

Why then does the Apostle say, We shall assure our hearts before God? He reminds us by these words, that faith does not exist without a good conscience; not that assurance arises from it or depends on it, but that then only we are really and not falsely assured of our union with God, when by the efficacy of his Holy Spirit he manifests himself in our love. For it is ever meet and proper to consider what the Apostle handles; for as he condemns reigned and false profession of faith, he says that a genuine assurance before God we cannot have, except his Spirit produces in us the fruit of love. Nevertheless, though a good conscience cannot be separated from faith, yet no one should hence conclude that we must look to our works in order that our assurance may be certain.<sup>1</sup>

**21–22 Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.**

Once again, John includes himself together with the believers to whom he writes by using the first-person plural: “if our heart condemn us not.” Since he has just previously pointed to the guilty conscience of a believer, there may have been some in the community who, struggling with their own failings, were wondering if John was himself acting as their judge. He therefore begins this sentence with the endearing “Beloved,” and identifies himself with them as one who understands the weakness of the flesh and the constant battle against the flesh as one perseveres in their faith.

Thus, the striving against the flesh and persevering in trusting God’s word, along with exercising repentance and claiming the cleansing of one’s soul that comes by confessing one’s sin, the believer’s heart is freed from the inner condemnation of a guilty conscience. It is the very process of repentance, confession, and forgiveness that once again brings confidence of one’s true standing in God’s grace, and therefore one’s identity as a child of God.

And it is a cleansed conscience or heart that opens the path to the throne of grace where we may obtain mercy and help from God Who loves us. Consider these three Scriptures together.

If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.  
(Ps 66:18)

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1 Calvin, *1John*, p. 222.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1Jn 1:9)

Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Heb 4:16)

What is more, the strength and joy which comes into one's life from worshiping God with a cleansed conscience is the very spiritual strength which enables the believer to grow in overcoming the weakness of the flesh.

The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him, and I am helped; therefore my heart exults, and with my song I shall thank Him. (Ps 28:7)

Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; for the LORD GOD (יְהוָה יְהוּה) is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation. (Is 12:2)

*And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.* – This is reminiscent of John 14:13–14 (cp. Matt 7:7).

Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it. (Jn 14:13–14)

Does this mean that God will grant any and every request? No, and this is why John adds “because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.” Is John teaching here that answered prayer is on the basis of personal merit? No. What he is teaching is what is consistently taught in the life of Yeshua Himself and therefore as a pattern for us, namely, that we seek not to do our own will but the will of the Father. We do not obey His commandments in order to receive something we otherwise would forfeit. We obey His commandments out of a heart of love and gratitude for all that He has done for us.

Thus James teaches us that all of our life should be lived with an anticipation of God's expressed will.

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in

business and make a profit.” 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. Instead, you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.” (James 4:13–15)

Kistemaker’s remarks are right on target:

The basis for answered prayer is not blind obedience but a desire to please God with a dedicated love. And God fulfills our requests because of the bond of love and fellowship between Father and child.<sup>1</sup>

**23–24 This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Yeshua Messiah, and love one another, just as He commanded us. 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.**

The opening sentence of v. 23 actually begins with the word “and” in the Greek: *Καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἐντολὴ αὐτοῦ*, “And this is His commandment...,” thus linking v. 23 as a continuation of the previous verse:

...and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight, and this is His commandment....

As noted earlier,<sup>2</sup> the fact that John sums up the commandments (plural) in the combined commandment of faith and love cannot be interpreted to mean that the commandments of God, given in the Torah, are no longer applicable but have been subsumed into a singular (though double-sided) commandment. The use of the singular “commandment” simply envisions God’s commandments as a collective whole, for they have been given to us as the very revelation of His own righteous and holy being.

Further, it is obvious that in the commandments to believe in the name of the Son and to love one another, John is simply repeating the teaching of Yeshua Himself when He summed the whole of the Torah and the Prophets as resting upon two commandments: loving God and loving one’s neighbor.

