

CHRISTIANITY (*defined*)
A Study of 1 John
“The Cure for a Condemning Heart”
1 John 3:18-24

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INTRODUCTION: I heard a funny story old John who had won the first prize in the Publishers Clearing House Sweepstakes. The prize was \$10 Million. The man’s family were concerned because he suffered from heart problems and they were afraid the sudden good news might send him into cardiac arrest. So they enlisted their pastor to break the news to him gradually. So the pastor went in to see old John. The pastor said, “John, if you had \$10 Million, what do you think you would do with it?” Old John thought for a minute and said, “Preacher, I believe I’d give half of it to the church.” And the pastor had a heart attack.

Heart attacks are nothing to laugh about because heart disease continues to be the number one cause of death around the world. Every year, 655 Million Americans die from cardiovascular disease. Globally, the number is even higher. According to the world health organization, each year 18 Million people die of heart disease – that compares to the total number of Covid deaths of about 3 Million.

But there is another kind of heart problem the Bible addresses. In John 14:1 Jesus said, “Don’t let your hearts be troubled.” In Luke 21, Jesus said that in the last days, men’s hearts would be failing them from fear. So the Bible addresses a different kind of heart problem.

The Bible uses the word HEART 685 times. The Apostle John uses it three time in 1 John and all three occurrences are here in this passage. When the Bible uses the word heart (*kardia* in the Greek), it’s not referring to that fist-sized pumping organ in your chest. It refers to the control center of your life – it is the seat of all desires. The words heart and soul are often used interchangeably.

Let’s read what John writes about our heart beginning in 1 John 3:18:
Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in action and in truth. This is how we will know that we belong to the truth and will

reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows all things.

Dear friends, if our hearts don't condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive whatever we ask from him because we keep his commands and do what is pleasing in his sight. Now this is his command: that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another as he commanded us. The one who keeps his commands remains in him, and he in him. And the way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit he has given us.

It's one thing for other people to condemn you, run you down, and to criticize you. But that's not what this is talking about. This is talking about the problem that a lot of Christians have: running themselves down, condemning themselves, being too hard on themselves.

We are all born with a bad heart. Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, desperately wicked. Who can know it?" But Jesus replaces our heart of stone with a tender heart of flesh. He gives us a good, clean heart. But it's not a total heart transplant because there are still vestiges of our old heart. And if we're not careful that old sinful nature can begin to whisper accusing condemning thoughts to us.

Your heart might say something like, "How dare you sit in church with all these other Christians! Just think about all the terrible things you've done." Or your heart will say to you, "How in the world can you teach a Connect Group? How can you stand up in that choir loft?" The devil is the accuser of the brethren. But sometimes, according to this scripture, your own heart will condemn you.

We talk a lot about a heart-healthy lifestyle. This includes following a healthy regimen of exercise and diet. In the same way, if you want to have a spiritually healthy heart, this passage gives us seven daily exercises that will cure a condemning heart.

1. Rest in God's presence. Many Christians stay so much in turmoil. Their heart is so agitated and always in such perpetual motion that they never get to the point where they rest in his presence. Some people work their fingers to the bone to serve God, but never truly rest in His presence. I've spoken many times on the true meaning of the Sabbath

Day. We aren't to refrain from work for one day a week like our Jewish friends do. The New Testament meaning of the Sabbath means that we rest EVERY day from any labor to try to earn our salvation. We rest in finished work of Christ.

But we also need to take time to literally rest in the presence of Jesus. That's why it's so important to have a daily quiet time with the Lord. The most important time of day for me is when I get up and spend time with the Lord in prayer and Bible Study. I'm not ready for the challenges of the day until I first spend time alone with God. Some people stay agitated in their spirit. They may seem calm on the outside, but inside there is a hurricane of stress and worry that is raging. Some of you are like a duck on a pond. On the surface, the duck seems to be gliding along with no effort, but beneath the surface, he's paddling like crazy.

Are you struggling with a troubled heart? Why don't you accept the invitation found in Matthew 11:28: **Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take up my yoke and learn from me, because I am lowly and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."**

Now all of us labor. And you can labor in the Lord without it being a heavy burden. But this is God's promise. That is the birthright of a believer. An agitated, self-condemning heart will not allow you to rest in the presence of the Lord. And what does it mean to rest in the presence of the Lord? It just means you get alone with him. Open your Bible and just say, "Lord, I'm yours. My life is totally in your control. Lord, I don't even trust what my own heart tells me sometimes." Your heart can falsely accuse you.

Your heart may be telling you one thing. And if God tells you another thing in his word, which voice are you going to listen to? If God is greater than your heart, listen to him.

2. Pray with confidence. Do you have confidence when you pray?

There are many factors that affect our prayers. There are things that can hinder your prayers. In 1 Peter 3, he is writing about the importance of husbands and wives being coheirs of the grace of salvation. He

specifically tells us husbands to honor our wives, so that our prayers will not be hindered. Guys, if you've just had a "discussion" with your spouse that can be heard down the street, you might find that your prayers will be hindered.

