

# 1 John 3:20 Commentary

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FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD AND HIS CHILDREN

Click chart to enlarge

Charts from [Jensen's Survey of the NT](#) - used by permission

Another Overview Chart - [1 John](#) - [Charles Swindoll](#)

BASIS OF FELLOWSHIP		BEHAVIOR OF FELLOWSHIP	
Conditions of Fellowship	Cautions of Fellowship	Fellowship Characteristics	Fellowship Consequences
Meaning of Fellowship 1 Jn 1:1-2:27		Manifestations of Fellowship 1 Jn 2:28-5:21	
Abiding in God's Light		Abiding in God's Love	
Written in Ephesus			
circa 90 AD			
From Talk Thru the Bible			

## STUDY GUIDE

### 1 JOHN 3

What is this? On the photograph of the Observation Worksheet for this chapter you will find handwritten 5W/H questions (Who?

What? Where? When? Why? How?) on each verse to help you either personally study or lead a discussion on this chapter. The questions are generally very simple and are stated in such a way as to stimulate you to observe the text to discern the answer. As a reminder, given the truth that your ultimate Teacher is the Holy Spirit, begin your time with God with prayer such as Psalm 119:12+ "Blessed are You, O LORD; Teach me Your statutes." (you can vary it with similar prayers - Ps 119:18, 26, 33, 64, 66, 68, 108, 124, 135, 171, etc) The questions are generally highlighted in yellow and the answers in green. Some questions have no answers and are left to your observations and the illuminating/teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. Some qualifying thoughts - (1) Use "As is" - these are handwritten and will include mistakes I made, etc. (2) They may not be the best question for a given verse and my guess is that on some verses you will think of a far superior 5W/H question and/or many other questions.

Dr Howard Hendricks once gave an assignment to his seminary students to list as many observations as they could from Acts 1:8. He said "So far they've come up with more than 600 different ones! Imagine what fun you could have with 600 observations on this passage. Would you like to see Scripture with eyes like that?" (P. 63 [Living by the Book](#) - borrow) With practice you can! And needless to say, you will likely make many more observations and related questions than I recorded on the pages below and in fact I pray that the Spirit would indeed lead you to discover a veritable treasure chest of observations and questions! In Jesus' Name. Amen

Why am I doing this? **Mortimer Adler** among others helped me develop a questioning mindset as I read, seeking to read actively rather than passively. Over the years I have discovered that as I have practiced reading with a 5W/H questioning mindset, it has yielded more accurate interpretation and the good fruit of meditation. In other words, consciously interacting with the inspired Holy Word of God and the illuminating Holy Spirit has honed my ability to meditate on the Scripture, and my prayer is that this tool will have the same impact in your spiritual life. The benefits of meditation are literally priceless in regard to their value in this life and in the life to come (cf discipline yourself for godliness in 1Ti 4:8+.) For some of the benefits - see Joshua 1:8+ and Psalm 1:2-3+. It will take diligence and mental effort to develop an "inductive" ([especially an "observational"](#)), interrogative mindset as you read God's Word, but it bears repeating that the benefits in this life and the rewards in the next will make it more than worth the effort you invest! Dear Christian reader let me encourage you to strongly consider learning the skills of [inductive Bible study](#) and spending the rest of your life practicing them on the Scriptures and living them out in your daily walk with Christ.

Although Mortimer Adler's advice is from a secular perspective, his words are worth pondering...

*Strictly, all reading is active. What we call passive is simply less active. Reading is better or worse according as it is more or less active. And one reader is better than another in proportion as he is capable of a greater range of activity in reading.* (Adler's classic book [How to Read a Book is free online](#))

[John Piper](#) adds that "Insight or understanding is the product of intensive, headache-producing meditation on two or three verses and how they fit together. This kind of reflection and rumination is provoked by asking questions of the text. And you cannot do it if you hurry. Therefore, we must resist the deceptive urge to carve notches in our bibliographic gun. Take two hours to ask ten questions of Galatians 2:20+ and you will gain one hundred times the insight you would have attained by reading thirty pages of the New Testament or any other book. Slow down. Query. Ponder. Chew.... (John Dewey rightly said) "People only truly think when they are confronted with a problem. Without some kind of dilemma to stimulate thought, behavior becomes habitual rather than thoughtful."

*"Asking questions is the key to understanding."*

--Jonathan Edwards

That said, below are the [5W/H questions](#) for each verse in this chapter (click page to enlarge). This is not neatly typed but is handwritten and was used for leading a class discussion on this chapter, so you are welcome to use it in this "as is" condition...



## 1 John 3:20 in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things: .

**Greek** hoti ean kataginoske (3SPAS) hemon e kardia hoti meizon estin (3SPAI) o theos tes kardias hemon kai ginoskei (3SPAI) panta

KJV 1 John 3:20 For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

BGT 1 John 3:20 τι ν καταγιν σκ μ ν καρδ α, τι με ζων στ ν θε ς τ ς καρδ ας μ ν κα γιν σκει π ντα.

NET 1 John 3:20 that if our conscience condemns us, that God is greater than our conscience and knows all things.

CSB 1 John 3:20 even if our conscience condemns us, that God is greater than our conscience, and He knows all things.

ESV 1 John 3:20 for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.

NIV 1 John 3:20 whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

NLT 1 John 3:20 Even if we feel guilty, God is greater than our feelings, and he knows everything.

NRS 1 John 3:20 whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

NJB 1 John 3:20 even if our own feelings condemn us, that God is greater than our feelings and knows all things.

NAB 1 John 3:20 in whatever our hearts condemn, for God is greater than our hearts and knows everything.

YLT 1 John 3:20 because if our heart may condemn -- because greater is God than our heart, and He doth know all things.

MIT 1 John 3:20 because if our heart would be accusatory, God is greater than our heart; he knows everything.

GWN 1 John 3:20 Whenever our conscience condemns us, we will be reassured that God is greater than our conscience and knows everything.

BBE 1 John 3:20 When our heart says that we have done wrong; because God is greater than our heart, and has knowledge of all things.

RSV 1 John 3:20 whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

NKJ 1 John 3:20 For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.

ASV 1 John 3:20 because if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

**NEB** 1Jn 3:19-20 - This is how we may know that we belong to the realm of truth, and convince ourselves in his sight that even if our conscience condemns us, God is greater than our conscience and knows all

**Wuest** on 1Jn 3:19-20 - "In this we shall know experientially that out of the truth we are, and in His presence shall tranquilize our heart in whatever our heart condemns us, because God is greater than our hearts and knows all things." ([Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used by permission)

- **if:** Job 27:6 John 8:9 Ac 5:33 Ro 2:14,15 1Co 4:4 14:24,25 Tit 3:11
- **God:** 1Jn 4:4 Job 33:12 John 10:29,30 Heb 6:13
- **and:** Ps 44:20,21 90:8 139:1-4 Jer 17:10 Jer 23:24 John 2:24,25 John 21:17 Heb 4:13 Rev 2:23
- [1 John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries.

## **BELIEVERS ARE NO LONGER UNDER CONDEMNATION!**

There are two ways this passage is interpreted, one positively and the other negatively. **John Anderson** summarizes the two views and the proponents of each, but the majority of writers favor the positive interpretation (which is the interpretation I favor)...

