

17. The Epistle of 1 John—3:19-20

A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier
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Years ago, Hal Lindsey wrote a book called, *"The Guilt Trip"*.

In that book he talked about how Satan loves to use guilt to condemn us and drive us from God—destroying our walk and neutralizing our witness. Of course, the only thing powerful enough to destroy Satan's guilt trips is understanding (from the Word)—God's grace and love!

And yet, many Christians fall into Satan's guilt 'trap'—and John wants to help them to get free.

1 John 3:16-20 (NKJV)

¹⁶ By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. ¹⁷ But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? ¹⁸ My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. ¹⁹ And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. ²⁰ For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.

The first thing John does is to state, once again, how loving other Christians proves our faith in Jesus is genuine—that we are really children of God.

He tells us that God's love (especially for the family of God) is manifested by helping those in need—tangibly, practically (verses 17-18).

"By this", he said in verse 19, **"we know that we are of the truth (saved)."**

He goes on to say, **"...and shall assure our hearts before Him."** (verse 19b)

So, victory over the devil begins with our salvation—but it doesn't end there.

As we have been saying, salvation won't help you to live a fruitful, victorious life if you don't have the *assurance* that you are saved!

The dictionary defines assurance as: *"full confidence; freedom from doubt; certainty."*

Assurance starts with self-examination—which we are commanded as Christians to do:

- *"Judge yourselves and you won't be judged by God someday."*
- *"Make you calling and election sure."*
- *"Examine yourself to make sure that you are really in the faith."*

How do we do this? By looking for spiritual fruit in our lives—or in other words, by looking for changes—for transformation.

Someone who is genuinely saved will undergo a transformation in how they think, how they talk, how they live and with whom they associate with that will be—an unmistakable testimony that they are saved and being transformed by the Holy Spirit who is now living inside them.

So, assurance is vitally important in the lives of all of God's children—essential for their victory, fruitfulness and service for God.

Satan knows this only too well and so he tries to use guilt and condemnation to *“shut us down!”*
But the only way the devil can use guilt and condemnation against us is by putting us under the law. Legalism destroys assurance every time!

As we said last time—many pastors and church leaders in their zeal to see their people walking with God and bearing fruit—place them under the law.

In other words, they tell them that unless they are constantly doing good works (going to church, giving money to God and not smoking, drinking, going to movies, or dressing and looking inappropriately (however they define it)—that they are either fake Christians or Christians who have lost their salvation and need to be saved again.

This constant emphasis on works (and the corresponding condemnation that often accompanies it) robs them of the assurance of their salvation and the joy that comes from the knowledge that they are saved, sustained and eternally secured by God's grace—not by their works. (Galatians 3:1-3)

1 John 3:19-20 (NKJV)

¹⁹ **And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.** ²⁰ **For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.**

Sometimes, a Christian, who goes to a church that *does* teach grace and not law will still battle with condemnation. This is often the result of them having a tender heart towards God and a tendency to be too hard on themselves—constantly thinking they're a failure as a Christian.

A Christian that is still young in the faith is especially susceptible to the devil's condemnation.

Not having had time to grow in their faith and knowledge of the Word—they are still a 'baby Christian', and as such ignorant as to what God's Word teaches about His grace and unconditional love for them.

This allows the devil to use their tender but immature heart to condemn them.

While they cannot lose their salvation (if they are truly saved)—they can begin to lose the *assurance* of that salvation due to a heart that keeps condemning them.

John comforts them by saying that—**“If our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things”**.

Some of you might be thinking—*“Okay, but what exactly does that mean?”*

It's John's way of saying that, sometimes a child of God can be overly hard on themselves where they *‘set the bar’* so high that they begin to have unrealistic expectations in their walk with the Lord.

Expectations so high that they border on perfection so that any sin, no matter how small and unintended, becomes the justification to condemn themselves as worthless failures.

This extreme legalism becomes so burdensome and so exhausting that eventually they can't live with the guilt of failure any longer and they wind up walking away from the Lord—or even worse, committing suicide. (Elaborate)

Now look, I'm not saying that 'small' sins aren't an issue and only 'big' sins need to be taken seriously—remember what Solomon said in Song of Solomon 2:15, that it's *"the little foxes that spoil the vine."* (Explain)

All sin is serious in God's eyes and He wants us to take all of it seriously as well.

It's just that we are all like little children learning to walk, and when we fall (to sin) He wants us to acknowledge our sin, confess it, repent—and get back up and start walking with Him again!

What the devil wants is to tempt us to sin and when we fall—he wants us to condemn ourselves, stay down and give up by buying into his lie that God is thru with us and that in His eyes we are nothing more than miserable failures so—"get out of My sight!"

Often, we hand Satan the 'bat' that he uses to beat us with by trying to prove our love and devotion to the Lord by making Him promises that things are going to be different—*"You watch Lord, I'll show You!"*

Maybe you've done this very thing—where you've made the Lord a promise, a promise that with all your heart you intended to keep.

