



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 John 3:19-24

"Christian Assurance and the Uneasy Heart"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] For the Scripture reading, we are turning to 1 John chapter 3, and we are reading verse 19 through verse 24. For those of you who may not have been here over the past few weeks or even the past few months in which we have been studying this book, if you'll just remember that in the context of 1 John and in this particular context as well, the apostle has been stressing the new commandment. This will be very important for understanding the section that we are turning to today.

In the 19th verse the apostle continues, "And hereby we know that we are of the truth and shall assure our hearts before him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart and knoweth all things." There has been a great deal of discussion over this particular verse and we don't have time to deal with the technicalities of it. It is likely that we are to read verse 20, "Whenever our heart condemns us," and take it as the continuation of what has gone before.

"Hereby we know that we are of the truth and shall it assure our hearts before him, whenever our heart condemns us. God is greater than our heart and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God? Now whatsoever we ask we receive of him because we keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. And this is his commandment," (Notice the change from plural to singular then back to plural again in his use

of the term commandment.) "And this is his commandment that we should be on the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another as he gave us commandment."

The little word "on" which I have read in reading from the Authorized Version is not really part of the original text. We should read this, "That we should believe that name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another as he gave us commandment." And it will help us if we remember that the term "name" is especially significant being somewhat Hebraic in its force and includes not simply the title a person may have that is the name that we write, but includes his character, his nature, and thus is a much more significant term than the term "name" in our particular culture. So to believe the name of his Son Jesus Christ is to believe more than just the name, the moniker that we might attach to someone but has to do with all that Christ is in his person as well as his work. Finally in verse 24, "And he that keepeth the commandments dwelleth in him and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us by the Spirit," or from the Spirit, "which he has given us." May the Lord bless this reading of his word and let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Our Heavenly Father, we approach Thee through the name of the Son of God, and we thank Thee that all that is signified by the term, "name", so inclusive of the greatness of the Son of God in all of his person and offices, we thank Thee that that name is so significant and is the one upon whom we have rested our lives for a time and for eternity. We praise Thee for the grace of God that came to us that enabled us to believe the name of Thy Son Jesus Christ and to love one another.

We thank Thee and praise Thee for all of the grace manifested to us through the shedding of blood upon Calvary's cross upon his death, resurrection, his ascension to the right hand of the Father, and the glorious hope of his coming again.

We ask Lord, Thy blessing upon the whole church of Jesus Christ today, not simply this local aspect or manifestation of that body, but we pray that the whole body of Christ wherever its

members may be may receive spiritual blessing from Thee. We thank Thee for the hope that we all have together. We look forward to the day when all of us shall be gathered into the presence of the Lord to worship him, to truly love one another in the love of God. We thank Thee and praise Thee for the tasks that Thou hast given to us and pray that Thou would help us to proclaim his name in our day to the people who are living with us in this society and on this globe.

We pray, Lord, for our country. We ask Thy blessing upon the President and upon the newly elected President and Vice-President, we ask that Thou would prepare them for the tasks that lie before them and may if it please Thee, President-Elect Bush may have a successive presidency of the United States of America. We pray that our freedoms may continue that Christ may be lifted up in the days that lie ahead of us, those that Thou does give us. May it be that the whole body may experience the blessing of God in the weeks and days and months and years that lie ahead.

We pray especially for the sick. We pray for them. We ask Thy blessing upon those who have been in the hospital, some of whom are returning home today. We pray for them, such as the Hamets, and we pray for the Wallaces, Thy blessing upon them. May our Lord give them the comfort and the encouragement that they need in these difficult days.

Lord, we praise Thee that Thou has allowed us to have a testimony for Jesus Christ and wilt Thou encourage us in the proclamation of the word of God by giving fruit. We thank Thee that Thou has reached down to use sinners, lost sinners, as instruments in the glorification of the name of Jesus Christ. May that transpire today in our meetings and through the days of this week that lie before us. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] Many years ago I read something by the man who led me to the Lord that comes to my mind every time I sing this great hymn, *Beneath the Cross of Jesus*. He pointed out that in the way in which most the hymns appear in most of our modern textbooks there is considerable variation between what was originally written and what we sing. For example, when this hymn was written instead of singing, "the wonders of redeeming love and my unworthiness," the author wrote, "the

wonders of redeeming love and my own worthlessness". And then in the stanza that reads, "From my smitten heart with tears to wonders I confess." In the original version it was "from my stricken heart with tears".