But when you are right with God and right with others you can have confidence when you pray. The writer of Hebrews says that because Jesus has opened the way to God, that we can approach the Father with boldness. In 1 John 5:14, John describes this confidence. **This is the confidence we have before him: If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.**

I can remember when I was in the first or second grade, my Sunday School class was on prayer. The teacher said, "If you ask God for something, God will give it to you." And I said, "You can ask God for anything?" And they said yes, that's right.

At the time, I was fascinated with helicopters. I loved an old black-and-white TV show about a helicopter called Whirly Bird. We were living in Dothan, Alabama which was near Fort Rucker where all the Army helicopter pilots are trained even today. Every time I saw a helicopter fly over, I'd run out the back door and scream up to the sky for them to give me a ride. So, that night after Sunday school, I got on my knees beside my bed and prayed, "God, I want a helicopter. Not a toy one. I want the real thing." I went on to describe it to God in detail, as if God had never seen a helicopter! I told him there was an empty field behind my house and I wanted it to be there in the morning.

I promise you, there was not an ounce of doubt in my prayer. The next morning, I hopped up and got dressed to go fly. And I went outside, really expecting to see a helicopter. And would you believe? That night an army helicopter had made an emergency landing in that field beside my house. And there it was, the answer to my prayer.... Now that didn't happen, I just asked if you would believe it. Don't believe it. No helicopter. At first, I was disappointed and thought that whole deal about prayer was just a lie. I later came to understand that there are several conditions to prayer. You must pray according to God's will. That wasn't God's will for me to have a helicopter, but at least I was

praying in faith. So even now, when I pray, I try to copy that same kind of childlike faith when I pray – so I can have confidence in prayer.

When you pray, do you put a question mark on your prayer? Are you not sure whether or not you'll get it? The Bible says to ask in faith, nothing wavering, for he that wavers is like a wave of the sea. Let not that man think he shall receive anything from the Lord. We all need to learn how to pray with confidence.

3. Obey God's Word. There is a connection between answered prayer and obedience. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

And here in 1 John 3:21-22 we read: **"We have confidence before God and receive whatever we ask from him because we keep his commands and do what is pleasing in his sight."**

You see, obedience gives us access to the blessings of God. God cannot bless a disobedient child. Let me use an example from parenting. What if you had a teenage child who was continually rebellious. Let's say that child went out one evening with some of his friends. And you said to him to be back by 11 o'clock. Then 11 o'clock passes. The child's not there. Then 12 o'clock passes. The child's not there. At 1 o'clock in the morning, the child comes in and really doesn't have an excuse and isn't really upset about it.

Let's say you've been instructing that same child to study more, but instead they are on their phone or playing video games instead of studying. They are making terrible grades. And then this same child comes to you and says, "Dad, and mom, what I'd really like is a new car."

Now as a parent, you're not going to be very intelligent if you give that kind of gift to a child who is continually rebellious and disobedient. But let's change it to a positive story. Let's say you have a child who isn't perfect, but when you tell that child to be in by 11 o'clock, they're in by 11 o'clock. Or they call you and let you know what the emergency is that keeps them from being home. And although they may not be Einstein, they're diligent in their studies. They work hard in their studies. They try to obey you as best they can. One day that child tells you they really need a car. There's a tremendous difference between the willingness on

the part of good parents to give something to an obedient child and a disobedient child.

There was a period in King David's life when he was living in open rebellion to God. He came to find that his prayers weren't being answered and in Psalm 66:18, he made this observation, **"If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened."**

4. Believe that Jesus is changing you. One reason you should not be condemning yourself is that God isn't finished with you yet. You and I are a work in progress. I think some Christians are harder on themselves than God is.

Sometimes they expect too much of themselves, and they allow their heart to condemn them. And it keeps them from being all they can be, because they stay in a cycle of self-condemnation.

I saw a man wearing a button one time with 11 letters on it: PBPWIMGIFWYMY. It stood for: "Please be patient with me. God isn't finished with me yet." And you see, we just need to trust Jesus to keep on working in us. That's what Paul said in Philippians 1:6: **I am sure of this, that he who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.**

The Lord predicted that Peter would deny him three times. But He said, "Peter, I have prayed for you – that your faith won't fail. And when you have changed, go and strengthen the brothers." After Peter failed the Lord, he went out and wept bitterly. He had to have been angry and condemning of his failure. But he remembered the words of the Lord who had told him that he would grow beyond that failure. And if you've failed the Lord, don't be so down on yourself. God has great things in store for you. If you fall down, get up and keep going.

I once heard a man testify, **"I'm not what I ought to be. But praise God, I'm not what I used to be. And I thank Him that I'm not yet what I'm GOING to be."**

5. Practice love for others. In the next chapter we're going to read that God is love. But love is not God. Love is not the way to God. God is the way to love. Love is really the theme for the rest of this epistle. The way we know we have passed from death to life is because we love one

another. Jesus said that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. If you have a self-condemning heart, then you won't love yourself very much which means you won't love others the way you should. I've said before that there's a difference between an unhealthy attitude of being in love with yourself – that leads to narcissism. Someone who is in love with themselves will stand in front of a mirror and sing, "How Great Thou Art."