**(POSITIVE)** The writer is reassuring the readers that when they are doing deeds of love, they can know that they are of the truth and, even if their overly sensitive consciences condemn them, they can comfort their hearts with the realization that God is greater than their consciences and knows everything about the matter and still forgives them [Raymond Brown, F F Bruce, Donald Burdick, Glenn Barker, David Smith, Rudolf Bultmann, J L Houlden, A E Brooke, R C H Lenski, John Huther, I Howard Marshall, Simon Kistemaker, John Stott, Stephen Smalley, WBC, B F Westcott; probably all versions].

**(NEGATIVE)** The writer is giving them a way to know whether they are in the truth and warns them that if their consciences judge them guilty of wrongdoing, then God will do so even more, because he knows their every trespass and selfish thought [Henry Alford, Kenneth Grayston]. ([An Exegetical Summary of 1, 2, and 3 John](#))

**In whatever our heart** (kardia) **condemns** ([kataginosko](#) present tense) **us, for God is** (present tense) **greater than our heart** (kardia) **and knows** ([ginosko](#) present tense) **all things** - I like the International Children's Bible paraphrase which clearly favors the positive interpretation - "When our hearts make us feel guilty, we can still have peace before God. God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything." God's Word Translation is similar "Whenever our conscience condemns us, we will be reassured that God is greater than our conscience and knows everything."

**Our heart** is our "control center" and in this context refers to our conscience.

[Wycliffe Bible Commentary](#) (POSITIVE INTERPRETATION) - In examining our brotherly-love life, our hearts may be either too strict or too lenient. But God is greater and knows all things; therefore, we appeal to him for the truth about ourselves, and remember that he is the all-compassionate One. This results in correct judgment and confidence for our hearts.

*The Word of God which acquits us must prevail  
over the word of our hearts that condemns us.*

-- [Reformation Study Bible](#)

**ESV Study Bible** (POSITIVE INTERPRETATION) - Whenever one has an inward conviction of sin. It is vital in such times to have a living faith; the proposition that God is greater than our heart grants us assurance that he has forgiven us through the atoning work of Christ. (Borrow [ESV Study Bible page 2434](#))

[The King James Study Bible](#) (page 2009) (POSITIVE INTERPRETATION) - Our heart condemns us in that we recognize that we do not measure up to the standard of love and feel insecure in approaching God. Our conscience may not acknowledge the loving deeds we have done in the power of the Holy Spirit, but God does, and He is superior to our heart. Unlike our conscience, God takes everything into account, including Christ's atoning work for us. God is more compassionate and understanding toward us than we sometimes are toward ourselves.

**John MacArthur** (POSITIVE INTERPRETATION) - God knows those who are truly His (2Ti 2:19) and wants to assure His own of their salvation. Although Christians may have insecurities and doubts about salvation, God does not condemn them (Ro 8:1). Displaying love as a pattern of life is the proof that believers stand uncondemned before God. (Borrow [MacArthur Study Bible page 1970](#))

[Ryrie Study Bible](#) (page 1882) (POSITIVE INTERPRETATION) - We may be either too strict or too lenient in examining our lives; therefore, John's word of comfort is, God the all-knowing is also the all-loving.

[KJV Study Bible](#) (borrow-page 1884) (POSITIVE INTERPRETATION) - In light of John's strict teaching above, he may have felt that some readers might begin to despair. He assures them that, although our feeble attempts to honor God may leave us feeling defeated inside, God is greater than our self-awareness (cf. 1 Cor. 4:4) and can justify us even when we would condemn ourselves. He sees not only our actions, which at times are thwarted or misguided, but also the motives and intentions behind them.

**R C H Lenski** (POSITIVE INTERPRETATION) - To be sure, He knows all our failures in love, all that our own heart finds against us; but He knows vastly more, namely all about our real spiritual state, that the measure of love we do have shows that we have stepped over from the death into the life (1Jn 3:14), that although we are as yet imperfect in love, and our own hearts penitently acknowledge it, we have been born from Him and are his children (1Jn 2:29, etc.). (Borrow [The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude page 484](#))

*Our salvation does not depend  
upon how we feel but upon God*

**John Phillips** (POSITIVE INTERPRETATION) - At times our own hearts make us feel guilty, so John here lifts us above subjective feelings to solid facts—God is infinitely greater than our hearts. On occasion, we let ourselves down, that is, we do not come up to even our own expectations, let alone God's. We discover afresh and with sorrow and shame that the human heart is, indeed, "deceitful above all things," as God declares, and "desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9). We find our hearts full of pride, anger, bitterness, resentment, lust, and we are tempted at times to wonder if we are saved at all. (**ED: BEEN THERE, DONE THAT!**) At such times it is comforting to know that **God is greater than our hearts** and that our salvation does not depend upon how we feel but upon God. The order in which we experience salvation is fact, faith, feeling. The unalterable facts of history are that God has provided salvation—full, free, and forever—in Christ. Faith (**ED: WHICH HE ALSO ENABLES!**) then appropriates those facts, making them no longer merely abstract statements of truth but integrating them as part and parcel of our lives. The feelings follow, and we enter into the joy of our salvation. The sevenfold fruit of the Spirit, after all, begins with love, joy, and peace. So, even when we have a condemning heart, God is greater. His salvation takes care of all our sins, including those temporary and regrettable lapses from that higher and holier life to which we have been called. (SEE [Exploring the Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary - Page 116](#))

**Bob Utley** - All believers have experienced inner grief over not living up to the “standard” that they know is God’s will for their lives. Those pains of conscience can be from God’s Spirit (to cause repentance) or Satan (to cause self-destruction or loss of witness). This is both appropriate guilt and inappropriate guilt. Believers know the difference by reading God’ book (or hearing His messengers). John is trying to console believers who are living by the standard of love but still struggling with sin (both commission and omission).

*A “condemning heart” is one that robs a believer of peace.*

*An “accusing conscience” is another way to describe it.*

**Warren Wiersbe** (POSITIVE INTERPRETATION) - A “condemning heart” is one that robs a believer of peace. An “accusing conscience” is another way to describe it. Sometimes the heart accuses us wrongly, because it “is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jer. 17:9) The answer to that question is, “God knows the heart!” More than one Christian has accused himself falsely, or been harder on himself than necessary; but God will never make such a mistake. A Christian who walks in love has a heart open to God (“God is love”) and knows that God never judges wrongly....No Christian should treat sin lightly, but no Christian should be harder on himself than God is. There is a morbid kind of self-examination and self-condemnation that is not spiritual. ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

**Glenn Barker** (POSITIVE INTERPRETATION) - His readers, like all others, know how easily the conscience can render us ineffective. Doubt, guilt, and failure are never far from any of us. Sometimes our misgivings are the result of our own actions or inactions. Sometimes it is the “accuser” who seizes our weaknesses and shortcomings and so elevates them that we wonder whether we can really be in the truth. What then can we do? We can remember that God understands everything. His word and his truth are greater than our feelings or our conscience. We may rest ourselves in his love for us and live in that love and by that love. We will not excuse ourselves of any sin, but neither will we needlessly accuse ourselves (cf. 1 Cor 4:3–5). (see [The Expositor's Bible Commentary - Abridged Edition](#))

**Spurgeon** here seems to favor a positive interpretation - "Sometimes **our heart condemns us**, but, in doing so, it gives a wrong verdict, and then we have the satisfaction of being able to take the case into a higher court, for '**God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.**'"

