

*“The Blessings of God’s Love”*

November 13, 2011

Text: 1 John 3:17-21

**There are many people who never give a thought to the spiritual condition of their eternal souls.**

They may have a daily physical exercise routine & eat only health food, but they rarely if ever exercise their faith, or feed their souls on the bread of life, or the milk/meat of God’s Word.

That makes us all the more thankful for young Xn athletes concerned w/ both their bodies/souls.

1 Tim 4:8=> *“Bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life & also for the life to come.”*

Those who have no concern for spiritual things demonstrate to God their disregard/indifference toward His Word, His will, and ultimately Himself.

They live their lives w/ a presumptuous sense of ease.

That’s a foolish way to live—God will not be mocked.

A day will come when they’ll wish they could redeem just an hour of that time they spent on their bodies, to invest it in their souls instead, entrusting them into X’s care.

By contrast there’s another type of person who constantly worries about his soul’s eternal welfare, and tries to estimate his standing before God by the feelings of his conscience.

He self-examines his heart every day, hoping to find evidence of righteousness rather than guilt, to reassure himself that God would find him acceptable. He is extremely conscientious to the point of being anxious/insecure, but he puts too much stock in his own self-analysis.

Our conscience isn't always a reliable guide in such matters of regeneration; it can be overly strict, overly lenient, or simply misinformed.

Knowing that, Paul wrote in I Cor 4:3-4=> *“I do not even examine myself. / For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord.”*

**In today's text, John will teach us a valid/reliable way of reassuring ourselves about our standing before God, which avoids these potential errors of the conscience.**

It is based on objective evidence of our love for one another, a principle we considered in verse 14 of last week's text=>

*“We **know** that we have passed out of death into life, because we **love the brethren**. He who does not love abides in death” (I Jn 3:14).*

If you lack assurance of your salvation, ask yourself whether/not you love your fellow believers.

John is going to show us there's a direct correlation between the two.

**Today's text reveals 3 blessings we derive from the God-given love manifested in our lives as born again believers, one of them being assurance of our salvation...**

- \* Charity with Regard to Others
- \* Assurance with Regards to Ourselves
- \* Confidence with Regard to God.

It's ironic that God would have to explain why loving others is such a blessing to the believer—it's such an obvious truth. But He does so, nonetheless, through John's words here in our text.

**\* Blessing #1—Charity with Regard to Others**

[1 John 3:17]=> *“But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?”*

**The answer=> It doesn't.**

If one Xn can look at another Xn's need, fully understand the misery it is creating for him/his-family, & not respond in a charitable way, he doesn't have God's love within him. That's what John is saying.

His statement isn't really a question but an exclamation.

Here you have a case where a believer has a legitimate need.

He isn't like the undisciplined man in II Thes 3:10, about whom Paul writes=> *“If anyone will not work, neither let him eat”*—he's either working or wants to.

This is a responsible believer who seeks to do his duty, but for whatever reasons, he can't provide even the basic necessities of life for himself/his-family.

It's not that he's just late on his cell phone payments or that he's having to drop his Netflix subscription.

He's like the unfortunate person James 2 describes=>

*“If a brother or sister is without **clothing** and in need of daily **food**, / and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?” (Jms 2:15-16).*

John is describing a situation in which a Xn witnesses the plight of his brother/sister in X, just as the Good Samaritan witnessed the injured Jew lying on the side of the road.

But instead of responding like that Samaritan, he “**closes his heart against him.**”

He reacts like the Levites who passed by on the other side of the road in order to avoid eye contact with their wounded brother.

The lit. wording is “closes his bowels” because in the Hebrew's mind, compassion was a visceral reaction that came from a person's midsection.

In this case, the so-called “Xn” erects an internal emotional barrier between himself and his needy brother, so the other man's need won't make him uncomfortable.

He blocks the sufferer's access to any tender feelings that might compel him to get-involved/give-help.

**John says this individual's indifference is an indication that the love of God doesn't abide in him—that's significant.**

Because God's love does abide in every born again believer.

