

## **FIRST JOHN PART 8 "By This We Know"**

### **1 John 3:19 thru 24**

Six verses. That's all we're going to look at this morning as we continue our journey through First John, the passage shown here.

You will hear me talk sometimes about the various "tensions" that are in the Bible. Let me make this clear – the Bible never contradicts itself. It is the inerrant, inspired word of God and God never contradicts Himself. But sometimes what it says in one place seems to push back against what it says somewhere else. This supposed conflict creates what I call "tensions in scripture." Here are a couple of examples of what I'm talking about. Paul says, "By grace you have been saved thru faith...not a result of works" (Eph 2:8-9) and then James comes along and says, "Show me your faith apart from your works and I will show you my faith by my works" (James 2:18). There seems to be a difference between what Paul and James are saying when it comes to faith and works. Here is another example: "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world... in love He predestined us for adoption as sons thru Jesus Christ" (Eph 1:4-5). God chose us way back a long time before we were ever born – to be saved, to be "sons thru Jesus Christ." But then we read in Romans, "For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved" (Rom 10:10). Sounds like WE choose Him. Here again we have this apparent "tension" in scripture. And you'll find similar sorts of things throughout the Bible.

As you begin to delve into what these passages are saying and look at the context in which they're written, you'll realize that there is NO contradiction. Rather, what you begin to see is that the subject matter being addressed is far deeper than how it appears on the surface. There are often multiple layers of truth that you need to peel back and examine carefully. Sometimes you wrestle with what's being said because it's pushing back against your pre-conceived ideas. The deeper things of God which the scriptures reveal to us require deep contemplation and

consideration on our part – that is, if we’re really going to understand what they’re saying. These issues are not easy. They require a little bit of effort on our part.

The reason I’m saying all this is because today’s passage introduces one of these so-called tensions. It’s not the easiest passage to understand but I’ll do my best to explain it as we go.

Look at the handout I gave you “Contrasts in 1 John.” It says that John’s style of writing is to use contrasts. And what is it that he’s contrasting throughout the letter? True believers and unbelievers. “This is what a true believer in Jesus Christ looks like.” And John explains it. “And over here is what an unbeliever looks like.” And then he explains that.

According to John, do they look any different from each other? YES, as you can see they look a lot different. They’re clearly NOT the same. That’s what John’s is doing throughout this letter.

To make John’s message personal... I must first determine whether or not I am really saved. That’s Step 1. If I am NOT saved, then I go to Step 2 and I repent of my sins, turn to Christ in faith, ask Him to save me and then Step 3, I follow Him in obedience (to His teachings in the Bible). If I AM saved, then the next step for me is to commit myself from this point on to living a godly life, to being obedient to the teachings of Jesus. So that’s what is going on in First John.

Let me go ahead now and read our passage. fill in blanks...

READ 1 John 3:19-24

In this passage John is clearly addressing Christians.

Do you have any idea what is the so-called tension is that John brings up in these verses (as well as throughout all of 1 John)? I told you this wasn’t going to be easy today. Here’s the tension: On one hand is the idea which is prevalent in evangelical churches that if I simply believe in Jesus I will be saved. We have scriptures like these: John 3:16 “believe”, Acts 2:21

“call upon”, Acts 16:31 “believe”, Eph 2:8 “thru faith”, Titus 3:5 “He saved us, not because of works done by us”. But on the other hand there are a whole bunch of passages in the N.T. that teach about the expectation of God’s children to be obedient, to do what Jesus commanded, to submit to His Lordship, to live holy lives pleasing to God, to be filled w/ the Spirit, to live right. Here are a few scriptures about that: James 2:17; 1 Jn 3:23, 2 Peter 1:5-11. So the tension in this passage is (A) do I just have to believe in Jesus to be saved or (B) is there more to it than that? Depending on who you listen to, you’ll get different answers. What does the Apostle John say under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit?

READ 1 John 3:19a

“By this” – here is how “we shall know that we are of the truth,” in other words, that we are true believers. Here’s how...

READ 1 John 3:19b

Here’s how we can have the assurance of our salvation. Now John’s been talking about this in this letter. The verses just before this emphasize that one way we know that we’re saved is whether or not we love our fellow Christians. He contrasts the compassion of a believer with the indifference of an unbeliever. There is a clear contrast. So John is just continuing this line of thought here in this passage.