Loving yourself means accepting yourself as God accepts you. Gloria Gaither wrote a song decades ago that I find myself often singing. It says, **"I am loved; I am loved; I can risk loving you. For the One who knows me best loves me most."**

Here's how John expressed it in 1 John 3:23: **Now this is his command: that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another as he commanded us.**

There is an immature love that says, "I will love you if you love me." Immature love says, "I will love you if you will change." But mature love – God's love – says, "I will love you unconditionally. I love you just the way you are." But God's love is a transforming love that says, "I love you just the way you are; but I love you too much to let you stay the way you are."

So here's God's standard for love. As I read this, I want you to think about a particular person that you find difficult to love: **Love is patient. Love is kind. Love isn't jealous. It doesn't sing its own praises. It isn't arrogant. It isn't rude. It doesn't think about itself. It isn't irritable. It doesn't keep track of wrongs. It isn't happy when injustice is done, but it is happy with the truth. Love never stops being patient, never stops believing, never stops hoping, never gives up.**

6. Abide (remain) in Christ. I mentioned several weeks ago that all of the Christian life can be summarized in three invitations. (1) Come to me – for salvation. (2) Follow me – for discipleship. And (3) Abide in me for fruitfulness. To abide in Jesus means to remain in Him. 1 John 3:24 says: **The one who keeps his commands remains in him, and he in him.**

Think about the phrase, “in Christ.” The Apostle Paul uses that phrase 170 times. What does it mean? Let’s say I asked you, “Hey, what are you into these days?” You might say you’re into skiing, or you’re into golf, or you’re into music, etc. What you're saying is what's important to you. What are you into, folks? The Bible says we ought to be into God. That ought to be the most important thing in our lives.

But it also has the idea of abiding in Christ. It means to stick as close as you can. That's what that word “abiding” means. Parents, have you ever been in a crowd and you say to your child, “Stick close to me. Don’t you wander off.”? That's what it means to abide in Christ. It means to stay close to Christ and don't wander away or backslide. Have you noticed that throughout the day there are forces, people, and temptations that will try to draw you away from abiding in Christ?

7. Acknowledge Christ in you. Charles Spurgeon said the most important words in the Greek New Testament are prepositions. “We are saved **by** grace **through** faith **unto** good works.” You get those prepositions mixed up, and you're in a heap of trouble. We're not saved by faith. We're saved by grace, through faith. We're not saved by good works. We're saved unto good works. And when it comes to our relationship with Jesus Christ, don't get the prepositions confused. It is not so much Christ **with** me. It is not so much Christ **for** me. It is not so much Christ **beside** me. It is Christ **in** me, the hope of glory. And that is the essence of the Christian life.

You've got to say, like Paul, that your body is not your own. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. You're bought with a price. Try acknowledging several times during the day, “Christ is in me, Christ is in me. And because Christ is in me, I'm not going to do some of the things ordinarily I would do. And because Christ is in me, I'm not going to listen to my condemning heart.”

How do you know that Christ is in you? Look at verse 24 again. It says because God, the Holy Spirit, who represents Jesus, comes to live in us. The resurrected Jesus is seated at the right hand of God, but it is the Holy Spirit who bears witness of Jesus in our lives. **And the way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit he has given us.**

Have you ever had the Holy Spirit speak to you? I became a Christian at age nine, but there were three or four years when I was a teenager that I was terribly rebellious against God. I had no hunger for the word. I didn't pray. I didn't want to go to church. I think it was instrumental that one of my friends died without Christ around that time, because I never told him about Christ. It was about the 10th grade when I got serious about God and I began to grow. When I got to college, God was continuing to do great things in my life. And I faced a dilemma, a crisis of faith. And it was the crisis that many of you faced. I said, "Lord, was I really saved when I was nine? Or did I just make some kind of a decision? And then what happened to me when I was a 10th grader...was that really being born again?" I wanted to know, "God, when was I saved?" And I remember getting on my knees in my dormitory at Samford University, knowing that I was never really going to be productive in my faith until I nailed this down.

And God spoke to me as clearly as I've ever heard the Lord speak to me. He said, "David, you were saved as a child by simple, childlike faith. You were backslidden and you were rebellious, but the whole time you were mine. And now I've got you back where I want you. Son, just don't ever wander away again." And you say, "Well, was that an audible voice?" No, it was a lot louder than that! It was the Holy Spirit speaking to my spirit. There are times when God just lets us know that Christ is in us.

Conclusion: And so look at those seven daily exercises. Which one of these do you need the most? Rest in God's presence? Confidence when you're praying? Total obedience in your actions? Absolute and utter trust in Jesus to make you into what he wants to make you? Real, agape love for others? Abiding in Christ and sticking to him? Or acknowledging that Christ is in you? Don't let your heart condemn you. Instead realize that God is greater than your heart.