**Condemns** (2607) ([kataginosko](#)) is in the present tense which pictures continual condemnation. Perhaps you are one who has a sensitive conscience and like all of us have fallen short of God's standard, especially His high standard of demonstrating love to your brethren, and so you find your conscience continually condemns you, calling you guilty of breaking God's command to love one another. If that is you (and even as I wrote the notes on 1Jn 3:11-18 I truly had to question the reality of demonstration of my agape love for my brethren), then these verses are for you dearly beloved of the Most High God. Memorize them so the **Spirit** might be able to bring them to your mind the next time the evil one accuses your heart! Remember that Jesus fought off the temptations of the devil by being filled with the Spirit (Lk 4:1 "full of the Holy Spirit", cp Lk 4:14, Acts 10:38) and filled with the Word ("It is written" - Mt 4:4, 7, 10; Lk 4:4, 8, 10 - And Jesus did not have an Ipod to look up the passages! They were hidden in His heart - Ps 119:9-11 And remember the devil knows the word and tried to trip him up by quoting it out of context - Mt 4:6. We must know the Word - Eph 6:17!), and He is our pattern for the victorious Christian life (cp 1Cor 11:1, 1Jn 2:6, 1Pe 2:21). To fail to memorize (no legalism intended) is to fail in part to follow our Master's example and walk in His steps! See Memorizing His Word and Memory Verses by Topic.

*The context would seem to support the positive interpretation*

*inasmuch as John was trying to encourage the believers, not discourage them.*

**Cornerstone** (see [The Gospel of John, 1-3 John - Page 355](#)) - Even if we feel guilty, God is greater than our feelings, and he knows everything... this statement has two possible interpretations—one positive and one negative, each depending on how the expression “God is greater than our feelings [lit., hearts]” is understood. The positive interpretation is that the believer can take consolation in God’s beneficent greatness (cf. Brooke 1912:100; Stott 2000:150–152). The negative interpretation is that the believer should recognize that God, who is greater than us, would echo any condemnation and do so in greater fashion (cf. Alford 1976:4.479–481). The context would seem to support the positive interpretation inasmuch as John was trying to encourage the believers, not discourage them. Certain scholars would repunctuate 1Jn 3:19–20 to make it even clearer that John intended a positive interpretation. Burge (1996:164), following [Marshall](#) (1978:198), suggests this format:

1 Jn 3:19a: “In this [the love and obedience we exhibit, 1Jn 3:11–18] we will know that we are of the truth.”

1 Jn 3:19b-20: “We will reassure our hearts in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us, because (1) God is greater than our hearts, and (2) God knows all things.”

Paul assured the believers in Rome that they would experience "no condemnation" and "no separation"

Ro 8:1+ There is therefore now **no condemnation** for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Ro 8:31-39+ What then shall we say to these things? If God [is] for us, who [is] against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? 33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Just as it is written, "FOR THY SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, **shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

**Chuck Smith** - As a Christian we should not live in condemnation. Jesus said that He did not come into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. The woman taken in the act of adultery. The woman at the well. The prostitute that washed His feet with her tears. If a person has come to Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, those sins are forgiven, and there is no condemnation. This is a difficult truth for many people to grasp. Before receiving forgiveness there was such great conviction, as David said, "My sin was ever before me." ([If Our Heart Condemns Us](#))

**John Wesley** describes how the conscience functions in three ways: "First. It is a witness, testifying to what we have done in thought, or word, or action. Secondly. It is a judge, passing sentence on what we have done, that it is good or evil. And, thirdly, it, in some sort, executes the sentence, by occasioning a degree of complacency in him that does well, and a degree of uneasiness in him that does evil." (From his sermon [On Conscience](#))

**Ray Stedman** addresses "the problem of an accusing heart, i.e., a condemning conscience. What do you do as a Christian when your heart condemns you? As we saw, the usual result of a condemning conscience is a tendency to ignore God, to keep in the shadows and to distrust his love, to criticize his people and in many ways to manifest the fact that we have lost contact with the God who indwells us. The answer, as we saw in 1John 3:19, was to reassure our hearts by a deed of self-giving love: 'Little children, let us not love in word or speech,' says John, 'but in deed and in truth. By this we shall know that we are of the truth, and reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us,' {1 Jn 3:18-19RSV}. We are to give ourselves to someone who is in need or help another in his problem, repay good for evil, or give back kind words instead of caustic, sharp ones. The result, John says, will be a sense of reassurance. If we are really in Christ, rivers of love and peace will begin to flow out from our hearts again, and it will be impossible to remain condemned"

**David Legge** on doubting our salvation - It may be that we are His, we are child of God, but we have failed Him. Whilst it may not be a lifestyle of constant failure and habitual sin, there has been a blip and a blot on our testimony. Because of that, whether we consider it to be a small hiccup or a large fall, we have a bad conscience toward God - and it causes us from time to time, or maybe constantly, to doubt our salvation. I would have to say after our study last week in verses 10 to 18, reading and studying in depth that portion, it would be easy to come away and say: 'Am I saved at all? How guilty I have been of being an unloving Christian, an uncaring Christian! I have not laid my life down for the brethren the way that John is exhorting us to do. I have shut up my emotions when I have been faced with the needs of others, my brothers and sisters in Christ and those outside the church. I have been guilty of loving in word, loving in language, but not loving in deed and in truth'. Now, let's be honest with one another, and honest with God: all of us, at some time or another, have been guilty of these things. Whilst we agree that these ought to be exceptions rather than the rule in the Christian life, we are all guilty of being unloving towards our brethren in Christ. But here's where the problem arises: if you have an oversensitive conscience, you can read passages of Scripture like this and listen to preaching that we've been hearing week after week, biblically based, and you can begin to say to yourself, 'I'm not truly saved', or 'There's a cause for doubt' - when there is no cause for doubt because you're a child of God. Your sensitive conscience can actually begin to do the devil's work for him. Some of you, perhaps, are having self-incriminating doubts, and it makes you feel condemned in your heart. It's wrong, because God has not condemned you if you're one of His children! Maybe even that bad conscience, that condemning heart is preventing you from approaching God. You feel unworthy to such an extent that you feel that you can't come into God's presence, even though it is not God who has condemned you, God has not barred you from approaching Him, but it's your own heart that makes you feel that way. Whilst there are those, as we've said, who have well-grounded doubts, and their heart condemns them for good reason, I believe that John here now in these verses - 1Jn 3:19-24 - is speaking to those who have ill-founded doubts. This is the problem he's addressing... John has not only been exposing false teachers whose salvation should be doubted, but he's seeking to bring assurance to the true sheep of God in these churches who have been influenced by the false teaching of the false teachers and are beginning to doubt their salvation because of what they have been saying... Now John is wanting to guard against this (those who profess Christ but don't truly know Him): yes, he wants to uncover, in the hearts of men, false assurance; the false assurance that these false teachers had, spreading their lies; the false assurance that some of these believers may have, if they believed their lies -

but what he does not want to do is create a bad conscience in a true child of God. ([Confident Christianity](#))

[David Guzik](#) - Condemnation can well up inside us that has nothing to do with our standing before God. It may be the work of the enemy of our souls (who, according to Revelation 12:10 accuses the brethren), or the work of an over-active conscience. At those times, we trust in what God's Word says about our standing, not how we feel about it.