Rom 5:5—*“The love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”*

When anyone becomes born again, the H.S. indwells him. God is love, and the H.S. is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Person of the Godhead. So when the H.S. indwells a person, He brings into that individual the influence of His own loving nature.

Every true believer is drawn to loving others by the H.S. within him, making him a more generous/caring person.

That explains why we read in Acts 2:45, that when the Church was originally founded among the poor saints in Jerusalem, those who had this world's goods, made extraordinary sacrifices to help those in need.

There we read=> *“They began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.”*

Acts 4:36 gives us the name of one such man=> Barnabas.

II Cor 8 describes the Macedonians' amazing outpouring of generosity to impoverished Xns in Jerusalem they'd never even met.

Paul writes=> *“In a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. / For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord, / begging us with*

*much entreaty for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, / and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God” (II Cor 8:2-5).*

**You might think such practical outpourings of love couldn't actually happen in today's world.**

But when we told you earlier this year that Teri Lechowski didn't have the money to buy expensive her MS medication, you folks gave over \$2300 dollars so she could.

Why would Xns respond like that?

It's more than the goodness of their hearts, or artificial feelings of guilt that they have so much themselves.

It's the H.S. working within them.

If that's not how they respond, John asks the penetrating question=> How does the love of God abide in them?

Last Saturday we sent out the message on our prayer chain that 3 of our men had been injured in a boating accident, & I feel confident that many of you stopped what you were doing and prayed for them.

Why? Because the H.S. abides in your hearts, so you have a Spirit-given love for your brothers in X.

**The first benefit derived from the love of God w/i a believer's heart is loving charity towards others, that glorifies God's name, because of its extraordinary generosity.**

In the verse just before this (vs 16, which we considered last

week) John wrote=> “*We know love by this, that He [X] laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.*”

Now John shows us how we can/should make such sacrifices for others=> get into their problem w/ them, feel their distress, & help them in a tangible way to manage their crisis.

That’s what X did/would-do out of love for them, and He is the Source of the love w/i us as Xns.

Self-sacrifice is the character of such love, and it is an outward indicator of eternal life within.

**There is always a temptation for professed Xns to pretend they have/feel that kind of love, when in reality they don’t.**

In the early church Ananias/Sapphira yielded to that temptation.

They wanted everyone to think they had been as generous in giving to the poor as Barnabas, while actually keeping some of the money back secretly for themselves.

Believers can still repeat this kind of hypocrisy by insincerely claiming to love others, when they really just want people to think they’re more loving/selfless than the actually are.

So John gently admonishes his readers to love sincerely and without the hypocrisy of pretense=>

**[Verse 18]**=> “*Little children [a term of endearment], let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.*”

**Love that is genuine, is love “in deed and in truth.”**

It's love that makes real sacrifices for others, because it reveals  
God's own loving nature acting within the believer.

It gives evidence that our character has been transformed.

That we have been indwelt by the H.S.

It is a loving generosity that's unspoiled by ulterior motives.

That kind of sincere/unhypocritical love will someday

cause X to declare=> *"Come, you who are blessed of  
My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you  
from the foundation of the world. / For I was hungry,  
and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and  
you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited  
Me in"* (Mt 25:34-35).

Jesus isn't saying we will be rewarded with the Kingdom  
for being charitable.

He is saying that our loving acts of kindness will prove we  
are Xns, and that's why we will receive the Kingdom.

Those who are truly born again have repented of their loveless  
indifference to others' needs.

God has opened their hearts & poured His love into them.

When you come under their sphere of influence, you get  
genuinely loved, with God's love radiating out from  
their hearts.

\* **Blessing #2 (of God's love being in us) Assurance with  
Regard to Others**

**As a believer looks back at his life and sees a record of kind deeds that manifest genuine love, he can feel assured that he is genuinely regenerated.**

[Verses 19-20]=> *“We shall know by this that we **are** of the truth, and shall assure our heart before Him, / in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.”*

The real issue here is not simply what the believer feels/does, but what he is.

John says we can know that we *“**are** of the truth”* if we love in deed/truth.

