



# CAPITOL COMMISSION™

## Dealing with Doubt (1 John 3:19-24)

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### **Weekly Bible Study Schedule**

- **Tuesday, January 28, 7 AM in HHR #5**  
-Breakfast Provided
- **Tuesday, January 28, 8:30 PM in Office #225**  
(Sen. Wayne Wallingford's office)

The letter of First John is one of challenges and assurances. It gives challenges to those who claim to walk with God and gives assurances to those who truly walk with God.

In the midst of this letter, the Apostle John laid out a series of tests to see if one's life actually matches up with one's claim. The first test was a test of righteousness, of morals. A person cannot claim to "know Him" if they continue to live in a pattern of sin (2:3-6). The second test is a social test; a test of love for one's fellow man. A person cannot claim to live in the light if they do not show an *agape* love toward those around him or her (2:7-11). The third test is what James Boice calls "the Doctrinal Test."<sup>1</sup> A person cannot claim to follow Jesus Christ without an understanding of the truth concerning His person, character and deeds (2:18-27).

The passage that will be examined today continues in a similar vein, but is one that gives a great assurance to those whom God has shown a great love; those "that would be called children of God" (3:1).

## INTRODUCTION

*1 John 3:19-24 We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him <sup>20</sup>in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things. <sup>21</sup>Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; <sup>22</sup>and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. <sup>23</sup>This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. <sup>24</sup>The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.<sup>2</sup>*

In the section preceding this passage, John is quite blunt and used strong language to show the contrast between those who are true children of God and those who are not. Those who are of God display *agape* love toward others, especially toward the brethren. Those who do not are compared to Cain (3:12), are of the world (3:13), abide in death (3:14), called murderers (3:15) and do not have God's love in them (3:17). These are frightful concerns for those who "think" they are living in the light.

This message can also be disconcerting for those who wonder if they "measure up." With that seemingly in mind, John penned the passage we are studying to give confident assurance to those who are God's children so they may live fruitful and pleasing lives unto God.

There are five things in this section that casts away this paralyzing doubt.

## AN ASSURED KNOWLEDGE

"How does a Christian deal with doubt? Although, there are many causes for it, there is only one answer: by knowledge" – James M. Boice.<sup>3</sup>

John's first statement after his hard-hitting words in the previous passage, is a statement of knowledge. A person of God can know that he or she is "of the truth" (another form of saying "a child of God" or "walking in the light" or "knowing Him"). The "by this" phrase is pointer back up to the last statement: "Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth (3:18). Evidence of a person's right standing before God is exhibited in their care and concern for others; a truth John has declared already in this letter (2:7-11) and will again (4:7-21).

A reminder is in order: we must define this love biblically and not how we think it should look. In past studies of 1 John, we have defined the love that John described. *Agape* love is a distinct love which is seen in the giver's deliberate choice to care for the welfare of the recipient; regardless of the recipient's worthiness or willingness to receive it. *Agape* love can be understood as an attitude. It is the attitude of God the Father toward the Son (John 17:26). It is also God's attitude toward mankind (John 3:16) and the believer's attitude toward Him and other humans (John 13:34; 2 Peter 1:7). *Agape* is also used to describe the attribute of love in God (1 John 4:8). *Agape* love is definitely seen in its actions. It is not primarily motivated by feelings, although feelings can be involved. It is evidenced by the giver's action of care to the receiver.

### CAPITOL COMMISSION BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS, LOBBYISTS & STAFF: TUESDAYS @ 7AM, HEARING ROOM #5

LEGISLATORS: TUESDAYS @ 8:30PM, OFFICE #225

PROCLAIMING THE GREATNESS AND GLORY OF GOD IN THE MISSOURI STATE CAPITOL

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The knowledge that a person has this type of love and it is seen in their “deeds and truth” can be assuring that they have been made right before God. The opposite is also true—where there is no love, there is much cause for doubt.

### A CONFIDENT HEART

Secondly, a confident heart before God helps to deal with doubt. Four times in this passage, John makes reference to the “heart” (*kardia* in the Greek). Whereas *kardia* could be a reference to one’s organ which pumps blood throughout the body, it is also used to describe the place where one thinks, feels, knows, decides, judges between right and wrong, and holds convictions. This second option is what fits best within the context.