Now everyone knows that the term for "stricken" means that there is no hope, but with "smitten" there is some hope. "Unworthiness" is not nearly so significant as "worthlessness". After all, he said we must leave the people in the pew with some shreds of respectability. Well, the writer of the hymn understood theology a little bit better than those who have modified his language as being inappropriate. But at any rate, I noticed that you sang the last phrases "my sinful self, my only shame". At least you have confessed your sinfulness and that is worthwhile. You see that is where all theology begins. If there is no confession of our worthlessness, our sinfulness, then there is no point in Christianity because Christianity addresses people who do confess just that. It is great to have the assurance that it is true, that we are sinners and that further, that there is a remedy and the remedy is through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and his atoning death.

Now we are looking at the passage in which the apostle has again been ringing the changes on the fact that Christians, who are our brethren and sisters in the Lord, are to love one another. The new commandment is referred to more than once to this point. So now he is going to try to give us some assurance. The topic for today is Christian assurance and the uneasy conscience. He just said in the preceding context, the immediately preceding context, that genuine love is not love in word or tongue only. It is stated in the 18th verse, "My little children let us not love in word neither in tongue but in deed and truth." Not in word but in deed. Not in tongue in which we can say things that are very polite, very courteous, but nevertheless not truthful, of which we are all guilty. I speak for all sinners. For those that are not sinners, I don't speak for you. [Laughter]

We do so often because of the conventions of our society say things which are not true. And so the apostle says that we are to love in word and in deed and it is perfectly all right to love in tongue. We should express our love, but it should be in truthful tongue. Now he stressed this. So

to put it in his words, he has just said that genuine love is not in word or tongue only. Like Balaam's tongue love, that will not do.

Last week, well, I take it back. It was a couple of weeks ago, I received a letter from a person who listens to our tapes and who also is close enough to Dallas, to listen to our radio broadcast on Sunday morning. She sent me a couple of pages in somewhat anguish spirit trying to set forth one of the problems she was having in her church in East Texas. And she sent me the sermon that her pastor had preached. The topic of that sermon, believe it or not my Bible reading friends, was *Great Lives of Faith: Balaam, a Man of God's Word*. And she said, when I came out from listening to this man, my pastor speak, and I often have this feeling; I came out wondering if I had been reading the Bible correctly. She said I have been trying to find a place in our area where we do have the ministry of the word of God in expository fashion and I haven't been able to find it. But will you please look at this sermon and tell me what you think of it.

Now you might wonder how a person could come up with a title like that and consider it exposition of the word of God. *Great Lives of Faith: Balaam, a Man of God's Word*. I don't think I would get away with that in Believers Chapel, but he got away with it, evidentially, with the exception so far as I know, this one woman. He began with a little bit of humor. He said as a kid, his favorite movie hero was Francis, the talking mule. Many years later he learned the story of Balaam and Balak and what could be the first talking story of a talking mule. "Could Francis have had a biblical ancestor?" he asked. Well his contention is that Balaam is a man of God's word and he found a text for it. You know, you really can find a text for almost anything you want to say if you look carefully enough. His text was the text, "if Balak," he was you remember the king of Moab, who sent princes to Balaam to urge Balaam, a prophet, to come and curse Israel. So the text reads, Balaam is speaking, "if Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God to do less or to do more." Magnificent statement providing you take it out of the total context of the word of God, not simply here, but the New Testament as well because the New Testament authors have some things to say about Balaam as well.

So here is a text taken by a minister of the word of God out of its context totally to support the title, *Great Lives of Faith: Balaam, a Man of God's Word*. He said furthermore, this statement was reminiscent of a statement of the basic beliefs of the church of which he is a part. That statement is still cherished by all who belong to this body of believers and they are very numerous over the country and particularly in the South. And the statement is, "When the Bible speaks or where the Bible speaks, we speak. Where the Bible is silent, we are silent." Now that is a significant statement. In fact, it is not a bad statement. But the apostles found no valid example of it in Balaam's life and ministry.

Now let's see what the apostles say about Balaam. Let's take Peter first of all in the second epistle and the 15th verse which we have been hearing Dr. Kurt Daniel expound very well on Wednesday nights. We have this text, "Which have forsaken," he is speaking of false teachers, "Which have forsaken the right way and have gone astray following the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness."