**What does it mean to be “of the truth” ?**

- \* I Jn 5:7=> *“The **Spirit** is truth.”*
- \* In Jn 14:6, Jesus said He is *“the **truth**.”*
- \* Jn 17:17 says the **Word** is truth.
- \* Jn 18:37 (Jesus)=> *“I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is **of the truth** [regenerated] hears My voice.”*

So *“the truth”* is the regeneration life in those who have responded to the gospel revealed in God’s Word, by believing in X, & being indwelt by the H.S.

The H.S. then enables/causes them to obey X’s command to love both God/man.

They become like X—people *“of the truth,”* living a new kind of regenerated life (eternal life, God’s life).

**John’s point here in verse 19 of our text is that we know “by this” that we’ve become regenerated, & are born again.**

“*By this*” what? => By the fact that the H.S. is impelling us to love others sincerely, not just in tongue/word as John has just said in verse 18.

We now love “*in truth*” with sacrificial deeds of kindness towards other people—especially Xns.

Our sincere love manifests the truth of God within us.

The Xn who sincerely loves belongs to the truth, and is therefore born again.

His love for others is his assurance that he is born again.

Love is the final test of our genuineness as Xns.

It involves a willingness/readiness to sacrifice that not natural to fallen man which is evidence of new-birth, a new nature, & the indwelling H.S.

Our love for others is our own assurance, of our salvation.

**John even takes it a step further=>** “*We shall assure our hearts before Him [God].*”

We live our Xn lives entirely before God’s eyes.

God has seen/recorded our every word/deed, examined the motives behind them all, and fully evaluated them against His own holiness and glory.

And yet, we can feel assured that even He would declare that we love in deed/truth, because our character originates in His truth, & it is “*of [out of ] the truth.*”

**So why do Xns ever lack the assurance of their salvation?**

We do, you know—because doubts about it arise w/i us.

Sometimes we may sing, “Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine;  
O what a foretaste of glory divine,” & we inwardly  
wish we felt that way—but at that moment, we really  
don’t.

What we do feel is spiritual dryness & distance from God.  
The culprit that has stolen our assurance is guilt.

Whether it’s hot/medium/mild guilt, it creates spiritual  
insecurity to one degree or another, about whether  
we’re truly saved.

We feel like David in Psa 32=> *“When I kept silent about  
my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning  
all day long. / For day and night Thy hand was heavy  
upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the  
fever heat of summer”* (Psa 32:3-4).

Imagine David singing *“Blessed Assurance”* under those  
circumstances....

**John has a solution for this problem=> trust God’s judgment  
of our own heart over the feelings of our own  
conscience** *“in whatever our heart condemns us [he says];  
for God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.”*

By “us” John means born again believers, & he includes himself.

There were prob. times when his heart condemned him too.  
John is saying that by our Spirit-given love for other believers,  
we know that we are of the truth, and find our assurance in  
that knowledge whenever our hearts condemn us.

But we might answer=> “That’s the point. I’m angry at someone right now, and don’t feel loving towards him/her at all. So if it’s my love that gives me assurance, I’ve got a problem.”  
We can never sense assurance of our salvation while anger is destroying our love for others.

So we must begin by forgiving them.

Then we can look back at the track record of sincere loving deeds we have done for others in the past, trust that’s the evidence that we are truly saved, and leave the final judgment in God’s hands.

As Paul says (I Cor 4:5)=> “[not] passing judgment before the time.”

We can do as Peter did after he had denied he even knew Jesus.

X appeared to him after His resurrection & asked Peter the hardest question He could have asked=>

*“Simon, son of John, do you love Me?”*

Everything about Peter’s betrayal of his Savior pointed to the seemingly inevitable answer=> “No.”

But Peter didn’t say No; he answered=> *“Yes, Lord; **You know that I love You.**”*

The Apostle knew that his denial of his Lord had been an aberration, not the true, normal pattern in his heart.

Peter prob. hoped Jesus would drop the issue, but X didn’t.

He asked him this same question 3 times.