1 Kistemaker, *1John*, p. 317.

2 See the comments on 2:3-4.

And He said to him, “‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Torah and the Prophets.” (Matt 23:37–39)

The word “depend” in the phrase “On these two commandments depend the whole Torah and the Prophets,” is the Greek *κρεμάννυμι* (*kremannumi*) which carries the basic meaning “to hang.”<sup>1</sup> The picture is of something that is suspended by a rope or other means, apart from which it would fall. Thus, when John sums the whole of salvation in the command to believe in Yeshua and to love one another, he is simply reiterating the very point of Yeshua when He taught the young lawyer who asked about what was the greatest commandment.

But it is clear, both in the words of Yeshua and in John’s reiterating them in our text, that genuine faith in God and in His Messiah Yeshua will result in a heart-felt commitment to demonstrate one’s love for Him by keeping His commandments, as Yeshua states: “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.” (Jn 14:15). And thus the desire and ability to love one’s neighbor as God intends will be the inevitable result as the child of God matures and grows in his or her obedience of faith.<sup>2</sup> Rather than diminishing the commandments given to us in the Torah, John has reinforced the unity of the Torah and thus of all of God’s commandments as His gracious teaching in righteousness.

When John writes “This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Yeshua Messiah...,” some might balk at the idea of faith being a commandment, for it may sound as though faith is a work, and that therefore salvation by faith is actually earned.<sup>3</sup> But to take John’s words with this meaning is to misunderstand the very attribute of faith itself. For faith, far from being that which is produced by the individual himself, is rather the honest admission before God that one has nothing to offer by which he or she could be rightly accepted by Him. Faith is coming to God with empty hands and a genuine heart of repentance before Him, seeking His mercy and grace manifested in His Son Yeshua as the only avenue by which forgiveness and life can be obtained.

1 The verb is used six other times in the Apostolic Scriptures: Matt 18:6; Luke 23:39; Acts 5:30; 10:39; 28:4; Gal 3:13.

2 Cf. Rom 1:5; 16:26.

3 See the remarks of Brown, *1John*, p. 481.

This was Paul's message to the philosophers on the Areopagus:

Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring (*παραγγέλλω, parangellō*) to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead. (Acts 17:30–31)

The Greek word *parangellō*, translated above as “declaring,” more properly carries the sense of “to command” or “to give orders.”<sup>1</sup> Note the ESV translation:

The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.... (Acts 17:30, ESV)

Thus, the commandment to believe is able to be obeyed when the repentance and faith are granted and one comes to the Lord seeking His mercy and the free gift of His grace in Yeshua.

...that<sup>2</sup> we believe in the name of His Son Yeshua Messiah, – The commandment is that we believe in the name of His Son Yeshua, the Messiah. To “believe in the name” means to receive Him as He has revealed Himself, for His “name” represents the whole of His being and what He has done, and to commit oneself to Him in obedience to His will and His ways. Thus, saving faith has substance, that is, it is founded upon the truth as known through God's self revelation, a revelation that has its zenith in the person of the incarnate Son, Yeshua. For He said, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9). This is what John means when he writes that “we believe in the *name* of His Son Yeshua Messiah.” Faith that saves is faith based upon the truth, i.e., that acknowledges what God has said to be true, both about oneself and about Him. This means, therefore, that saving faith has as its object Yeshua Himself and the saving work He has accomplished through His death, resurrection, ascension, and continues to accomplish through His intercession at the right hand of the Father (cf. Rom 8:34). Saving faith is not manifest in a wide and varying range of religious expres-

1 See BDAG, “παραγγέλλω,” p. 780.

2 The use of ἵνα in the phrase ἵνα πιστεύσωμεν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ..., is appositional, linking ἐντολή with believing. See Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Zondervan, 1996), p. 475-76; See also Blass, DeBrunner, Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament* (Univ of Chicago, 1961), p. 196, §389; p. 197, §391.

sions. The substance of saving faith is the Name of Yeshua, that is, the truth that is found in Him.

For as many as are the promises of God, in Him [Yeshua] they are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us. (2Cor 1:20)

*...and love one another, just as He commanded us.* – Faith that saves is the fountain from which love for one another flows. John has placed both faith and love for one another in the same commandment, for they are integrally related. As John has already emphasized (cf. 3:11, 14), loving one another within the body of Messiah is a sure mark of those who abide in Messiah.