Now this is a man of the word of God? He loved the wages of unrighteousness. Jude, who was not an apostle, but the brother of our Lord, in the 11th verse of his short letter speaking about the same kind of men said, "Woe, unto them for they have gone in the way of Cain, they ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward and perished in the gainsaying of Korah." So Balaam is not linked to the men of God. He is linked with Cain and Korah and described as those who ran greedily after the error for reward. In other words, they did what they did, said what they did, in order to enlarge their pocketbooks.

And finally, the apostle John in the second chapter of the book of Revelation, in the 14th verse giving the words of our Lord, he interprets the Old Testament too. And the apostle in the letter that he has recorded writes the Lord's saying, "I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication." I really do not think I would call Balaam a man of God's word. In fact, I might call him a man of Satan's activities

and word, but not of God's word. The apostles, the New Testament, our Lord himself, disagree with that.

Now Balaam's, of course, further history makes that very plain. Later on after giving his magnificent Messianic prophesies, he found opportunity to tell Balak, now if you really want to curse the Israelites what you need to do is to seduce them with false doctrine. So he sought to get Balak to seduce the Israelites so that they would follow another god, Baal Beor and finally, as an ignominious end, by being slain by the children of Israel later on.

Now we have been exposed to this expression a whole lot in recent days. We've listened to the candidates talk about each other from presidency on down. And one of the expressions that has come so often to my ears, and I must confess it gets under my skin every time I hear it, is "the facts are". In other words, here is what my opponent is saying, the facts are. Have you heard that? If you have been listening to the candidates you have heard it, not once but scores of times. "The facts are."

Well, the facts are Balaam is not a man of God's word. Balaam was a false prophet. It is very plain. Now it is true. When Balaam asked him, Can I go to Moab and curse the Israelites there as Balak and his princes would have me do, can I go? God said first, no Balaam, you cannot go. But then when they offered him a little bit more money and more inducements, he went to the Lord again and said can I go? Now he had already made his will known to Balaam. But it is obvious that Balaam is going to do it so God said, all right Balaam, go. That is the text that is referred to by the author. Go, but when you go Balaam you are not going to be able to say anything but what I put in your mouth. So Balaam said to the people who come, if Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God to do less or more. He loved to go beyond the word of God, but now God has told him you cannot do it. So he couldn't do it.

And the result is, here is false prophet and what does he do. He utters great, and they are great, Messianic prophecies. But he has absolutely no real sympathy with what he is saying deep in

his heart. As a matter of fact, later on he says he wished he could die the death of the righteous. "I wish my end could be like these people of whom I am talking about." It was not. It was not at all.

Now the facts are then, Balaam was a man of God's word in the sense that his lips spoke God's word but there was no real sympathy with what he was saying. That is a beautiful illustration of what God is talking about. This Faustian Prophet, who sacrificed spirituality, all of the great values of spirituality for material gain, this Faustian Prophet spoke the word of God. He actually uttered the word of God.

So when I look at a text like this and I read, "My little children let us not love in word neither in tongue; in deed and in truth," we are talking about tongue love; word love. And in the case of Balaam the prophet, we are talking about a person who had tongue love for Israel. Great prophecies he spoke, but they were just as deep as his tongue. That's the kind of thing that John is talking about. Balaam was a man of God's word but in a sorted, avaricious, mercenary, licentious way. His words and his prophecies were God's, but his mind, heart, and soul were of the devil. So a tongue prophet with tongue love for Israel. That's the ultimate in contrast with what John is talking about. "My little children let us not love in word neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth." This is Christian love. This is the real thing. Not like Balaam or even those of us who, not even really like Balaam, but like to put on a good appearance and we talk about love, and we talk about being sweet, and we talk about nice, but there is not real love of the brethren in the sense that the apostle is speaking here.

John's letter, after he has said these very strong words about love, moves to the fruit of love, Christian confidence. Since divine love is impossible apart from the gift of life, its presence conveys assurance. When you see an individual who is truly loving, loving the brethren, that person should have the inner assurance of relationship to the Lord God, because no one can do that naturally. If you see a Christian truly love another in the sense in which our Lord is speaking, you have seen evidence of Christianity. We are not talking about things as I say, in word only or in tongue only.