*We can come confidently to God when we recognize that His grace and mercy are greater than our guilt.*

--[1-3 John page 356](#)

[Marvin Vincent](#) on **God is greater than our heart** - Is this superior greatness to be regarded as related to God's **judgment** (Ed: As favored by Calvin, Martyn Lloyd-Jones) or to His **compassion** (Ed: As favored by most modern commentators)? If to His **judgment**, the sense is: God who is greater than our heart and knows all things, must not only endorse but emphasize our self-accusation. If our heart condemns us, how much more God, Who is greater than our heart. If greater refers to His **compassion**, the sense is: when our heart condemns us we shall quiet our hearts with the assurance that we are in the hands of a God who is greater than our heart—Who surpasses man in love and compassion no less than in knowledge. **This latter sense better suits the whole drift of the discussion.**

**Spurgeon** in this quote (see another Spurgeon quote above) seems to see the judgment side of God's greater knowledge (I seldom argue with him, and so it may be that John's passage conveys both senses - **warning to professors, comfort to possessors!**) - If you, with your narrow knowledge of right and wrong, — your imperfect understanding of your own motives, — if you find reason to **condemn** yourself, what must be your position before the bar of the all-seeing, heart-reading God? That little flutter in thy bosom, my friend, that trembling, that uneasiness, what means it? Is not this a forewarning of the sounding of the trumpet of the great assize, when thou wilt have to stand before the Judge of all the earth, and answer for thyself to Him? It is easy to deceive thy fellow-man, but it is impossible to deceive thy God.

*"Conscience is one drop;  
the reconciled God is a sea of comfort."*

--Martin Luther

**David Allen** writes that "sometimes our conscience may condemn us when we are not guilty of overt sin. We sometimes become keenly aware of our unworthiness before God, especially at times of prayer. Sometimes this unworthiness is satanic in nature. As Luther said, "Sometimes the devil interprets the best things badly and the bad things well, weakens the good things and makes much of the things that are bad. From a little laughter he can make eternal damnation." Yet God is greater than our conscience and knows everything concerning us, including our deepest motives... When we are living and loving as we ought, even if our oversensitive conscience condemns us, we take comfort in knowing that God is greater than our conscience. Our conscience is not the Supreme Court! There is a higher court: God!" (See [1-3 John: Fellowship in God's Family](#))

**Greater** ([meizon](#)) is the comparative of **mégas** which means great, more in magnitude, degree or effectiveness, beyond what is usual.

**Greater** ([meizon](#)) **than our heart** (or conscience) - While God in no way winks at or minimizes our failures, He knows us better than we know ourselves. Our heart or consciences "knows" us to a degree, but God's knowing is perfect and infallible. Ultimately believers are clothed in the righteousness of His Son and when God looks at us, He knows we are still positionally in His Son, regardless of our failures and the conviction of our conscience. While we as believers tend to be either to severe or too lenient in our own consciences, God's omniscience trumps our conscience, and is a firm ground for our continued assurance in spite of our failures and foibles.

**God...knows** (ginosko) **all things** - **All** means all without exception, all things, all the time! In a word He is omniscient. In the present context, it means He knows our heart and our conscience. So why is that significant to us? In context, it favors that God knows our conscience and is able to comfort us if we have misgivings in our conscience regarding our love of the brethren.

[Hiebert](#) ([POSITIVE INTERPRETATION](#)) explains it this way - The added words "**and knows all things**" seem to be a note of encouragement; it is better to have the all-knowing God as our judge than our own conscience. "It is the difference between conscience and Omniscience." While He knows our failures and shortcomings, He also understands our true motives and desires, the innermost yearnings of our heart. His omniscience is also linked to His unchanging love and sympathy; He remembers His saving intentions and purposes for each of us. It is to that perfect knowledge that the conscience-stricken believer, like Peter in John 21:17, can appeal: "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." The fact that He has implanted His love in our hearts assures us that He will not reject or disown us.

*God's omniscience is linked with his love and sympathy.*

*God knows every secret in our hearts.*

A T Robertson

**James Montgomery Boice** ([POSITIVE INTERPRETATION](#)) - "Whatever our hearts may say, God knows us better than even we ourselves do and, nevertheless, has acquitted us. Therefore, we should reassure ourselves by His judgment, which alone is trustworthy, and refuse to trust our own." (Borrow [The Epistles of John page 124](#))

**Simon Kistemaker** ([POSITIVE INTERPRETATION](#)) - John writes these reassuring words: "**God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.**" That is, as Christians we can always go to God, who knows us better than we know ourselves. David testifies to this truth. At the conclusion of one of his psalms, he prays this fervent prayer: Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. [Ps. 139:23–24] Because God is greater than our hearts, He will show us mercy when we come to him; He will comfort us, and reassure us that we are His children. ([Epistles of John- Simon J. Kistemaker](#))

**Sam Storms** ([POSITIVE INTERPRETATION](#)) - When our conscience accuses us in this way, to what shall we appeal? John mentions two things.

\* The first answer was given in the previous context, vv. 11-18. The fact that we have loved in deed and truth and not merely in word. In other words, "there are actual things we can point to not things we have professed or felt or imagined or intended, but things that we have done, and that we know we would never have done but for the love which God has put into our hearts. Of ecstatic emotions, heaven-piercing vision, we may know nothing; but if, in the practice of love in bearing another's burden, in denying ourselves to give to another's need (3:17), we are sure of our ground, hereby we shall tranquilize our self-accusing hearts yea, even in the presence of God" (Law, 282).

\* The other way of pacifying the condemning and disquieting doubts of our hearts is by our knowledge of God's knowledge of us. **Stott** ([page 150](#)) explains: "*Our conscience is by no means infallible; its condemnation may often be unjust. We can, therefore, appeal from our conscience to God who is greater and more knowledgeable. Indeed, he knows all things, including our secret motives and deepest resolves, and it is implied, will be more merciful towards us than our own heart. His omniscience should relieve, not terrify, us*". See also 1 Cor. 4:3-5+.

To sum up, John appeals to two means by which we may pacify our doubting hearts. We may reassure ourselves of salvation, first, by looking back to the love which we have shown to the brethren; love in deed, however, not in word only. The second means of assurance is an appeal to the omniscience of God, regardless of what one's own doubts and misgivings might be. God knows us far better than we know ourselves. We should reassure ourselves by His judgment, which alone is ultimately trustworthy, and refuse to trust our own. ([1 John 3:10b-24](#))

**David Legge** on **God knows all things** ([POSITIVE INTERPRETATION](#)) - Now if you are conscious in your life of a momentary failure, of a partial transgression - at some time in your Christian experience you have let the Lord down, and you're continually reminded of it, and through it you have a condemnation attitude toward yourself, a bad conscience - does that mean that you no longer love the Lord? Does that mean that you have forfeited His grace, you no longer have a claim upon His name, that He's letting you go and maybe you're not even saved at all? Now listen, here's the answer, this is what John is trying to say: first of all, what you need to do is what we studied in chapter 1 and verse 9, 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness'. Because God is greater than even our condemned heart, He not only understands the way we really are in all of our sin that we can't even see with our eyes, but He is able to undertake for our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness... It's not that God minimises or disregards our failures, He knows them better than we know them. Yet the amazing thing is that this God acquits us, even though He does know them. Here's the big question that John is trying to get to: why then should we listen to our condemning heart? If God is greater than our heart, and God knows all about us and what we've done, yet God still undertakes to forgive us our sins, why should we listen to our condemning heart? He, our God, is the just One and the Justifier of those who believe in Jesus. Am I speaking, tonight, to a Christian, and you got a condemning heart, and you're harder on yourself than God is? You hammer yourself constantly, because you've an oversensitive conscience; and you allow the devil to latch onto, perhaps, sins that were legitimate sins, but that Christ has forgiven you for a long, long time ago - but you still have this condemning heart that you won't let go of, and you're harder on yourself than the Almighty is! Oh, you need to hear this tonight: God is greater than your heart. He knows all things! ([Confident Christianity](#))