In the movie *Apollo 13*, the mission control center monitored, decided, and questioned everything. This is a good way to describe the heart—it is a person’s “mission control center”. This would be the understanding of the Hebrew and Greek cultures of Jesus’ day.<sup>4</sup>

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**THE ‘FROM HIM’ CLEARLY REFERS TO GOD THE FATHER AS THE SOURCE OF THESE ANSWERED PRAYERS. IT IS ‘CLEAR THAT THESE ANSWERS ARE NOT MERELY FORTUITOUS CIRCUMSTANCES BUT COME FROM HIM AS HIS SPECIFIC RESPONSE’.**

**--DANNY AKIN**

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The confidence of one’s heart is a “boldness” or “freedom of speech.” “It describes the privilege of coming before someone of importance, power, and authority and feeling free to express whatever is on one’s mind.”<sup>5</sup> For the child of God, it is the joy of being able to approach the throne of God in prayer and praise.

It is not a flippancy for one must remember whom he or she is approaching. Yet, because of Christ (Hebrews 4:14-16), one can stand boldly or confidently before the Sovereign of the Universe.

But, a person’s heart (or we may say “conscience”) may try to condemn or cast doubt. When one has sinned, this is needed. Again, though, when one is

“of the truth” there is the reminder that when one of God’s children go to Him in repentance and confession, there is always forgiveness (1 John 1:9).

Other times, a person’s heart will falsely accuse the believer. And that is John’s reminder that God is greater than our “mission-control centers” and He knows what is actually true about us—a terrifying thought to those who are not His children but a great comfort to those whom He has redeemed. He knows that He has redeemed them and they stand before Him forgiven and righteous.

### ANSWERED PRAYERS

And this confident heart leads to prayers being asked and answered. When God’s redeemed and cleansed people stand before Him without fear (2:28; 4:17) in prayer, He answers. And these answered prayers remove doubts that His child is in right fellowship with Him.

In understanding the full teaching on prayer, these requests must be in line with the will of God. God’s people are not to pray for those things which they know are outside of God’s will. How do they know what is in or out of God’s will? By being “of the truth”, growing in love toward God and others and knowing and doing what pleases Him. It is these prayers that one who is in the light can boldly stand before the throne and seek to be answered.

The present tense use of the verbs “ask” and “receive” describe ongoing actions. The one who is “of the truth” continues to stand with a confident heart before throne of God laying his requests before Him and finding they are answered. Daniel Akin wrote, “The ‘from him’ clearly refers to God the Father as the source of these answered prayers. It is ‘clear that these answers are not merely fortuitous circumstances but come from Him as His specific response.’”<sup>6</sup>

### OBEDIENT ACTIONS

John’s fourth aspect in this passage comes from the condition of answered prayer—the obedience to His commands and desire to please Him.

God does not answer prayer based upon the merit of the one who has approached His throne. He is not looking at him or her to see if they have done their good deeds in order to answer. He answers because obedience is the state or condition in which His children live. The desire not to obey nor

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please Him is evidence that one has not been redeemed and thus, not His child.

While the Apostle noted two separate commands, it is clear from the rest of His letter that the two are quite intertwined. One cannot truly believe in Jesus Christ if he or she is not showing love to others. And the flip side is true, also. True love cannot be shown unless it is done in the truth of nature and person of Jesus Christ.

The first command obeyed is to “believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ” (3:22b). What a packed statement!! Two important aspects of this sentence need to be unpacked.

- a. To “believe” is a reference to a past point when one believed that Jesus is the Christ which has produced on-going results of a changed life. To “believe”, though, “involves total commitment and obedience to Him (cf. John 8:31; Matthew 7:21/Luke 6:46)...”<sup>7</sup> It is much much more than a simple acknowledgement, it is placing one’s trust and faith in the thing believed.
- b. “...in the name of His Son Jesus Christ” refers to all that He is—“the Divine Son, the incarnate Deity, the sinless Human, the Messianic Savior, and all other facets of His unique nature and personhood.”<sup>8</sup> John made sure that those who are children of God believe all that has been revealed concerning the Son. We are not allowed to cut and paste the type of Jesus that makes us feel comfortable.

The first command is to fully trust and commit to everything that Jesus is and has done in history on behalf of God’s people.

