is going to build your future but you. But, as Christians we are not self-made, but a new creation made in the image of God, by God, for God

and to serve God. It is prayer that brings us back to who God is and who we are in God.

If our heart is no longer condemning us, we've confessed our sins, we have embraced and believe, we then celebrated the promise of God as those who are in Christ. We are able to celebrate that all those sins that we have committed have been paid for by Christ. We have confidence that even though our behavior has fallen short and it may momentarily appear we do not love God or that we have lost our holy affection towards Him, as we pray God brings us past these things and we find the barrier between God and us is dismantled and we are able to rush back to Him. In this state we can celebrate the fact that God knows way down deep inside of us, even though it's not apparent at the moment, that we love Him, that we have holy affection toward Him and as we get past those sins and past our conscience condemning us, we find ourselves with a kind of confidence that causes us to rush into the presence of God and whatever we ask we receive from Him. The second half of verse 21 and on into 22 tells us, [“we have confidence before God; ²² and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.”](#) If we have repented and have been brought into fellowship once again with God, by our very act of prayer we are obedient and He will give us whatever we ask because we ask as He has directed. This is the opposite of when you are young and you pray for a corvette to impress others. You see all the guys driving corvettes are middle aged or older and you think it isn't fair - a corvette is meant for the young. Of course, these older guys driving the corvettes prayer is for a full head of hair and to be younger. These kinds of prayers are neither said from true faith or understanding of God's Word or a right relationship with God.

In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus the incarnate prayed, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.” (Matthew 26:39) The man Jesus had some fear of the coming hours, the pain. However, even though He let His humanity show He always sought the Father’s will. God wants to hear of all our hurts, desires, frustrations, joy, sadness and regrets. Then God will instill His will and His desires will become our desires.

This is amazing; read verse 21 again with me, “Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God.” The verse begins with “Beloved” meaning it is already done you are a child of the living God by His action and His grace. Continuing the verse says, “if our heart does not condemn us.” We have just seen that as a Christian our conscience functions on a higher level, and it is aware what is holy and what is not. But, God is saying if you repent, your sin is forgiven, you are washed clean by the blood of Christ, so your heart and conscience can longer condemn you. Therefore, verse 21 continues, “we have confidence before God”, because of God and not because of ourselves comes our confidence. The word translated here, as “confidence” is *parrēsia* and means boldness and frankness. You are able to approach God through prayer and say exactly what is on your heart and mind.

When you invite guests to you home you tell your children to behave and for them to not ask too many questions. We often had people visiting and staying with us from many countries throughout the world. You do not want your children asking why are you dressed that way? Why do you have such a funny sounding name? But with God, when you have repented and been forgiven you do not have to watch what you say. You can come boldly for your “heart does not

condemn” you. Your heart is right and you have holy affection for God. You run to God and open your heart in bold prayer. It is freedom in prayer. It is an open relationship; it is a face-to-face relationship with God. If only we could have this type of relationship with other Christians. When you come to God in prayer you do not have to worry about rejection. You do not have to fear ridicule. His judgment and cleansing will bring you a peace this world does not understand. You can open your heart with complete safety.

We can go back to chapter 2 of 1st John and in verse 28 we read, “Now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.” Jesus has cleansed our souls and we have no shame before Him now or at His coming. We need not fear the return of the King. Jumping ahead to chapter 5, verse 14, “This is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.” No matter what we ask as we spill it out in prayer from our heart - God hears us. This brings great confidence. We know this is true because Jesus paid for each of our sins and God the Father sees and hears us through the righteousness of Christ.

This should bolster your faith for this is evidence of a regenerated soul and a new heart of flesh. The unredeemed sinner has no desire to run to God to unload the depths of his mind and heart. He either does not believe there is a God or would be so filled with dread at the thought of exposing himself before God. The unbeliever has no relationship with God. What other religion believes in a relationship with the living God? Other religions pray to their god or gods but there is a chasm as wide as the universe between them and their god. But the

saints do have a relationship with God for the Lord has regenerated believers and made them His own loving children. As a child of God we may approach Him as Abba Father, as daddy, and the redeemed sinner knows that anything he asks within the will of God he will receive because God has promised to meet all our true needs.

My beloved, do not doubt your salvation. How do you know you are a true Christian? You have a holy affection for God and everything that is of God. This gives you a holy affection for the brethren. You have experienced the grace of God in His saving you and you want others to experience God's grace. Jesus commanded, “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.’ ” (Mark 12:30-31) Is God your holy affection? As Christians the answer is, “Yes” for He is the purpose and focus of Christian life.

Unlike people who know you only on the surface or to a shallow depth and seem ready to judge, God knows you as the psalmist wrote, “For ~~you~~ God created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.” (Psalm 138:13-14) God gives us a love for Him, for our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. He gives us a deep gratitude for His grace in our lives and gives us a boldness to come before Him in prayer.

E. M. Bounds wrote, “Nothing distinguishes the children of God so clearly and strongly as prayer. It is the one infallible mark and test of being Christian. Christian people are prayerful. The world-minded are prayerless. Christians call

on God. The worldly ignore God and do not call on His name. But even Christians need to cultivate continual prayer. Prayer must be habitual, but much more than a habit. It is duty, yet one that rises far above and goes beyond the ordinary meaning of the word. It is the expression of a relation to God, a yearning for divine communion. It is the outward and upward flow of the inward life toward its original fountain. It is an assertion of the soul's paternity, a claiming of the sonship that links a Christian to the eternal Father." Prayer life is a benchmark of the Christian. I am convicted along with you that I need to set the world aside and spend more time in prayer.