*With my burden I begin,  
Lord, remove this load of sin.  
Let Thy blood for sinners spilt,*

*Set my conscience free from guilt'.*

--John Newton former slave trader

[Marvin Vincent](#) has a lengthy note on the condemning and consoling interpretations ([SEE INTRODUCTORY NOTE](#)) - Luther and Bengel take this verse as consoling the believer whom his heart condemns; and who, therefore, like Peter, appeals from conscience to Him who is greater than conscience. "Lord, You know all things: You know that I love You." (Jn 21:17) Peter's conscience, though condemning him of his sin in denying the Lord, assured him of his love; but fearing the possibility, owing to his past fall, of deceiving himself, he appeals to the all-knowing God: so Paul, 1Cor 4:3, 4. So if we be believers, even if our heart condemns us of sin in general, yet having the one sign of sonship, love, we may still assure our hearts (some oldest manuscripts read heart, 1 Jn 3:19, as well as 1 Jn 3:20), as knowing that God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. But thus the same Greek is translated "because" in the beginning, and "(we know) that" in the middle of the verse, and if the verse were consolatory, it probably would have been, "Because EVEN if our heart condemn us," etc. Therefore translate, "Because (rendering the reason why it has been stated in 1 Jn 3:19 to be so important to 'assure our hearts before Him') if our heart condemn (Greek, 'know [ought] against us'; answering by contrast to 'we shall know that we are of the truth') us (it is) because God is greater than our heart and knows all things." If our heart judges us unfavorably, we may be sure that He, knowing more than our heart knows, judges us more unfavorably still [Henry Alford]. A similar ellipsis ("it is") occurs in 1 Co 14:27; 2 Co 1:6; 8:23. The condemning testimony of our conscience is not alone, but is the echo of the voice of Him who is greater and knows all things. Our hypocrisy in loving by word and tongue, not in deed and truth, does not escape even our conscience, though weak and knowing but little, how much less God who knows all things! Still the consolatory view may be the right one. For the Greek for "**we shall assure our hearts**" (see on 1 Jn 3:19), is gain over, persuade so as to be stilled, implying that there was a previous state of self-condemnation by the heart (1 Jn 3:20), which, however, is got over by the consolatory thought, "God is greater than my heart" which condemns me, and "knows all things" (Greek "ginoskei," "*knows*," not "kataginoskei," "*condemns*"), and therefore knows my love and desire to serve Him, and knows my frame so as to pity my weakness of faith. This gaining over the heart to peace is not so advanced a stage as the having CONFIDENCE towards God which flows from a heart condemning us not. The first "because" thus applies to the two alternate cases, 1 Jn 3:20, 21 (giving the ground of saying, that having love we shall gain over, or assure our minds before Him, 1 Jn 3:19); the second "because" applies to the first alternate alone, namely, "if our heart condemn us." When he reaches the second alternate, 1 Jn 3:21, he states it independently of the former "because" which had connected it with 1 Jn 3:19, inasmuch as CONFIDENCE toward God is a farther stage than persuading our hearts, though always preceded by it. (**EDITORIAL NOTE** - Vincent is a bit confusing [to me] but included for completeness).

*Clearly John's aim here is to heal the wounded conscience of the sensitive believer, not to widen the wound unnecessarily.*

[Hiebert](#) - Some interpreters (John Calvin, John Owen, Henry Alford, et al) understand this reference to God's greatness and knowledge not as a comfort but as a challenge to the believer. So understood, John is stressing the severity of God's judgment. Thus Alford remarks, "*Our conscience is but the faint echo of His voice who knoweth all things; if it condemn us, how much more He?*" If it were evident that John was seeking to stimulate a consciousness of sin in his readers, this understanding of his words would be obvious. But such an interpretation is quite inappropriate in the present context. Smalley asserts, "*John's chief purpose at this point is to reassure his readers that when believers are most aware of their shortcomings, in respect of God's standards, the love and mercy of the Father are present to heal their troubled conscience.*" Clearly John's aim here is to heal the wounded conscience of the sensitive believer, not to widen the wound unnecessarily. But it is clear that whenever professed believers seek to stifle the demands of conscience by claiming to possess a superior enlightenment, his words do sound a needed warning.

**Steven Cole** - On the subject of assurance of salvation, R. C. Sproul ([Essential Truths of the Christian Faith](#) [borrow], pp. 201-202) points out four possibilities. First, there are those who are unsaved and they know that they are unsaved. They don't make any claim of salvation. Second, there are people who are saved but do not know they are saved. They doubt their salvation, perhaps due to a troubled conscience. Third, there are people who are saved and know that they are saved. Fourth, there are those who are not saved but confidently believe that they are saved. They have false assurance. As I understand our text, John is mainly addressing the second group—those who are saved, but they're having doubts because of their awareness of falling short of God's commandments. John wants them to know the basis and the blessings of true assurance. ([Blessed Assurance](#))

**Related Resource** - Borrow R C Sproul's [Essential Truths of the Christian Faith](#) see page 200 for chapter entitled [Assurance of Salvation](#) - Here is an excerpt from this chapter:

Can anyone know for sure that he is saved? For someone to declare that he is certain of his salvation may seem to be an act of unspeakable arrogance. Yet the Bible calls us to make our salvation a matter of certainty. Peter commands, "Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10).

It is our duty to seek assurance of our salvation with diligence. This is not done out of idle curiosity about the state of our soul, but to enhance our growth in sanctification. Christians who remain uncertain about

the state of their salvation are subject to all sorts of questions that paralyze their walk with Christ. They stumble in doubt and are vulnerable to the assaults of Satan. So we must seek to be assured of our salvation. There are four possible positions with respect to one's assurance of salvation.

**Position One:** There are people who are unsaved and know that they are unsaved. These people are aware of the enmity they have in their hearts toward God and clearly want nothing to do with Christ as their Savior. They are bold to proclaim that they do not need Christ. Such people are often openly hostile to the gospel.

**Position Two:** There are people who are saved but do not know they are saved. These people are actually in a state of grace but are uncertain of it. Perhaps they are wrestling with sin in their lives and doubt their own salvation because of a troubled conscience. In this group are those who have not yet made certain that they are among the elect.

**Position Three:** There are people who are saved and know that they are saved. This is the group who are certain of their election and calling. They have a clear and sound understanding of what salvation requires and know they have met the requirements. They have believed the testimony of the Holy Spirit when He witnessed to their spirits that they are the children of God (Romans 8:16).

**Position Four:** There are people who are not saved but confidently believe that they are saved. These people have assurance of salvation without salvation. Their assurance is a false assurance.

Because it is possible to have a false assurance of salvation, how do we know if we are in group three or group four? To answer that we must look more closely at group four and ask how it is possible to have a false sense of assurance.

The easiest way to have a false assurance of salvation is to have a false doctrine of salvation.