The second command has been covered earlier. The love commanded here is *agape* love—a distinct love which seen in the giver’s deliberate choice to care for the welfare of the recipient; regardless of the recipient’s worthiness or willingness to receive it. It is not primarily motivated by feelings, although feelings can be involved. It is evidenced by the giver’s action of care to the receiver.

One last note in this point: When John united “keep His commands” and “do the things that please Him”, he is pointing out that the obedience is not a “legalistic” attempt to win His favor. Rather, obedience comes because the child of God desires to please the One who has already redeemed him or

her. There is a big difference between obeying in order to be right and obeying because one has been made right. This obedience that pleases God is true evidence that one has been redeemed by God and thus there is no reason to doubt one’s right standing with God.

### A CLOSE CONNECTION

The final “doubt-buster” in this passage is the reminder that God dwells in His people.

These last two verses John has basically copied from his gospel concerning Jesus. The command to believe comes from familiar statements like “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16). The command to love others comes from Jesus’ words at the Last Supper, “This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:12-13).

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**THE LOVE COMMANDED HERE IS AGAPE LOVE—A DISTINCT LOVE WHICH SEEN IN THE GIVER’S DELIBERATE CHOICE TO CARE FOR THE WELFARE OF THE RECIPIENT; REGARDLESS OF THE RECIPIENT’S WORTHINESS OR WILLINGNESS TO RECEIVE IT.**

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Verse 24 also echoes Jesus’ teaching “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love” (John 15:10) and “You are My friends if you do what I command you” (John 15:14).

The person who obeys God is exhibiting the fact that they are in God and that God is dwelling in them (cf. 1 John 1:6-7). But this is not the sole confirmation, but God’s Holy Spirit also confirms this close relationship.

There is an element of mystery here in how the Holy Spirit, who abides in God’s people, confirms one to be in right standing. The Holy Spirit works many things in the life of one of God’s children. He quickens their dead soul, gives understanding to God’s Word, draws them through Christ to

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God, convicts of sin, and is the “down payment deposit” of the inheritance to a child of God (Ephesians 1:13-14).

### CONCLUSION

John starts this section of encouragement by showing what we will know and he concludes this section by reminding the readers of what they know. Right knowledge is how a child of God deals with the doubt of whether he or she is right with God and in true fellowship with Him. An assured knowledge which leads to a confident heart which leads to the answered

prayers of God’s obedient children in whom He dwells. Understanding these things we can see and know gives a great comfort, assurance and defense when times of doubt arrive in the life of a follower of Christ.

But, friend, if you do not “believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ”, you have no assurance of right standing before the throne of God. You are standing before Him with no defense but your own good works and charms—which are very lacking and not nearly enough. Assurance can be found, though, but only in Jesus Christ.

God can forgive a person of his or her sins—are you interested?

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<sup>1</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1979), 66.

<sup>2</sup> All passages in Capitol Commission Missouri studies are taken from the New American Standard Update version of the Bible; unless otherwise noted.

<sup>3</sup> Boice, 99.

<sup>4</sup> Some additional biblical thoughts concerning the “heart”: In his commentary on Job, Robert Alden wrote, “The heart is not only one of the seats of emotion in Hebrew psychology; but it is also one of the locations of thinking, reasoning or planning.” Thus Solomon stated: *The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, But the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things* (Proverbs 15:28). When answering a question, the righteous man will stop, think, and plan before speaking. The wicked just spouts off whatever is on his tongue without any thought with his heart.

This is quite telling when King David wrote: *The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; There is no one who does good* (Psalm 14:1). The fool has contemplated, thought about and concluded that there is no God. The picture is that the evidence is laid out

before the man, and all the evidence points to the truth that there is obviously God. Then the man thinks and meditates, and his mission control center judges and decides that there is no God. Thus, he draws the judgment that he is a fool; his heart ignores that which is clear and evident.

It is also revealing the nature of the Pharisees when Jesus quoted Isaiah: *This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far away from me* (Mark 7:6). The outside (the lips) appears to honor God, but the inside, their “mission control center”, is far from Him.

<sup>5</sup> John F. MacArthur, *1-3 John* The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007), 145.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel L. Akin, *1,2,3 John* The New American Commentary (Nashville, Tenn.: B & H Publishing Group, 2001), 166. Dr. Akin was using a quote from D.E. Hiebert.

<sup>7</sup> Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John* The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 142-3.

<sup>8</sup> Akin, 168.