Finally, Peter answered=> *“Lord, **You know all things; You know that I love You**”* (Jn 21:15-17).

Peter entrusted himself to his Lord's omniscience, saying in essence, "If You look in my heart with Your all-seeing eyes, I'm sure You'll find my love for You there."

John was present, & prob. heard Peter's answer, so he advises us to do as Peter did=> assure our hearts in the truth that God is greater than our hearts, & knows all things—He knows us better than we do.

**It's as if we were in a courtroom, & our own conscience were both our judge and the star witness.**

As judge, it asks, has this person kept God's Law of love?

Then taking the witness stand himself, he answers, "No, he has violated it repeatedly ever since his childhood, and continues to do so even now."

Conscience continues as the judge=> "Has he repented?"

Again, it takes the witness stand: "He has repented momentarily many times over, whenever I have overwhelmed him w/ feelings of guilt, but he always goes back to his unloving penchant for love of hatred/revenge/enmity."

**Conscience is a harsh judge, but fortunately our Judge is God.**

He knows all things, having all the facts/evidence, which our conscience does not.

It's what He knows that our conscience doesn't know, that makes all the difference.

1<sup>st</sup>, He knows that although we are guilty of all that our conscience accuses us of, X has paid the penalty for all our sins.

2<sup>nd</sup>, II Tim 2:19 says, *“The Lord knows those who are His.”*

He knows we became His adopted child when we humbled our hearts before X’s cross, & sought His forgiveness based on faith in Him, and His grace towards us.

3<sup>rd</sup>, He knows our weakness (Psa 103:13-14)=> *“Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him. / For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust.”*

So the believer can say, “I admit my guilt, just as my conscience has witnessed against me. But Jesus suffered in my place. I’m sure of that, because I’ve seen clear evidence in the past of God’s love working in/through me on behalf of others.

This assures me that He has regenerated me.

So I leave my case in His hands, as my merciful Father.”

When conscience accuses us, we can quiet our hearts in the knowledge that we are “of the truth,” and the God of truth knows us better than we do ourselves.

Having a personal relationship w/ Jesus X, we can pray the same way Peter answered Jesus.

The way David prayed (Psa 139:23-24)=> *“Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; / And see if there be any hurtful*

*way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.”*

\* **Blessing #3 (of God’s love being in us) Confidence with**

**Regard to God**

[Verse 21]=> *“Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God;”*

John isn’t implying that our hearts don’t condemn us because we have become either sinless, or insensitive to our sin.

He means we know we have the privilege of on-going fellowship w/ God, thru faith in Jesus X.

**If our sins are confessed, if we are humbly leaning on God’s grace for our salvation (not our own good deeds), and if we can truthfully say we love our brothers/sisters in X, we can be confident before God.**

We come to Him not as to our Judge, but as our Father.

In 1 Jn 3:14, John wrote=> *“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren.”*

That’s the indicator of the genuineness of regeneration-life within us.

If that’s true of us, we know we are of the truth, transformed by God’s grace through the blood of X, indwelt by the H.S., and adopted by God as our Father.

We have every reason to feel confident before Him, even though our conscience may condemn us at times.

**Q: What is it that we can be confident of?**

We can be confident that we will be received by God when we stand before Him, in His presence to be judged, because

I Jn 4:17 says=> *“By this, love is perfected with us, that we may have **confidence** in the day of judgment.”*

- \* We can be confident about Jesus’ returning for us, because we abide in Him.

I Jn 2:28 tells us to=> *“abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have **confidence** and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.”*

- \* We can be confident to approach God in prayer even now, because I Jn 5:14 says=> *“This is the **confidence***

*which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.”*

Lovelessness creates a barrier to prayer for the Xn, but when love prevails in our hearts, as our sins are confessed, we can pray w/ confidence.

**There are people, however, whose hearts don’t condemn them because they’ve become indifferent to their sin.**

As I Tim 4:2 says, their conscience has become seared.

Rom 1:18=> they have suppressed the truth in their unrighteousness.

Their conscience still condemns them, but they have trained themselves to ignore its warnings.

