CONFIDENCE BEFORE GOD

1 John 3:19-24

Key Verse: 3:21-22

“Dear friends, if your hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receives from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.”

Thank God for Jesus Christ, who laid down his life for us. Thank God for Christ’s choice and determination to love us that he lay down his life for the salvation of his people, who would eternally perish without his love. In this love of Christ, God exhorts us to lay down our lives for our brothers. We can begin by doing a small yet concrete thing in the direction of laying down our lives for our brothers. This direction is necessary especially when we are in a difficult situation to love someone near me. Today’s passage is then about what blessings of God through obeying the command of love. We will see the effect or fruit of the life of obedience and love.

**First, our hearts assured (19-20).** Verse 19 says, “This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence.” When we practice the love of Christ by doing the act of love in truth, we are assured that we belong to the truth. God is the God of truth (Isa 65:16), and our Lord Jesus said, “I am the truth” (Jn 14:6). Children of God are the children of truth; children of the devil are the children of lies, for the devil is the father of lies, not holding to the truth (Jn 8:44). It is written in Proverbs 6:16-19, “There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.” Regarding lying or falsity is written twice. Then what a blessing it is to belong to the truth! John says in 2 John 1:4, “It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us.” He also says in 3 John 1:4, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.” We see that love and truth go together, since God is love and he is the God of truth. This is also in accordance with 1 Corinthians 13:6, “Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.”

Let’s look at verse 19 again, “This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence.” Living in this troubled world, it is not easy for our hearts to be at rest. Then what a blessing it is that we set our hearts at rest in his presence! When our hearts rest in his presence, the rest is true rest in perfect peace. Jesus said in John 14:27, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

Here, “we set our hearts at rest in his presence is” in other translations (ESV, KJV) is “we shall (re)assure our hearts before him.” This assurance of our hearts is certainly related to the assurance of God’s living and that he is our Father and we are his children, and so the assurance of salvation. There is a song, “Blessed Assurance”, which goes, “Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine! O what a fore-taste of glory divine! Heir of salvation, purchased of God, Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood! This is my story, this is my song…”

Then verse 20 says, “whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is great than our hearts, and he knows every thing.” According to the 2011 NIV, it is, “If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.” In ESV, it is “for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.” What does this mean? Does this mean that we should ignore our guilty feelings? Certainly, not. When our sins are obvious before God, we should repent. For example, when anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, the person should repent as he realizes this sin before God. In that way, he can be set free from the condemnation of the heart through our advocate Jesus Christ. Yet, even if the person had pity on the needy brother and served him, there might be the condemnation of the heart that says, “your giving and serving is not enough; you should lay down your life for him.” What can we do? We come to God, confessing, “O God, you know all things and please let me know what to do.” It does not mean that we should compromise with our situation. In John 21, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than these?”, Peter said, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Again, Jesus said, “Simon son of John do you truly love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” The third time Jesus said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” Probably at that moment Peter remembered that he had betrayed Jesus three times and was hurt. At this time Peter said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you” (21:15-17). We believe that Jesus understood Peter’s possible heart condemnation and accepted Peter’s love confession, which was made sincerely despite his shortcomings and failures. What a comfort it is that God is the greater than our heart and he knows everything!

Sometimes, we see that the conviction of my heart is different from that of other believers, especially that of the one who I have trusted in. We have a great conflict in the heart! What can we do? Again, come to God. When we truly come God, we can be most honest and sincere, being freed from anyone and even myself. When we do not come to God, we can be lost. We must really come to Him opening our heart to Him. Coming near to God, we can present this serious matter before him, confessing, “I believe that there is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and the Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” (Eph 4:4-5). We can believe that God will resolve all matters in his way at his time. We should always remember the words of God in Isaiah 55:8-9, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” Thank God that He is the greater than our heart, and he knows everything! Before this great God and Father, our personal struggle is to remain true to him, with our faith being refined in him more and more.

**Second, confidence before God and of prayer (21-23).** Verses 21 and 22 say, “Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.” Human confidence is not reliable and it is short-lived. Human confidence is confidence in flesh. But confidence before God is confidence in God and this confidence is true and steadfast. It is likely that Cain had confidence in his flesh and Abel in God. When Cain killed his brother Abel, Cain looked strong in his human confidence and Abel, helpless and miserable without resisting him. Cain seemed to be a victor and Abel, a loser. But the Bible says in Hebrews 11:4, “…By faith he (Abel) was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.” Before God Abel was a victor in life. We can also think of the first king of Israel Saul and David. With his human confidence as king of Israel Saul tried to kill David, his subject, out of jealousy, for David got more people’s popularity than he. For thirteen years David only fled relying on God. David had chances to kill king Saul two times, but he did not do so in the fear of the Lord. When David relied on God, having confidence in God, God gave him victory and raised him as the second king of Israel. He said in 2 Samuel 22:2-3, “…The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge…” In the epistle Philippians, Paul wrote about those who had confidence in their flesh. They were circumcision party claiming that circumcision was necessary for salvation. They were those who took pride in their human background and human achievements. Paul used harsh words, saying, “Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, mutilators of the flesh.” They turned out to be enemies of the cross of Christ. Paul clearly said of them, “Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things” (Ph 3:19). But Paul gloried in Christ Jesus giving up all his confidence in the flesh. His confession at his mature faith is this: “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and fellowship of sharing in his death becoming like him in his death” (Ph 3:10). His confidence was only in Christ Jesus to the end. We remember Martin Luther, the Reformer. He put 95 theses on the door of the Castle Church of Wittenberg, challenging against the corruption of the Roman Catholic. At that time, Roman Catholic power was so strong that no one dared to challenge it. On one occasion at the Diet of Worms, when he was asked, “Martin, do you or do you not repudiate your books and the errors which they contain?” he spoke the words for which he has become most famous: “…I am bound to the Scriptures I have quoted, and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise. Here I stand. God help me. Amen.” Certainly, Martin Luther had confidence in God. We can say that the history of God is the battle between the streams, those who have confidence in flesh and those who have confidence in God.