John has recorded in his Gospel that Yeshua repeatedly taught His disciples to love one another and did so by giving them the commandment to love.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. (Jn 13:24)

This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. (Jn 15:12)

This I command you, that you love one another. (Jn 15:17)

If we confess to believe in Yeshua and have therefore submitted to His kingship, it follows that we will seek to live in accordance with His commands. To love one another is therefore the natural outgrowth of faithful submission to the will of our Lord and Savior.

*The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him.* – Once again, John utilizes present participles when he writes “keeps His commandments” and “abides in Him and He in him,” thus telling us that one whose life is characterized by keeping His commandments is the one who truly abides in Him, and who therefore experiences the joy and strength of His abiding presence. Moreover, His love is expressed in His abiding presence with His own, a love that includes not only sustaining grace and comfort, but also loving discipline when needed, in order to guard them from straying; “for those whom the LORD loves he disciplines...” (Prov 3:12; cf. Heb 12:6).

Yeshua promised His abiding presence when he said:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing

them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matt 28:19–20)

That the promise of Yeshua's abiding presence goes beyond the lives of the Twelve is obvious, since Yeshua states "even to the end of the age" (ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος.) And it is wonderful to read the more literal expression of the Greek in the phrase "with you always," for it is ἐγὼ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας, literally "I am with you all the days" or perhaps "I am with you every day, even to the end of the age."

*We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.* – Here John emphasizes the supreme gift of God's presence with us through His Spirit, for it is His abiding presence that assures us that we are His and He is ours.

John does not clearly differentiate between the Father and the Son in this statement, nor should he, for the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are one. Thus, Yeshua is with us in the Spirit, as is the Father. Note how Paul easily speaks of the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Messiah as one and the same Spirit:

However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Messiah, he does not belong to Him. (Rom 8:9)

John intends that we recognize the abiding presence of God with us as a matter of true knowledge, not mere speculation. He writes, "We know by this," which is very much like what he wrote in 3:16, "We know love by this...." How do we know that God abides with us and in us through the Spirit? We know it first by faith, for the promises of God are sure, and the word of God gives us His promises. So the primary foundation of our knowledge regarding the abiding presence of God is not first and foremost our experiences in life, but rather the exercise of faith in the word of God. For faith is the very evidence and substance of that which is not seen (Heb 11:1).

Yet we are not to discount that experiential aspects of our life of faith. Surely the comfort of the Ruach HaKodesh, the strength that we receive from God as we call out to Him in times of need, and the very leading of the Spirit through His word and through wise counsel we may receive, is surely evidence of His presence with us. As Paul teaches: "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." (Rom 8:14)

*by the Spirit whom He has given us.* – Once again John reminds us that

the dwelling presence of the Ruach is not something we earned or even deserve, but that the Spirit with us and in us is the gift of His grace, purchased at great price by our Savior, Yeshua.

The sum of what is said is, that it hence appears that we are God's children, that is, when his Spirit rules and governs our life. John at the same time teaches us, that whatever good works are done by us, proceed from the grace of the Spirit, and that the Spirit is not obtained by our righteousness, but is freely given to us.<sup>1</sup>

This final verse of chapter three is a fitting conclusion to the primary message of the chapter, namely, that the person who has come to know the abundant love of God displayed in the giving of His Son Yeshua, will evidence that knowledge gained by faith through living a life of obedience to God and of love to those who are also "children of God."

But this final verse of the chapter also offers a fitting introduction to what comes next. For in the following section John admonishes his readers to recognize that there are those who will teach a contrary message, and who may be quite convincing in their errant teachings. What is it that John continues to emphasize as essential? The centrality of Yeshua and His saving work on behalf of His people. And he does so in the context of community, that is, in the context of loving one another even as God in the Messiah has loved us. It is within community that we care for one another and help each other to remain firm in the truth which was once for all delivered to God's people (Jude 1:3).

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1 Calvin, *1John*, p. 227.