If you were to ask them whether they have confidence towards God, they’d answer they’re not even sure there is a God.

They have thought it all through very philosophically and have come to the conclusion that creation came into being without a Creator—that everything came from nothing.

Rom 1:19 says “*that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.*”

So they know there’s a God, but they’ve suppressed the truth about Him, to avoid dealing w/ their conscience and the prospect of final judgment.

If you were to ask such a person to look into his future for a moment and consider whether/not he’ll ever face God’s judgment,

he’d prob. answer, “I won’t bother doing that because there’s no point=> I don’t believe there even is a God.”

If you then said, “Look into your future and think about your death. You do believe you’ll die someday, don’t you?” He might say, “No, thinking about death just makes me sad.”

His avoidance of death reveals that his conscience condemns him because, unlike a Xn, he cannot say, “*For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain*” (Phil 1:21).

Death will bring a Xn to his new home, his Savior, his inheritance, his new life/name/crown/glory (everything he has been waiting for in this life).

Suppressing the truth in unrighteousness is a dreary business for unbelievers having to deny what their hearts know intuitively to be true.

I hope that if you're a person like this, you'll humble your heart before Jesus X, asking him to take away your sin by His grace, allowing Him to cleanse your conscience and fill your heart with His love.

I hope you'll come out of death, embrace the truth, and begin by the grace/goodness of God to enjoy His life/love & the eternal security of soul that is found in Jesus X alone.

## ***“The Blessings of God’s Love”***

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Text: 1 John 3:17-21

1. Our conscience isn’t always a reliable guide; it can be overly [14 strict], overly lenient, or misinformed.

I Tim 4:8; I Cor 4:3-4; I Jn 3:14

**Today’s text lists three blessings we derive from the God-given love manifested in our lives as born again believers...**

### **\* Blessing #1—Charity with Regard to Others**

**[1 John 3:17]**

2. If one Christian can look at another Christian’s need, fully understand the misery it is creating, and not respond in a charitable way, he [16 doesn’t] have God’s love within him.

II Thes 3:10; Jms 2:15-16; Rom 5:5

3. Every true believer is drawn to loving others by the Holy Spirit within him, making him a more generous, [14 caring] person.

Acts 2:45; 4:46; I Cor 8; 2-5

4. The first benefit derived from the love of God within a believer’s heart is loving [16 charity] towards others that glorifies God’s name.

I Jn 3:16

**[Verse 18]**

5. Love that is genuine makes real sacrifices for others because it reveals [12 God’s] own loving nature within the believer.

Mt 25:34-35

### **\* Blessing #2—Assurance with Regard to Ourselves**

6. As a believer looks back at his life and sees a record of kind deeds that manifest genuine love, he can feel [16 assured] that he is genuinely regenerated.

**[Verses 19-20]**

I Jn 5:7; Jn 14:6; 17:17; 18:37

7. Love is the final test of our genuineness as [24 Christians].

8. Sometimes we feel spiritual dryness and distance from God; the culprit that has stolen our assurance is [12 guilt].

Psa 32:3-4

9. We look back at the record of sincere loving deeds we have done for others, trust that is the evidence that we are truly saved, and leave the final judgment in [12 God's] hands.

Jn 21:15-17

10. Conscience is a harsh judge, but fortunately our Judge is God; He knows all things, having all the evidence, which our [24 conscience] does not.

II Tim 2:19; Psa 103:13-14; 139:23-24

**\* Blessing #3—Confidence with Regard to God**  
**[Verse 21]**

11. If our sins are confessed, if we are humbly leaning on God's grace for our salvation (not our own good deeds), and if we can truthfully say we love our brothers and sisters in Christ, we can be [22 confident] before God.

I Jn 3:14; 4:17; 2:28; 5:14

12. There are people, however, whose hearts don't condemn them because they have become [24 indifferent] to their sin.

I Tim 4:2; Rom 1:18, 19; Phil 1:21

13. If you are a person like this, humble your heart before Jesus Christ, asking him to take away your sin by His grace, allowing Him to cleanse your conscience and fill your heart with His [10 love].