We are talking about the real thing. When you see a Christian express love to another in the true sense, then you can say, there is evidence of Christianity, the real thing.

But now many of us, if we look at John's words and we read them carefully and really try to follow him, we no doubt have the feeling, I know I have this feeling, I still have this feeling, how is it possible to love like this? Listen to what he says. In verse 14 he said, "We know we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." So often, I don't love my brethren. Really, deep down within, I failed. I don't love them. Whosoever hated his brother is a murderer. And you know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. There are so of the brethren that I find it difficult to like. I find it very difficult to like. And probably even more of the brethren find it difficult to like me. In fact, I have some personal testimonies to that affect. [Laughter] They don't like my doctrine. I know that in my case, I have self-doubts. I have misgivings. There are certainly inconsistencies. There are failures of duties that rise within my heart. They call in question the reality of my love.

For John, he is strict in what he says and dogmatic about it. "When know we passed from death unto life because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." Does not, I ask you a question my Christian friends sitting out there so nice and peacefully this morning. I ask you a personal question. Look within your heart. Does not true self-examination lead to an uneasy conscience? Does not, if you examine within your heart just how exactly you are living up to these things in the light of John's strictness, does it not sometimes make you want to say, who then can be saved? It does me.

I have a friend who also listens to the tapes constantly, calls me every couple of months or so. Martha answers the phone, she says, its, I won't repeat his name because he will probably hear this tape sooner or later, and I will say, well I now have to give a little bit of a lecture on the subject of Christian assurance, because he has a difficult time with Christian assurance. He is a very earnest Christian man as far as I can tell. He has visited the Chapel and I was very pleased to meet him, a very nice looking young man in his thirties. I say an earnest Christian, really concerned about

assurance of his salvation. I think of him as I think of this particular message. He is the one person that to me comes to my mind as I think of Christian assurance. Proud hearts need humbling. Mine needs humbling. Other proud hearts need humbling and those who are not proud but humble, truly, they need lifted up. So the apostle in this section seeks to lift up the humble, to give them a sense of assurance, to replace those feelings of uneasy conscience which they have as they faithfully and gently try to apply the word of God to themselves.

Now he gives them two grounds of assurance: one, in the 1st verse of our section, verse 19; and the second, in the last verse of the section. You can easily see them. They both begin with the phrase, "hereby we know". In the middle of verse 24 and, "hereby we know". But in between he also discusses some contingencies that may arise and he seeks to deal with them. So we are going to look at it, and we look first at the first ground of assurance given by the apostle in the 19th verse of chapter 3 in 1 John. "Hereby we know that we are of the truth and shall assure our hearts before him."

Now what does he mean by "hereby" or "by this"? Well he has just said in the 18th verse, "My little children let us not love in word neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth." This is how we now that we are of the truth. If we love in both word and deed and tongue and truth, that is how we know that we are of the truth. Active, sincere love leads to the convictions that we are of the truth. The apostle is trying to encourage us. He is trying to say, look, if you do act in love toward the brethren truly that should be a comfort to you. That should assure your hearts that you are of the truths. You remember those great words that the Lord Jesus spoke to Pilate when he was before him in John chapter 18 and verse 37. The Lord said to the procurator, "Everyone who is of the truth heareth My voice." Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice. Everyone who has the source of his being in truth, in the truth, that's a gift of God. That is God's electing grace. And everyone who is of the truth hears his voice.

I have often said this to you pardon me if I say it again because the audience changes through the years, but my father died seventeen years ago. If my father were to return and were to

speaking behind this wall where our baptistery is, and if he were to say to me, if I should hear coming through there, "Lewis," I wouldn't have any doubt who it was. I know his voice. The very tones of his voice are embedded in my mind. I look forward to the day in heaven when I shall hear him again say, "Lewis". I understand it. He is my father. Everyone who is of the truth hears our Lord's voice. When you hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, if you belong to God's eternal purpose, sooner or later you will recognize that you belong to him. "Everyone who hears My voice is of the truth." The true heart knows it's King when he speaks, someone has said.

So, consequently, that should give us encouragement when we really do love in word and in deed, in tongue and in truth, by this we know we are of the truth. Never to it otherwise. Never. No one can ever love like that apart from the possession of the truth of God. Put it another way, is of God.