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**Condemns** (2607) (**kataginosko** from **katá** = against + **ginosko** = know) literally means to know against (to know something against one) and then to find fault with, to blame, to condemn (to determine or judge to be utterly wrong or guilty).

**Kataginosko** is used only 3 times in Scripture - 1Jn 3:20-21 and Gal 2:11 "But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood **condemned**."

Kataginosko is used twice in the Septuagint - Dt 25:1 and Pr 28:11 where "sees through him" is translated in the Septuagint as "will condemn him."

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## **GOD IS GREATER James Bryan Smith**

God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.1 JOHN 3:20 NRSV

God has chosen to accept what we deem unacceptable. The parts of us that cause us shame do not shame God. Here is the good news: even if we feel condemned by our own hearts, God is greater than our hearts.

We may feel deep shame, and we may condemn ourselves unmercifully, but God does not. And if God does not condemn us, then who are we to condemn ourselves? Are we greater than God? Is our insight greater than God's?

God's acceptance should lead us to self-acceptance. Grace heals our shame not by trying to find something good and lovely within us that is worth loving but by looking at us as we are, the good and the bad, the lovely and the unlovely, and simply accepting us. God accepts us with the promise that we will never be unacceptable to him. It is ours to do the same for ourselves.

Do you accept that you're accepted—by the God of the universe, the one who made and saved you? Receive this truth this day, rest in it, and live in it.

Lord, if my heart condemns me, remind me that I am accepted—by you. Amen.

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## **VAIN REGRETS CATHERINE BOOTH**

If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.1 JOHN 3:20

I DO INDEED SYMPATHIZE WITH you and I think I can divine a little as to the nature of your trials. I wish I were near to comfort and help you - such help as it is I have to offer. The only way of comfort I see for you is to try and walk alone, shutting your eyes to what you cannot help.

It is useless to harrow ourselves up about the past, or to waste time in vain regrets. It is past now, and can never be altered. But we can cast it under the blood, and go on praying Him to avert the consequences, and maybe He will stoop to answer us. Do your own part in witnessing for God and truth, and hope that at some future time it will produce its effect.

Comfort yourself in the Lord. He is very pitiful and of tender mercy, and when He sees us truly penitent for our mistakes and failures He delights to pardon us. Do not perplex yourself about the experiences of others. I am more than ever satisfied that God looks more propitiously on those who are striving and struggling to do right and to please Him, even in fear and despondency, than on those who make light of sin and yet make their boast in Him. I fear there are sadly too many who can rejoice when they ought to weep, while some who can never forgive themselves, weep when they ought to rejoice. Perhaps these latter are amongst those who, though they mourn now, "shall be comforted" hereafter.

Not a burden we bear,  
Not a sorrow we share,  
But our toil He doth richly repay:  
Not a grief nor a loss,  
Not a frown nor a cross,  
But is blest if we trust and obey.

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### **Greg Laurie - KEEPING YOUR CONSCIENCE PURE**

For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God. (2 Corinthians 1:12)

The question arises, "How can I keep a pure conscience?" Here are four principles that can help: First, confess and forsake all known sin. Examine your feelings of guilt in light of God's Word. Is there anything you are doing that Scripture warns about? Martin Luther said, "My conscience is captive to the Word of God." The Bible says, "For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things" (1 John 3:20). We need to educate our conscience so that it is acting on the right information.

Second, ask forgiveness and be reconciled to anyone you have wronged, if possible. Jesus said, "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, ... first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matt. 5:23–24). Seek reconciliation. It is not always possible, but you need to make the effort.

Third, make restitution, if possible. Try to undo the wrong you have done. Saying you are sorry is enough to be forgiven by God, but you also should try and undo any damage you have done. This is part of what it means to repent.

Fourth, don't procrastinate in clearing your conscience. Some people think they can put off dealing with their guilt, believing their conscience will somehow clear itself in time. It won't.

Maybe your conscience has been troubling you lately. If there is something that you have done, God is only awakening you to it so that you can acknowledge your sin and turn from it.

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**Steve McVey** - "Even if our hearts condemn us...God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything" (1 John 3:20 NLT). This verse reminds us that we sometimes can't trust our emotions, but we can trust God. He knows that we are totally forgiven. The shame game is over—finished. It's a silly game we don't ever have to play again.

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### **WHO KNOWS BEST? Isaiah 40:12–17** [Reflections on the Names of God: 180 Devotions to Know God ...](#)

God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. 1 John 3:20 NIV

God doesn't know everything. Few people would be brave enough—or foolish enough—to say these words to the Lord. Still, although we don't say the actual words, our actions broadcast this message almost every day.

Every time we choose what God has forbidden, or choose not to do what God has commanded, we are telling Him, in effect, that we know more than He does. We are saying that His rules might be okay for everyone else, but extenuating circumstances require different standards for us. Do we really think we need to educate God about what is best for us?

The prophet Isaiah asked several questions to make it clear that God's omniscience does not need our help. Do we know how much the mountains weigh? Have we measured the earth's dust? Does God consult with anyone to add to His knowledge or to teach Him justice? No!

The next time we are inclined to choose our own way, let's remember the message we send by our actions. Obedience declares

that our heavenly Father always knows best.

Omniscient Lord, forgive me for the times my disobedience proclaims that I know better than You about what is best for me.

In what area have I been reluctant to obey what God has determined is best for me?

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### **Not Feeling Forgiving - Nancy Leigh DeMoss** [The Quiet Place: Daily Devotional Readings - Page 2](#)

Whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.—1 John 3:20

MANY PEOPLE who sincerely want to find themselves on the other side of forgiveness have bought into myths and misconceptions that have defeated their best attempts at following through. For the next few days, I'd like to help dismantle four common barriers that can easily keep us frustrated on our journey to relational freedom.

First is the assumption that forgiveness and good feelings should always go hand in hand. You may have genuinely trusted God to help you forgive your offender. But then the phone rings. Their birthday rolls around. A situation flares up where they handle a similar circumstance in the same insensitive way, and you feel your emotions start to heat up again.

That's when you might conclude, "I guess I haven't really forgiven because if I had, I wouldn't still feel this way." But forgiveness cannot be proven by our feelings, any more than it can be motivated or empowered by them. Forgiveness is a choice. And feelings often aren't. So it's quite possible to forgive someone the right way—God's way—and still have thoughts flash across your mind that seem to contradict the decision you made.

Forgiveness is not like planting tulip bulbs, where you never have to think about it again, and everything just naturally comes up nice and pretty in the spring. No, life goes on. Sometimes old feelings turn up when you're not expecting them, needing to be handled and replanted. But that doesn't negate what you've done. It simply gives you a new opportunity to let the Lord reign over your emotions. When you don't feel forgiving, that's when you just keep forgiving—by faith.

What can enable you to keep forgiving when your emotions are resisting the choice?

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### **The Telltale Heart** - David C. McCasland - If our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. —1 John 3:20

Recently I read about a private investigator in the US who would knock on a door, show his badge to whoever answered, and say, "I guess we don't have to tell you why we're here." Many times, the person would look stunned and say, "How did you find out?" then go on to describe an undiscovered criminal act committed long ago. Writing in Smithsonian magazine, Ron Rosenbaum described the reaction as "an opening for the primal force of conscience, the telltale heart's internal monologue."