When we obey his word and come to him, he gives us confidence. Certainly, this confidence is through the forgiveness of sins and in the right relationship with God. Hebrews 10:35 says, “So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.” And it is written in Hebrews 13:6, “So we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’” What a confidence in life! Apostle Paul said in Ephesians 3:12, “In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.” And the author of Hebrews says in Hebrews 4:16, “Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” We also need confidence in approaching God, his throne of grace.

Here verse 21 says, “We receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.” What a blessing! This blessing is the confidence of prayer. John said of this confidence also in 1 John 5:14-15, “This is the confidence we have in approaching God; that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.” And we are reminded of what Jesus said in John 15:7, “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.” Truly one of great privileges of God’s children is to pray to God the Father. What is prayer? Prayer is a direct contact with God. Nowadays connection among people is very important and powerful. But prayer is connection to God. We believe that this is the most powerful connection.

Yet, one of the difficult things in Christian life is prayer until we know the significance of prayer, until we become desperate in our life. But prayer must be learned. Luke 18:1 says, “Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.” In KJV, it is “men ought always to pray, and not to faint.” It means that when we do not pray, we faint. Jesus urges us to pray. He said in Matthew 7:7-8, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who ask receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.” What an emphasis it is, six-fold emphasis! Still Jesus says further consecutively in 7:9-11, “Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” Apostle Paul said in Ephesians 3:20, “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.”

Yet, we should not forget that prayer is to listen to God and have fellowship with him, and receive a direction from him. Mark 1:35 says, “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.” Through this prayer, Jesus renews the purpose of his coming into this world. During the previous night so many people were healed and in the morning still people were coming to be healed. His disciples demanded him to meet the need of the crowds through his healing work. But Jesus said, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come” (Mk 1:38). Another time Jesus did a miraculous work by feeding 5000 hungry people with five loves and two fish. Then the people demanded him to be king, the king of bread. But Jesus withdrew to a mountainside by himself and prayed (Jn 6:15; Mt 14:23; Mk 6:46). After prayer, Jesus walked on the water to train his disciples, especially one person, Peter. Peter could walk on the water when he fixed his eyes on Jesus, but as soon as he saw the wind, losing the sight of Jesus momentarily, he began to sink and cried out, “Lord, save me!” Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him and said, “You of little faith, why did you doubt” (Mt 14:29-31). This Peter grew up to be a rock of faith in the early Christian era. How important it is to come to God and receive a direction from him in our Christian life! Christian common sense is important. At we should come to God and listen to him and a clear direction from him especially at the time of conflict.

Here in verse 22, “and receive him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what please him.” So prayer and the life of obeying his commands and pleasing him all go together.

**Third, indwelling of the Spirit (23-24).** And then John says in verse 23, “And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.” Interestingly, “to love one another” alone is not a command, a separated command. Together with “to believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ”, the two is one command. It is as verse 3:16 says, “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.” Faith and love go together. With faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who laid down his life for us, we can obey the love command to love one another. We see that obedience that comes from faith (Ro 1:5) produces power in us to love.

Now verse 24 says, “Those who obey his command, live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that we live in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.” What an expression it is “live in him, and he in them.” In ESV, it is “Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.” The life of a child of God is God abiding in him and he in God through his obedience to God’s command. It is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in God’s children. In 2:20 John wrote, “But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth” and he continued in 2:27, “As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain/abide in him.” Now John specifically mentioned God abiding in us by the Spirit.

Jesus said in John 14:15-17, “If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” Jesus continually said in John 14:23, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”

Bible continually teaches that Christian life is the life led by the Spirit. Romans 8:14 says, “those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” Galatians 5:16 says, “…live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature” and in 5:18, “if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law” and in 5:25, “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”

We know that the Son of God Jesus Christ’s coming into this world and his death and resurrection are the pivot of Christian faith based on historical facts. Yet, we cannot neglect the coming of the Holy Spirit at the Pentecost. It is written in Acts 2:1-4, “When the day of Pentecost came, they (120 believers) were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed o be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.” The coming of the Holy Spirit was also a historical fact. At that time, Apostle Peter gave a speech based on what was spoken by the prophet Joel, “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy” (Acts 2:17-18). This is the reason God wants his children to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18).

Here in this Epistle of 1 John what is important is that one’s obedience to God’s commands and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit have a close relationship. Again, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. John has been writing in this Epistle, particularly in 2:3, “We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands”, 2:5, “If anyone obeys his word, Gods’ love is truly made complete in him”, in 3:22, “and (we) receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his command”, and 3:24, “Those who obey his command live in him, and he in them….”

In this passage, we see the whole picture of our Christian life: to obey God, to believe in Jesus Christ, and to live by the Spirit. May we have confidence before God as we obey his commands and come to him through Christ Jesus and be led by the Spirit.