But he goes on to say, "And shall assure our hearts before him." Obedience and heart persuasion. The New International Version uses the phrase, "set our hearts at rest". Confidence now and then before an ever-present Judge. Earlier John had said, "We look forward to seeing our Lord when he comes and we expect to have confidence before him at his coming," chapter 2 and verse 28. We may have confidence now my Christian friend. "And by this we now that we are of the truth and shall set our hearts at rest before him."

Now having said that the apostle moves on to two contingencies and their consequences, because two contrasted cases can arise. A Christian may have no reason to look within and say, My heart condemns me. He may have no reason to say that at a particular time or as John will point out, a true Christian may have his heart condemning him. These are the contingencies. First of all, the contingency of self-condemnation. Now we could say this 20th verse means, if our heart condemns us God is greater than our heart and knoweth all things, therefore, if our heart condemns us and God is greater than our hearts, look out at the Great Judgment Day. If we are already condemned, God is greater than our heart, if our heart condemns us, what is the all holy God going to do? Scholars would call that an argument, *ad minoria ad maioribus*, from the lesser to the greater.

Now John's purpose is to give encouragement in this section. So in spite of the fact that there may be some truth to what that interpretation suggests I don't think that is what John is speaking about here. As a matter of fact, if that were the case, if it were true that our heart condemns us and God is greater than our heart and he is really going to condemn us, then the only thing we should say is, "Oh God, be merciful to me, a sinner," which is not a bad prayer anyway. John's purpose, however, is to heal and so I really think what he is saying is that we ought to have confidence in the sovereign mercy of God, put very simply. He says, "If our heart condemn us," and I am going to take the rendering, "Whenever our heart condemns us," and read it with verse 19, "Hereby we know that we are of the truth and shall assure our hearts before him when our heart condemns us, for God is greater than our heart and knoweth all things." What John is talking about is commitment to love in action. And even when with an uneasy conscience, we can expect the Lord God to deal in mercy with us.

Now I really don't think there is any Christian, I have never run across a Christian who said, I always have a heart at perfect peace with God. There may be one. But look, I have been a Christian over forty-five years and all of you youngsters out there in the audience you may find someone like this. My tendency would be to expect such a person right at the beginning, but nevertheless, I have never found a Christian in all my experience who can say and has said, "My heart never condemns me". So what I think John is saying is simply this, when we have an uneasy conscience, when we have a troubled conscience, when we have struggles with the will of God, when there is penitence, but nevertheless shame also, what we may expect is validation of our sonship with an omniscient, sovereign God. Someone has said he is often kinder to us than we are willing to be ourselves. His perfect knowledge is not designed to be a turret to us; it is designed to be a comfort to us.

Now let me illustrate. I want to give you a man who had a troubled conscience. It was so troubled that he went out and wept bitterly after he denied the Lord three times. And if what John meant was look out, judgment is even greater. Poor Peter would have found no comfort in the

words of God at all. You know the story. Three times he denied the Lord Jesus Christ. Three times, mind you. This is an apostle. The apostle of Jesus Christ denying the Lord three times, and then you remember at the end of the gospel of John after the Lord Jesus had met those apostles and Peter by the side of the lake and had given them that great sign of the catching of hundred and fifty and three fish, just like fishermen, aren't it? You never heard a fisherman say, I had a good day. He will always say I had a good day, I caught seventy-eight today or caught forty-two. They always count it. I don't know why that is, but they always count them. Hundred and fifty and three, that is one of the signs of the genuineness of this little story.

Augustine found the doctrine of the Trinity in the hundred and fifty and three, and I wouldn't try to do that and weight your minds down with a new argument for the Trinity. But at any rate, when they gathered afterwards, the Lord Jesus as they had dined turned to Peter and said, "Simon son of Jonas," and I remind you, Jonas is the word for John, so Simon son of John or Simon Johnson. [Laughter] You didn't know I was an apostolic succession, did you? Nevertheless, Simon Johnson "Lovest thou Me more than these?" "Yea Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee." He said unto him, "Feed My lambs." He said to Peter again, Simon Johnson, "Lovest thou Me?" "Yea Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee." "Feed My sheep." Third time, "Simon son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?" Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time these three answering to the three denials, "Lovest thou Me?" He said unto him, "Lord, Thou knowest all things." You know deep down in my heart. You know. This is a man who denied the Lord three times at the critical point, denied the Lord, "You know that I love You." And Jesus said, "Feed My sheep."