We all know things about ourselves that no one else knows—failures, faults, sins—that although confessed to God and forgiven by Him may come back to accuse us again and again. John, one of Jesus' close followers, wrote about God's love for us and the call to follow His commands, saying: "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" (1 John 3:19-20).

Our confidence toward God grows out of His love and forgiveness in Christ, not our performance in life. "We know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us" (1Jn 3:24). (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

**God, who knows everything about us,  
is greater than our self-condemnation.**

No condemnation now I dread,  
I am my Lord's and He is mine;  
Alive in Him, my living Head,  
And clothed in righteousness divine.  
—Wesley

**The one who receives Christ  
will never receive God's condemnation.**

**Insight** - Today's reading establishes the benchmark for loving others by looking at what Jesus did for us on the cross (1Jn 3:16). We know love because of the willingness of Jesus to die for us, and the necessary response to this love is that we be willing to give of ourselves for others. The context implies that this does not require a physical dying on another's behalf. It does, however,

challenge us to sacrifice our own interests for the welfare of others as evidence that we have received God's love (1Jn 3:17).

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**Spurgeon - Daily Help** - Is my conscience at peace? For, if my heart condemns me, God is greater than my heart and does know all things (1 John 3:20). If my conscience bears witness with me that I am a partaker of the precious grace of salvation, then happy am I! I am one of those to whom God has given the "peace of God, which passeth all understanding" (Phil. 4:7). Now, why is this called "the peace of God"? Because it comes from God, because it was planned by God, because God gave His Son to make the peace, because God gives His Spirit to give the peace in the conscience, and because, indeed, it is God Himself in the soul.

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**Ever Feel Condemned?** Read: 1 John 3:16-20 | God knows us better than we know ourselves. He's aware of our weaknesses, the memories of sins that seem to predispose us to fail again and again. He knows our heredity and upbringing, the past and present influences that push us in the wrong direction. J. I. Packer calls these the "latent forces" of our existence as well as the "patent facts."

At my stage of Christian growth, I struggle with attitudes and actions over which I seem to have little control. I identify with Dostoevsky, who said, "It is nature asserting its rights." Paul called it "sin that dwells in me" (Romans 7:17). It has made me guilty of much, and capable of much more. That's why my heart sometimes condemns me, even though I'm a believer. God knows all about the forces that drive me. He also knows the intent of my heart—that I want to love others and desire to do right. He knows my shame when I fail and is quick to forgive when I confess (1 John 1:9). This wonderful truth sets my heart at rest when I feel condemned, for "God is greater than my heart, and knows all things" (1Jn 3:20). By David H. Roper (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

If you have trusted Jesus as your Savior and your heart condemns you at times, remember that He knows all about it and still loves you.

No condemnation now I dread:  
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!  
Alive in Him, my living Head,  
And clothed in righteousness divine. —Wesley

Guilt is a burden God never intended His children to bear.

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**The Telltale Heart** - Read: 1 John 3:16-24 | Recently I read about a private investigator in the US who would knock on a door, show his badge to whoever answered, and say, "I guess we don't have to tell you why we're here." Many times, the person would look stunned and say, "How did you find out?" then go on to describe an undiscovered criminal act committed long ago. Writing in Smithsonian magazine, Ron Rosenbaum described the reaction as "an opening for the primal force of conscience, the telltale heart's internal monologue."

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Our confidence toward God grows out of His love and forgiveness in Christ, not our performance in life. "We know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us" (1 John 3:24). God, who knows everything about us, is greater than our self-condemnation. By David C. McCasland ([Our Daily Bread](#). Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

No condemnation now I dread,  
I am my Lord's and He is mine;  
Alive in Him, my living Head,  
And clothed in righteousness divine. —Wesley

The one who receives Christ will never receive God's condemnation.

**INSIGHT:** Today's reading establishes the benchmark for loving others by looking at what Jesus did for us on the cross (1 John 3:16). We know love because of the willingness of Jesus to die for us, and the necessary response to this love is that we be willing to give of ourselves for others. The context implies that this does not require a physical dying on another's behalf. It does, however, challenge us to sacrifice our own interests for the welfare of others as evidence that we have received God's love (1 John 3:17).

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## Two Faces

No man can for any considerable time wear one face to himself and another to the multitude without finally getting bewildered as to which is the true one. —Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Leadership*, Vol. 7, no. 1.

See: Mark 7:6; 1 John 3:20; 2 Corinthians 10:12

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## John Knox Pleads Guilty

Fiery reformer John Knox was keenly aware of his own shortcomings:

Although I never lack the presence and plain image of my own wretched infirmity, yet seeing sin so manifestly abounds in all estates, I am compelled to thunder out the threatenings of God against the obstinate rebels. In doing whereof (albeit, as God knoweth, I am no malicious nor obstinate sinner), I sometimes am wounded knowing myself to be criminal and guilty in many, yea, in all things that I reprehend in others. Judge not, mother, that I write these things, debasing myself otherwise than I am—no, I am worse than my pen can express.

In body you think I am no adulterer. Let so be, but the heart is infected with foul lusts, and it will lust although I lament ever so much. Externally I commit no idolatry, but my wicked heart loveth itself and cannot be refrained from vain imaginations, yea, not from such as were the fountain of all idolatry.

I am no man-killer with my hands, but I help not my needy brother so liberally as I may and ought.

I steal not horse, money, or clothes from my neighbor, but that small portion of worldly substance I bestow not as rightly as his holy law requires.

I bear no false witness against my neighbor in judgment or otherwise before men, but I speak not the truth of God so boldly as it becomes his true messenger to do.

And thus in conclusion, there is no vice repugning to God's holy will expressed in his law, wherewith my heart is not infected.

—Letter to his mother-in-law, Elizabeth Bowes, June 1553. "John Knox—The Thundering Scot," *Christian History*, no. 46.

See: Psalm 38:3; Psalm 51:3; 1 John 3:20

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## Secret Prayer - Puritan Readings -

For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. 1 John 3:20

God sees that you pray in secret; that is, He observes your conduct, the posture and frame of your spirit, and the fervor and uprightness of heart which you manifest in prayer, is all known to Him. Mark that which is the hypocrite's fear, and binds condemnation upon the heart of a wicked man, is here made to be the saints' support and ground of comfort—that they pray to an all-seeing God. Your heavenly Father sees in secret; He can interpret your groans, and read the language of your sighs. Though they fail as to the outside of a duty, and there be much brokenness of speech, yet God sees brokenness of heart there, and it is that He looks after. God sees. What is that? He sees whether you pray or no, and how you pray. Mark that passage where the Lord said to Ananias, "Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus; for behold, he prayeth" (Acts 9:11). Go into such a city, such a street, such a house, such a part, in such a chamber, behold he prays. The Lord knew all these circumstances. It is known unto Him whether we toil or loiter away our time, or whether we pray in secret; He knows what house, in what corner of the house, what we are doing there. Second, He sees how you pray (Rom. 8:27). It is propounded as the comfort of the saints, "And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit." God knows you thoroughly and knows how you pray, whether is customary and formal or serious acts of love to God and communion with Him

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## Wayne Grudem - Knowledge (Omniscience) - [See full discussion in Systematic Theology page 151](#)

God's knowledge may be defined as follows: God fully knows himself and all things actual and possible in one simple and eternal act.

Elihu says that God is the one "who is perfect in knowledge" (Job 37:16), and John says that God "knows everything" (1 John 3:20). The quality of knowing everything is called omniscience, and because God knows everything, he is said to be omniscient (that is, "all-knowing").

