

1 John

Dr. Charles "Buddy" Parrish
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1 John 3:19-24

Vss. 19-22

- There is no doubt that the gnostic teachers and their heresies did great damage to John's churches. Not only did they lose some members of their churches to the false teachers, but clearly even among those who made the right choice and stayed with John's churches, they were shaken. Questions like "What does it mean to be saved?" and "Can I lose my salvation?" and "How do I know I am really saved?" seemed to permeate the congregations. Books have been written on these subjects, but rather than over-answering the questions, John brilliantly moves away from a deep, lengthy theological treatise and boils it all down to simple truths. This is why he keeps going back to what was seen and heard from the beginning. The simple truth is usually the best.
- Into every heart doubt will eventually creep. In the case of our salvation, John offers but one test: the love of Christ. The love of Christ is different than how we normally think of love and is greater than how we normally show love. In the previous verses, John speaks of love being active, something you do, something you demonstrate, not just something you feel. I heard Mark Lowery once remark that he had to get up so early to catch a plane that when he first crawled out of bed he did not "feel saved", but that the good news for baptized, cross-carrying followers of Christ is that we are saved whether we feel that way or not.
- We are to understand the love of Christ not as an emotion, for emotions are fickle, but as a presence, a power, that the Holy Spirit both surrounds us with and invades our spirit with. This is how we can love our enemies and do good to those who hate us and bless those who curse us and pray for those who mistreat us (Luke 6:27-28).
- ..."in whatever our heart condemn us; for God is greater than our heart": So often we are filled with a strong sense of failure and inadequacy when it comes to our service of God. I think about opportunities I have had to do something for the

Kingdom and I missed it, the opportunity was lost. I can rationalize why I froze, why I chose not to act or speak up, but in my heart I know I blew it, I feel like a failure. Then it becomes so easy for The Adversary to creep in and whisper “See, you’re not really the disciple you thought you were. You may not be a disciple after all.” But God is greater than our heart. Not only does He know our sin, but He also knows our love, our hope to be more like Him, the personal grief of our sin. This is why our conscience is not a good guide for a disciple. As a disciple, it is God who tells us what is good, not our conscience. And often it is our conscience that condemns us and makes us feel terribly guilty over things that God has already forgiven us or may not have counted against us at all. Thomas a Kempis wrote that “Man sees the deed, but God knows the intention.” It’s the widow’s mite. A gift of a small amount is given and people dismiss it because it is such a pittance, but God knows the heart, sees the intention, and knows that the widow gave more than all because she gave all she had.

- While he doesn’t use it here, John likes the term “little children” when referring to the church. The image he wants to convey is not of himself as father, but for us to see ourselves as the small children of a loving Father in Heaven who is quick to love and generous with mercy, grace, and forgiveness. We can have confidence in our salvation not because we are good, but because God is good, because He is who He is. He provides for us as we ask. So we are not anxious about what we are to eat or what we are to wear, because our Father in Heaven knows we need all these things. And in this love relationship, like any child who loves their Father, we want to please our Father and show Him that we love Him by being obedient to Him, not rebellious. We keep His commandments therefore, not out of fear but out of love.

Vss. 23-24

- John settles the question of the security of our salvation on two simple points: believe in the name of Jesus and love one another. To the biblical writers, the name was much more than what you are called by. Name meant the whole of who a person is. When Jesus met the Gerasene demoniac, He quickly asked “What is your name?” (Luke 8:30), not to know what to call the poor man, but to determine who he *really* was. And the answer came quickly, “‘Legion’, for many

demons had entered him.” In Psalms 124:8, when David says, “Our help is in the name of the Lord” he means more than just what God is called by, he means the qualities and character of God: His power, love, grace, and mercy. John thus means here what he quotes Jesus as saying to Nicodemus in John 3:16, that whoever believes in Jesus as the Son of God will not perish, but have eternal life.

- The second point to knowing the security of our salvation is our love for one another “just as He commanded.” And how did Jesus command us to love one another? John 13:34; 15:12, “This is my commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.” Without that last clause the command to love one another becomes relative: I may understand love differently than you, so my love for you is relative and limited to my own understanding of love just as your love for me will be. Jesus erases all such thought of our love for one another being open to discussion by adding that we are to love just as He has loved us. Here is where the bar is set. Here is the standard. “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).
- John adds in vs. 24 that “The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him and He in him” and that it is the Holy Spirit who makes all this possible. Yes indeed, for without the Holy Spirit not even belief in Jesus would be possible, for it is only through the power of the Spirit that believing without seeing is possible. “For we walk by faith and not by sight” (2 Cor.5:7) and only the Spirit can make this happen. Moreover, it is only by the Spirit that we are able to love one another as Christ loves us. Going back to vs. 12, if we did not have the Holy Spirit in us and around us, we would so easily become like Cain, filled with envy, hate, and murder. We see this in our news stories every day, from the beheading of innocents by terrorists to drive-by shootings at our local mall. Without the Holy Spirit, killing is so much easier than loving. But even more than what we are not, is what we *are* because of the Holy Spirit. By the power of the Spirit we are able to love the poor and wretched, we are able to love those who hate us and seek to harm us, we are able to touch the leper and love the unlovable. Just as Jesus did. And by *THIS* all people will know that we are His disciples and we will KNOW that we are saved.