Peter, tell them about your experience. Tell them how it is true. You can have an uneasy conscience, you can fall, you can falter, you can sin, but fundamentally what has transpired in your heart is the gift of a new nature, a new love for the Lord. And that has come sovereignly from a sovereign God. It is not due to your work. It is not due to your great decision, Peter; it is due to the great sovereign decision of God, who wrought it out in your heart. "Feed My sheep." Unforgettably sad conversation that lets us know it's possible to have an uneasy conscience. It's possible to sin. It's

possible to fail at the points at issue, but nevertheless, when God has spoken to the heart through his sovereign grace, he is greater than all, he knows all things as our text says, and he does give us reassurance.

Now, of course, there are some other things that could be said. I think they are rather self-evident. You notice the contingency of self-acquittal and the exultant tone of reassurance in verse 21, "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not." There are times when we don't really know something against us. Paul talked about that in 1 Corinthians 4, he said he knew nothing against himself at that point, although there were times when he knew things against himself. But at that point, he said, "I knew nothing against myself, but I am not justified in this. It is the Lord who will judge me at the judgment seat," and then he said, "Every man," not some men, "Every man," that is believing man, "shall have praise of God." Verse 21 the apostle states, "Whatsoever we ask we receive of him because we keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight." Incidentally, he is not formulating a doctrine. He is relating his own experiences. These verbs are in the present tense. He is telling what is happening in his life. Whatsoever we go on asking, we go on receiving from him because we are keeping his commandments and we are doing those things that are pleasing to him. He is telling what his experience is. It is a great doctrine all right, but nevertheless, it is his experience.

So answered prayer, one of the great experiences of life, our Father, my Christian friend, is pleased by obediently loving children. You want your prayers answered? Follow his word. Love the brethren even when you find it a little bit distasteful. You will find that you come to love loving the brethren. Love the brethren. God is pleased by obediently loving children. That is the general truth even the blind man in John 9, before he fully understood what had happened to him, acknowledged that point. This remarkable man, every time I turn to the 9th chapter, I have to say, "My, that is one man I want to meet in heaven." There is no one like him. These fellows around him, the great religious leaders, were saying, "We know God spake by Moses but as for this fellow (Christ) we don't even know from whence he comes."

This man said, you know there is a marvelous thing here, you don't know from whence he is, you great religious leaders, you don't know from whence he is, but he is the fellow that opened my eyes. Imagine, great religious leaders posing as if they know everything about spiritual things and here is a fellow who has opened the eyes of the blind, something unheard of, and they don't know anything about him. It is like a fellow today writes a great big book on the atonement and doesn't understand a simple Christian who has his sins forgiven by believing the atoning work of Christ who sits in the pulpit.

It is like my friend who listened to the sermon on Balaam. She has the reality. I don't think this man has much of the reality of all, if he has any part of it. So the blind man said, "We know that God heareth not sinners but if any man be a worshiper of God, he doeth his will. And doeth his will him he heareth." He knew the fundamental fact of spiritual life which the great religious leaders did not know. Look that is not something true of the 1st Century, my friend, that is true of something of the 20th Century as well, the last part of it.

So, answered prayer. He talks about mutual abiding in the first clause of verse 24, the first sentence, "He that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him and God in him." Obedience being the proof, not the cause of God's people dwelling in him. In other words, obedience is not the reason God dwells in us, it is the evidence that he does; the obedience that we cannot naturally do.

Now he talks also about the nature of the commandments because someone might say, what commandment are you talking about? Not the ten, that is not in the context. It's a rather surprising turn, "This is his commandment that we should believe," reminds you of John 6:29. This is the work of God, when they ask what work that they should do? This is the work of God that you should believe on him whom God has sent. See there might be the misunderstanding that love is the sum total of Christianity. John has talked about love so much that someone might say love is all that is really important. There are people who say that. Liberals constantly say that Christianity teaches love. It does teach love, but it teaches something before love. Because no one can love that hasn't believed something.

