

## “Heart Condemnation”

“And by this 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 knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God” (1 John 3:19-21).

What are we to learn from this? A lesson of condemnation, of comfort, of self-confidence or of trust in God? The average reader sees nothing more in it than this, that if our heart condemns us, we are to know that God condemns us to as much greater degree as He is greater than our hearts. If that were true, then there would certainly be no comfort in the passage. Neither would there be any hope in it. **For every man’s heart does condemn him, and if God condemns him also, where shall he go for mercy?**

Let us first read a verse or two in the book of Romans. “What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *can be* against us?” “Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? *It is* God who justifies. Who *is* he who condemns? *It is* Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us” (Rom. 8:31, 33, 34).

The idea plainly is that when God justifies, nobody has any right to condemn. Moreover, we are told that **God justifies, and that is evidence that He does not condemn.** God sent His Son into the world as the representative of Himself. “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.” Now read, “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17). **Therefore God is not condemning even the wicked world, but is seeking to save them.**

Now let us go back to the text with which we started. Note the nineteenth verse: “And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.” Here is assurance, not despair. Assurance is necessary when there is something that would naturally cause fear. Sin is in the human heart, and that naturally produces fear of God. We judge God by ourselves, and therefore feel as though we must hide from Him. But when our heart condemns us, there’s something by which we may gain assurance. What is that?

For an answer we have only to read the verses that precede, and we find that the entire chapter is devoted to showing the love of God. It begins, “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!” (1 John 3:1). The marvelous love is shown in the fact that we are called the

children of God. That God receives sinful men, and calls them sons, is shown by Heb. 12:5-11. If we were perfect, we should not need chastisement. God's love is shown in that Christ died for the ungodly, and God justifies such when they believe in Him.

In this we are to assure our hearts before Him, when our hearts condemn us. When we are borne down with a sense of sin, what hope should we have if that was only meant to teach us that God was condemning us to an infinitely greater degree? "But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more" (Rom. 5:20). So when we are the most conscious of the sinfulness of our hearts, we may draw comfort from the assurance that God's grace is infinitely greater, and that it justifies and saves from sin.

Having seen, even from the common version, that the text teaches confidence in God's love, which delivers from condemnation, let us read the passage in the Revised Standard Version. "By this we shall know that we are of the truth, and reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God" (1 John 3:19-21).

We know that we are of the truth, not from anything that we have done, but because of the love of God, which He shed abroad in our hearts by His Holy Spirit. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). In this fact we assure our heart wherein so ever our heart condemns us, and find comfort in the greatness of God. For when we are conscious of sin, then is the time when we may trust in the love and mercy of God. And **when we trust the Lord our heart ceases to condemn us, because it has no reason to condemn us when God justifies us.** So when our heart, through the knowledge of the love of God, has ceased to condemn us, we necessarily have confidence toward God. "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (Rom. 5:10).

Let us for a moment look at this question from the other side. If we are to consider it from the basis of the human heart in one case, then we must do so in the other. Therefore if we are to know that God condemns us because our own heart condemns us, then we are also to know that He justifies us because our own heart does not condemn us. That really leaves God out of the matter entirely. That makes our only ground of confidence our own heart. But "He who trusts in his own heart is a fool" (Prov. 28:26). "The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9). If we trust in it we shall be deceived. If our confidence is in the fact that our heart does not condemn us, then we are trusting in

vanity. No, our only hope is in God. **The only just ground on which our heart will not condemn us, is the knowledge that God does not condemn us.** Trusting in His love, we may have strong confidence. **Our heart has no business to condemn us when God does not.**

So the Bible speaks only encouragement to the sinner. If it did otherwise, we could not be drawn to God, God is great, but He does not wish that fact to be a source of terror to men. In all creation He speaks to us of His power, in order that we may trust Him; for His kindness and mercy are equal to His power. "God has spoken once, twice I have heard this: That power *belongs* to God. Also to You, O Lord, *belongs* mercy; for You render to each one according to his work." (Ps. 62:11, 12). "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:14-16).