- Maybe you said to Him, *"Lord that's it I'm going to quit smoking or drinking or looking at pornography."*
- Or maybe you said, *"Lord, things are going to be different between us, I'm going to start getting up earlier so I can spend some time with You in prayer before I start my day."*
- Or *"I'm going to stop watching so much T.V. and spend that time in the Word."*
- Or maybe you purposed to start being more of a verbal and visible witness for the Lord at work or some other place.

If you've ever promised the Lord things were going to be different, you were going to make some changes, you were going to be more committed—only to fail and feel the guilt that comes from failing the Lord—then you know how Simon Peter felt.

You see the evening before Jesus was crucified, in the upper room, as He and His disciples were observing the Passover together. Jesus had told His disciples—

Mark 14:27, 29 (NKJV)

²⁷ "...All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep will be scattered.' ... ²⁹ Peter said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble, yet I *will* not be."

Luke 22:31-33 (NKJV)

³¹ And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift *you* as wheat. ³² "But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to *Me*, strengthen your brethren." ³³ But he said to Him, "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death."

John 13:38 (NKJV)

³⁸ Jesus answered him, "Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow [twice] till you have denied Me three times.

Mark 14:31-32 (NKJV)

³¹ But he spoke more vehemently, "If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!"

Now I believe that Peter was sincere, I believe with all of his heart he meant to keep that promise to his Lord—the spirit was willing, but his flesh was weak. That's the problem with making God promises, no matter how sincere or well-intentioned they are—you're putting confidence in *your* strength instead of relying on *His* strength.

Again, you can't use the flesh to defeat the flesh—only the Holy Spirit can give victory over the flesh. (That's why New Year's resolutions fail). Jesus told all His disciples they would forsake Him before the night was out and yet Peter assured the Lord that his love and commitment to Him was stronger than the other disciples.

He promised Jesus that even though the other disciples failed Him—*"I will never fail You! You can count on me Lord; I won't let you down—I'm 'Rocky Johnson!'"* (Explain)

However, nine or ten hours after Peter made that promise—Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane and was put on trial by the Sanhedrin in the home of Caiaphas the High Priest. Peter was out in the courtyard of Caiaphas's house, warming himself by the fire and waiting to see what was going to happen to Jesus.

It was while he was there that three times, he was accused of being one of Jesus' disciples and three times he denied even knowing Jesus.

Now Luke tells us something about that scene that no other gospel writer records.

Luke tells us that immediately after Peter denied the Lord for the third time that Jesus, from where He was standing in Caiaphas's house, turned and looked at Peter.

What kind of a look did Jesus give Peter? We're not told, we're left to speculate.

1. Was it a look of anger?

There are a lot of Christians who think that when they fail, God is angry with them.

Maybe it stems from having an earthly father, who was hard on them, a father they could never please, who never acknowledged their accomplishments but only condemned them for their failures.

And so now when they fail as a Christian, they imagine their heavenly Father saying (in their earthly father's voice)—*"I told you, you were no good! You're nothing but a failure, you'll always be a failure, and I'm sick and tired of putting up with you now get out of my sight!"*

2. Was it was a look of disappointment?

There are many Christians who, when they fail, think they have let God down.

They imagine the voice of God whispering in their ears, *"I can't believe you did that! I expected more from you. You've really disappointed Me."*

This produces an incredible amount of guilt and shame which causes them to *'run and hide'* from God as Adam did in the Garden.

3. Maybe Jesus gave Peter a look of sadness.

Often, we feel that our failures cause God to look at us with the kind of sad look that one would give to a person who is a lost cause.

That the Lord is looking at us, shaking His head like we would look at some sad, pathetic loser who, no matter how many chances he is given, always blows it and will never amount to anything in life.

Of course, that causes a person to feel like it's no use trying anymore, *"I'll never amount to anything so I'm just going to give up!"*

Let me ask you—what kind of look do you think Jesus gave Peter?

I'll say this to you—the look you think Jesus gave Peter in the light of his failure reveals how you think Jesus looks at you when you fail as a Christian.

a) First of all, I don't believe that Jesus looked at Peter with a look of anger.

The Bible teaches that God's anger is reserved for those living in rebellion, who refuse to repent and not for those who try to live for Him but sometimes fail.

b) I also don't believe that Jesus looked at Peter with a look of disappointment.

You see for God to be *'disappointed'* with us it means that our actions took Him by surprise—that we acted in a way He didn't expect.

However, that is impossible for God Who has all-knowledge and knew every sin we were going to commit before He ever made us.

We know that Peter's denial of Jesus didn't catch the Lord off guard and disappoint Him because when Peter promised the Lord he would never be stumbled because of Him—Jesus told Peter that before the night was out he was going to deny Him three times.