Listen to what he says, verse 23, "This is his commandment that we should believe the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another as he gave us commandment." So the sum total of Christianity is believing and loving. As a matter of fact, he puts them in tenses that suggest "believe" is the beginning of life which occurs at a point in time or at least a point in his experience and the result is a continual loving. "That we should believe," suggesting a crisis experience of trust in the Lord, conversion, and then the constant loving. And notice the order. It is believe first, then love. It is not love and then believe. It is believe and love. Both are essential. Both are necessary. And believe the name. That is a strange expression. We don't say believe the name. If I said, "Believe the name Lewis Johnson." You would say what in the world does he mean? But in those days, to believe the name meant to commit oneself to all that the name signified.

Now they weren't committed just to the moniker, his Son Jesus Christ, but to what that means. Son, Sonship, divine Sonship, Jesus, he shall save his people from their sins. Savior, Christ, Messiah, Mediator, mediatorial Messiah. So to believe the name is to believe the Sonship of our Lord, to believe that he is the Savior, to believe that he is the mediatorial Messiah, what a beautiful compressed creed this is. Almost everything is contained within it. The mediatorial Messiah you can put within that expression all of the blessings of our Christian life, for they are what Christ has won by his saving work on Calvary's cross for those whom he represented. And he represented the people of God when he died.

So to sum up Christianity then, in John's words here, "believe him, love the brethren". Believe him, love other; the whole duty of man. The second duty of assurance we don't have time to talk about. He says in the 24th verse, "Hereby we know that he abideth in us by the Spirit or from the Spirit that he has given to us." Our confidence is not self-generated by walking in love. It is not acquired by any process of self-reflection. It is given by God. "The divine donation," as someone has called it. The divine donation of the Holy Spirit, vouched safe to every Christian, the universal conscientiousness of the sons of God. Every Christian who is a Christian at all has the Holy Spirit dwelling within him, and it is the inevitable possession of everyone who knows the Lord God.

That's why Paul said, "He that hath not the Spirit of God is none of his." Do you have him? Do you know you have the Spirit of God dwelling within you? Is that universal conscientiousness of the sons of God your experience? That is the antecedent of our sonship. It is the cause of our knowing he's abiding in us. That is how we know the conscientiousness of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Well, let me sum it up for time has past by. Assurance then is the product of being the Son and loving the brethren. And the acts are the products of God's working. Not from some ritual such as baptism, or confirmation, or whatever it may be. Not the result of some affiliation as if you joined a church somewhere and you were pronounced right with God by the fact that you joined the church, and it is surely not by any good works. An answered prayer is a promise for his submissive people. Access and answers, what a magnificent experience; the privilege of access, the privilege of answers. And the present tense, as I say, express ongoing action. There is no blank check. You cannot just go into God's presence and say, I'm a Christian, therefore Lord you said this, you must do this. You must give me a better job, you must increase my salary. No, there are other things involved in pleasing the Lord, doing his will. In the 5th chapter he will point out our petitions must be in his will. And so those who have the universal conscientiousness of the presence of God within him will be asking things in the harmony of the will of God, and those will be answered.

If you are here today and you never believed in Christ, these are not your possessions. You don't have the Spirit dwelling within you. You don't really know the name of God's Son Jesus Christ. We invite you, we're an ambassador, we present Christ, we do not have any power to give you anything, except the message. If you acknowledge that deep down within you know you are lost. You know you have sinned against heaven and you desire deliverance, forgiveness of sins, that deliverance, that forgiveness, that relationship of the presence of the Holy Spirit, and all the blessings of the Christian life are for those who have recognized their need and flee to our Lord Jesus who died for sinners and shed his blood that we might have forgiveness of sins. May God in his grace touch your heart. I could never do it, but God's Holy Spirit can. Let's stand for the benediction.

“Christian Assurance and the Uneasy Heart” by S. Lewis Johnson
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[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these magnificent words that John has given us. We so often, Lord, feel that we have faltered, that we have failed, our consciences our uneasy in the fulfilling of that which pleases Thee. We thank Thee for the encouragement we received that God is greater than all and knows all things.

We thank Thee for the encouragement of the great apostle, who expressed that very fact and found acceptance with the Lord Jesus himself. Lord, help us to confess our past failures and to lean upon Thee and continue to grow in the knowledge of our Lord and love for the brethren, our duty, our loving duty. For those without Christ, O God, work in their hearts to bring them to the knowledge of him who to know is life eternal. For his name's sake. Amen.