READ 1 John 3:20

The heart is part of us because John says it is OUR heart. It is part of us. So what part of us is John talking about? We know based on context it is not the organ that pumps blood. It is something that comes from deep inside of us. We know it is not the Holy Spirit because in v 20 says that “God is greater than our heart.” So I started digging into the Bible commentaries and dictionaries for help.

Three parts of us humans: Body, Soul, Spirit... Heart is quite broad in its scope, could be almost anything within our soul or spirit. The hint in this

passage are the components of reassurance (v 19) and condemnation (v 20). Based on the definition of the conscience, I think that is what John is referring to here, the **conscience**.

The "conscience" by definition is "that which God has placed inside every person that allows them to instinctively know the difference between right and wrong. It acts as an internal warning system. When we're in a situation and we hear, say or do that which we perceive is wrong our conscience warns us. In some cases it may accuse us or even condemn us. But on those occasions where we might say or do what is right our conscience affirms this. It commends us. It reassures us. It gives us a sense of peace. So based on the way John uses this word here and the fact that it involves being either reassured or condemned I believe he's referring to our conscience.

Let me clarify something about the human conscience. Everyone, saved or not has one. But over time it is possible for the conscience to become less effective (gradually lowering moral standards, misinforming it, silencing it or ignoring it, desensitizing it by consistent wrong behavior). According to the N.T. it is possible for someone to defile their conscience or wound it or sear it. On the flipside, it is possible for our conscience to be cleansed. This is what happens in the life of a true believer. When we come to faith in Christ our conscience gets cleansed, purified (Heb 9:14).

V 20 says that "God is greater than our heart." In context, God is greater than our conscience. "He knows everything." We don't. As finite beings we have limited knowledge. The conscience is not our guide. It is a warning system that God has placed in us. As Christians our guide is to be the word of God and the indwelling Holy Spirit (we'll talk about Him later).

READ 1 John 3:21-22

John is talking in these verses about being "before God" (v 21) and "whatever we ask" (v 22). He's talking about prayer. So when our conscience does not condemn us, in other words, when we're living right

and we're doing what we know is right, then when we go to the Lord in prayer we will "have confidence before God." And then v 22 tells us what that means. We are being obedient. We are doing what we know is right. We are pleasing God... the result is an effective prayer life.

We get whatever we ask for. This falls right in line with what Jesus said. One of my favorite verses in Psalms is Ps 37:4 which says, "Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart." And the verses on either side of that verse say "Trust in the Lord" and "Commit your way to the Lord." It's about this relationship between a loving Father and his child.

READ 1 John 3:23-24a

This summarizes the entire letter of First John. Believe, love and obey. This is what a true believer in Jesus Christ does. He or she believes in the name of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. He or she loves their fellow Christians. He or she keeps His commandments. Jesus said "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15). It is interesting that when Jesus says that to His disciples, the very next thing He tells them is about sending them the Holy Spirit. And that's where John goes next.

READ 1 John 3:24

One major difference between a believer and an unbeliever is that a believer has the Holy Spirit living in them. As John so aptly puts it in this verse, He (God) abides in us by the Holy Spirit and we abide in Him (in God). The abiding presence and power of God in us! A huge difference.

So back to my opening thought about this tension between belief vs more than belief – what does John say? What is he teaching in this passage and throughout the entire letter of 1 John? Is true saving faith simply believing the right things about Jesus? That's a big part of it, no question. You have to get that right. John shows by way of contrast that Christians are different than unbelievers. How so? Not only by what they believe about Jesus, but by how they live. By their love for others. By their

righteousness, by their love for God, by their obedience to their Lord and Savior. All the above. Now the million dollar question is: are these requirements for salvation? I would not go so far as to say they are requirements for salvation. I believe, however that what John is telling us is that all of these are evidences of a transformed life, of a saved person.

READ it.

I am so grateful and humbled that God saved me. But here's the deal... My salvation is not about me. Your salvation is not about you. It is all about Him, His good pleasure. And by His grace He allows us to be His children and to enjoy fellowship with Him and with all the saints. One commentary I read pointed out that all the verbs mentioned in this chapter are present tense. They apply to us now. Not just a past event we once experienced. And they are not some promise out in the future. They are ours to experience and enjoy today.

If you are one of those who has struggled or is currently struggling with whether or not you are saved, I encourage you to come talk to me. I will help you to settle the issue once and for all.