I believe Jesus told Peter this in advance, not only to warn him not to put his trust in his own strength but also to prepare him—to soften the blow of his failure by teaching Peter (and all of us) that our sins never surprise or disappoint God—grieve Him yes, surprise Him no.

c) And finally, I don't think that Jesus gave Peter a look of sadness—the kind of look we might give a person who was a lost cause, a hopeless loser.

The kind of person we often feel like for blowing it as much as we do—which causes us to say, *"Lord, I'm hopeless, I'll never amount to anything as a Christian—why don't You just give up on me I've given up on myself."*

Forgetting that we are 'a work in progress' and that Paul wrote to the Philippians *"...being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ"* (Philippians 1:6)

You say, “Okay pastor, what kind of look do you think Jesus gave Peter?”

I personally believe it was a look of loving compassion—the kind of look a parent would give a child who is learning to walk but keeps falling.

Hosea 11:1-4, 8 (NLT2)

¹ “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and I called my son out of Egypt. ² But the more I called to him, the farther he moved from me, offering sacrifices to the images of Baal and burning incense to idols. ³ I myself taught Israel how to walk, leading him along by the hand. But he doesn’t know or even care that it was I who took care of him. ⁴ I led Israel along with my ropes of kindness and love. I lifted the yoke from his neck, and I myself stooped to feed him...

⁸ “Oh, how can I give you up, Israel? How can I let you go?...My heart is torn within me, and my compassion overflows.

If the Lord can forgive Israel their *rebellion* under the law—don’t you think He will forgive you for your *weaknesses* and *failings* now that you’re His child under grace?

Look, God loves you. He’s not angry with you. He is not up in heaven condemning you for your failures.

He knew all the times you were going to fail before He ever created you and He still wanted you to be His child.

Now that you are His child, He’s not going to condemn you
because you’re weak and sometimes fail and fall in your walk with Him.

Paul the apostle made this clear in Romans 8 when he asked the question, “*Why would God condemn the very people He sent His Son Jesus to die for—those who are now His children?*”

Look, God knows our weaknesses, He knows us better than we know ourselves and He isn’t putting any confidence in our strength.

Psalms 103:8-14 (NKJV)

⁸ The Lord *is* merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy...¹⁰ He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. ¹¹ For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; ¹² As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. ¹³ As a father pities *his* children, So the Lord pities those who fear Him. ¹⁴ For He knows our frame; He remembers that we *are* dust.

God knows that we are weak and prone to failure—He is not condemning us for our failures as His children because He uses them to teach us how to walk with Him better in the future—

As someone has written—

“I went to the throne with a trembling heart the day was done. ‘Have you a new day for me dear Master I’ve spoiled this one? He took my day all spoiled and blotted and gave me a new one all unspotted and into my tired heart He cried, ‘Do better now My child.’”

Let me close with a true story about a little boy named William.

William is a pastor’s son who, at the time of this story, was about 7 years old.

It seems that William was a rambunctious little boy who often pushed the patience of his teachers.

One Sunday while driving home from church William, who was unusually quiet, suddenly blurted out, *“Dad, is God watching me?”*

William’s father knew something was behind that question and so he asked, *“Why do you ask me that William, did someone tell you God is watching you?”*

William responded in a sheepish tone, *“My Sunday school teacher told me God is watching me—is it true dad? Is God really watching me?”*

William’s father probed deeper, *“Why did your Sunday school teacher tell you God is watching you William?”*

“Well, because, I was kinda acting up in class—but is it true dad? Is God watching me!?”

Now this pastor knew that the way he answered that question had the potential to shape William’s concept of God for many years to come. So, he prayed quickly for wisdom and then said to his son, *“Yes William it’s true, God is watching you—He’s watching you because He loves you so much He can’t take His eyes off of you!”*

And the same is true for all of God’s children—God is watching you. He’s watching you, not because He’s angry with you or disappointed in you or disgusted because you fail.

He’s watching you because He loves you so much He can’t take His eyes off of you!

And like any parent, He wants what’s best for you and so He patiently keeps watching over you, protecting and guiding you each day.

And when you fall He stands ready to pick you up, dust you off, take you in His arms and whisper in your ears, *“I forgive you child, now draw your strength from Me and I’ll teach you how to walk with Me better in the future”*.

Remember you are a work in progress and He who has begun that work will see it all the way through to completion—so be encouraged and draw close to your loving Father in heaven every day for strength—and remember:

“If our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.” (verse 20)

Remember when Peter failed how the Lord asked him, *“Peter do you love Me?”* To which Peter rightly responded, *“Lord, You know all things—You know that I love You!”* (John 21:17--Elaborate)

The devil used Peter’s failure to condemn him, but Peter appealed to Jesus’ omniscience because he knew that God knows all things!

Our heart may condemn us when we fail—but God is bigger than our heart and knows that deep down in our heart we love Him and want to obey Him and please Him—He knows the truth!

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower—please reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Reach out to us [here](#).

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