Obedience

The life of a Christian is marked by obedience for without it we would fail to live holy. Not only would we not pray, but also we would not study God's Word and meditate on it. Without obedience we would not study and pray, and the world would seep into our lives. If this happens we would call ourselves Christian but live as the unsaved world. John writes in verse 22, "Whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him." This is another holy affection, the desire to be obedient to God, and to "keep his commandments." This obedience brings peace to the Christian life. You have heard me many times tell you how foundational obedience is to the Christian life and I do not want to dwell again too long on this. However, let me take you back to John 15, where Jesus said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He God the Father cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, and I

will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ...⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.¹⁰ If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love." (John 15:1-4, 9-10) Verse 10 sums up the verses before it.

John chapter 15 is about obedience. Without obedience we will not produce fruit in our lives or in the lives of others and the Father will prune us for our own good. Pruning is painful, but necessary. Would it not be better to work towards obedience and enjoy peace of Christ in your life? As Paul said to the Corinthians, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." (1 Corinthians 10:31) Those who are true believers are known by their obedience, not to the world but to Christ. Jesus makes that clear in His upper room discourse. Obedience is essential! We keep God's commandments and His commandments are the written Scripture. We do the things that are pleasing in His sight. Christians are no longer consumed with the ambition of the world. Yet, Christians work hard and with excellence, as it is a witness to the lost. However, Christians live for God's glory and what is pleasing in His sight. This is one of the strongest testimonies to those in our lives and for those who observe our lives.

There is a difference between true believers, unbelievers and what now is accepted by many as - unbelieving believers. To say one is Christian and live in disobedience exposes the heart and shows the disconnection between them and God. To claim to be Christian and not love the brethren defies the teachings of scripture. To say one is Christian and there are no holy affections or fruit of the Spirit in their life is an indication that they are unbelieving believers, which

means they are unbelievers. To not believe in God's grace and to not have a driving force to seek His grace shows disconnection in one's life. To not desire to seek God in prayer and pour one's heart out to God as one's Creator and Father is to live void of God's blessing. To **not** strive to be obedient to God's commandments is contrary to what is being taught in this passage. Christians live with holy affections for God and all that is holy. We bask in God's grace and have a deep appreciation that He sent Christ to cover our sins and bring us back to Him. Prayer is to communicate with the only true God and is a blessing beyond what we fully understand. I am so thankful God has given us the gift of prayer. These holy affections mark the life of a Christian and they are undergirded by obedience.

Spirit

Obedience is clearly indicated at every point of the New Testament, inherent in every command given to believers. It is not burdensome and it is not grievous and it is joyous for Christians. Since our time is almost gone, let me give you the last holy affection I want to speak on this morning. The holy affection of Spirit filled faith in Christ.

Let us visit verse 23 once again, [“And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.”](#) If you believe in Christ and love the brethren you are a Christian. This comes from being indwelt by God as His Holy Spirit. The process we call sanctification or growing closer to Christ and becoming more Christ-like in our life journey is only possible by the power of the Spirit. It is the Spirit that gives you faith and faith gives you love and holy affection for God. Spirit filled faith empowers you

to love other Christians. We should be so grateful for it is all by the power of God and has little to do with us. Salvation is not a human act. Before God's regeneration one is spiritually dead and dead people can do nothing because they are dead. Only God can breathe new life into the dead as God did with Adam. "The LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature." (Genesis 2:7) This is the God I worship, the God who created the universe from nothing, the God who created life from dust, the God that takes spiritually dead beings and makes them into His children. Your father and mother give you physical life that is three score and ten. "Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away." (James 4:14) However, God gives you spiritual life that is eternal. This brings us to one of the most famous verses in all of Scripture, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." Who can tell me the address of this verse? Right, it is John 3:16. Only God gives eternal life.

Closing

My beloved, John wants us to understand simple faith. Spirit filled faith is given by the grace of God. If you believe in Jesus as the Christ you are saved. If you are saved you are filled with the Holy Spirit. When you are filled with the Holy Spirit you have holy affections for God; loving all that is of God, especially His inspired Word, the Bible. A Christian has a heart filled with God's Spirit for God removed from you a dead soul and a heart of stone and gives you a heart of flesh and a Spirit filled soul that for the first time is able to love Him and others. God makes

your conscience alive. God takes your conscience that has been numbed by this fallen world and the evil of Satan to not recognize right from wrong and makes it function as it was meant to. This gives you a love for God and for His commandments. You have a desire to be obedient and obedience brings a life of peace and healing. Obedience leads to a desire for the study of the Word of God. It gives you a desire for prayer. Spending time with the only living God in communion and communication changes your perspective to God's thinking and will. Prayer is the air of Spirit filled life we breathe from God. We cannot do any of this on our own power or by our own will. To enable us to live as God's children He gives us the gift of His Spirit. God's own Spirit comes to live in a believer. It is the power of God's Spirit that gives a Christian the complete assurance of salvation. If you do not have these holy affections or fruit of the Spirit in your life, then it is time to come to God and let Him make you His child. Let God change you forever. Come! Know God and have assurance of eternity! Come to Jesus!