### Related Resource:

- [Omniscient](#)
- 

God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.1 JOHN 3:20

You and I are governed. The weather determines what we wear. The terrain tells us how to travel....

God—our Shepherd—doesn't check the weather; He makes it. He doesn't defy gravity; He created it. God is what He is. What He has always been. God is Yahweh—an unchanging God, an uncaused God, and an ungoverned God.

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### **William MacDonald - "God...knoweth all things." (1 John 3:20)**

The omniscience of God means that He has perfect knowledge of everything. He has never learned and can never learn.

One of the great passages on the subject is Psalm 139:1-6, where David wrote: "O Lord, thou has searched me and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising; thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it."

In Psalm 147:4, we learn that God counts the number of the stars and calls them all by name. The wonder of this increases when Sir James Jeans tells us that "the total number of stars in the universe is probably something like the total number of grains of sand on all the sea shores of the world."

Our Lord reminded His disciples that not a sparrow falls to the ground unnoticed by our Father. And in the same passage He said that the very hairs of our head are all numbered (Matt. 10:29, 30).

It is clear then that "all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13), causing us to join with Paul in saying "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33).

The omniscience of God is filled with practical meaning for every one of us. There is warning. God sees everything we do. We can't keep anything secret from Him.

There is comfort. He knows what we are going through. As Job said, "He knoweth the way that I take" (Job 23:10). He counts our tossings and numbers our tears in His bottle (Psa. 56:8 RSV).

There is encouragement. He knew all about us and yet He saved us anyway. He knows what we feel in worship and prayer but cannot express.

There is wonder. Although God is omniscient, yet He can forget the sins He has forgiven. As David Seamands said, "I don't know how divine omniscience can forget but it does."

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### **John Knox Pleads Guilty**

Fiery reformer John Knox was keenly aware of his own shortcomings:

Although I never lack the presence and plain image of my own wretched infirmity, yet seeing sin so manifestly abounds in all estates, I am compelled to thunder out the threatenings of God against the obstinate rebels. In doing whereof (albeit, as God knoweth, I am no malicious nor obstinate sinner), I sometimes am wounded knowing myself to be criminal and guilty in many, yea, in all things that I reprehend in others. Judge not, mother, that I write these things, debasing myself otherwise than I am—no, I am worse than my pen can express.

In body you think I am no adulterer. Let so be, but the heart is infected with foul lusts, and it will lust although I lament ever so much. Externally I commit no idolatry, but my wicked heart loveth itself and cannot be refrained from vain imaginations, yea, not from such as were the fountain of all idolatry.

I am no man-killer with my hands, but I help not my needy brother so liberally as I may and ought.

I steal not horse, money, or clothes from my neighbor, but that small portion of worldly substance I bestow not as rightly as his holy law requires.

I bear no false witness against my neighbor in judgment or otherwise before men, but I speak not the truth of God so boldly as it becomes his true messenger to do.

And thus in conclusion, there is no vice repugning to God's holy will expressed in his law, wherewith my heart is not infected.

—Letter to his mother-in-law, Elizabeth Bowes, June 1553. "John Knox—The Thundering Scot," Christian History, no. 46.

See: Psalms 38:3; Psalms 51:3; 1 John 3:20.

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### **Two Faces**

No man can for any considerable time wear one face to himself and another to the multitude without finally getting bewildered as to which is the true one.

—Nathaniel Hawthorne, Leadership, Vol. 7, no. 1.

See: Mark 7:6; 1 John 3:20; 2 Corinthians 10:12

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## The Telltale Heart

Read: 1 John 3:16-24

If our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. — 1 John 3:20

Recently I read about a private investigator in the US who would knock on a door, show his badge to whoever answered, and say, "I guess we don't have to tell you why we're here." Many times, the person would look stunned and say, "How did you find out?" then go on to describe an undiscovered criminal act committed long ago. Writing in Smithsonian magazine, Ron Rosenbaum described the reaction as "an opening for the primal force of conscience, the telltale heart's internal monologue."

We all know things about ourselves that no one else knows—failures, faults, sins—that although confessed to God and forgiven by Him may come back to accuse us again and again. John, one of Jesus' close followers, wrote about God's love for us and the call to follow His commands, saying: "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" (1 John 3:19-20).

Our confidence toward God grows out of His love and forgiveness in Christ, not our performance in life. "We know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us" (v.24).

God, who knows everything about us, is greater than our self-condemnation. — David McCasland (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

No condemnation now I dread,  
I am my Lord's and He is mine;  
Alive in Him, my living Head,  
And clothed in righteousness divine.  
— Wesley

The one who receives Christ will never receive God's condemnation

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## ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE - Illustrations - be a Berean -

An illustration of 1 John 3:20 could depict a person with a troubled conscience, represented by a dark cloud or heavy weight on their chest, while a bright light emanating from above signifies God's presence, signifying that even when our hearts condemn us, God is greater and knows all things, offering reassurance and forgiveness.

Key elements to include in the illustration:

A human figure:

Depict the person with a worried expression, possibly looking down, symbolizing internal struggle and self-condemnation.

Dark imagery:

Use shadows or dark colors around the figure to represent the weight of guilt or a troubled conscience.

A bright light source:

A shining light from above, symbolizing God's presence and knowledge, could be depicted as a radiant beam or a divine figure.

Symbolic elements:

Scales: Could represent the weighing of our actions and thoughts, with God's judgment being the ultimate measure.

Open book: Could represent the Bible, signifying God's knowledge of our hearts.

A heart: A visible heart could be drawn with cracks or darkness to portray the guilt and condemnation we might

feel.

Possible interpretations of the illustration:

Overcoming guilt:

The light shining down could represent the power of God's forgiveness, allowing us to overcome our internal struggles and find peace.

God's omniscience:

The bright light could highlight that God knows everything about us, including our deepest thoughts and feelings.

Hope and reassurance:

Even when our conscience condemns us, the illustration could convey that God is greater and offers hope for redemption.

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## 1 John 3:20 Says Simply "He Knows Everything." ...

God's Omniscience

1 John 3:20 says simply "He knows everything." Does that describe you? Do you know everything? I've known people that thought they did.

ILLUS - It's kind of like the little boy that asked his mom, he said "momma, how come the idiots only come out when daddy's driving."

And the answer is because daddy thinks he knows it all and everybody else is an idiot. I've known people like that. I've been people like that. And some people really do think they know it all. They think it all centers around them.

ILLUS - It's like the woodpecker that was pecking away at a tree. Suddenly lightning hit the tree and split it right in half. The woodpecker flew off saying, "Look what I did"

Or the true Survey – Guys were asked to rate themselves in intellectual ability. Here's the thing, 90% of guys rate themselves in the top 50%, and roughly 40% put themselves in the top 5% of all guys when it comes to intelligence. We really do think we know it all.

But you know what, there's only one person that really does know it all, one person that it all does center around, and that's God. God knows everything.

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**My Heart Condemns Me** - Read: If our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. —1 John 3:20

Do you sometimes feel guilty and unworthy because of something you did years ago? You have confessed it and asked God to forgive you, but the memory of it still haunts you.

I empathize with you. Feelings of guilt still sweep over me when I recall how I failed an elderly, childless woman while I was training for the ministry. She was a regular customer in a store where I worked part-time. After a while, I became a friend and spiritual counselor to her and her husband. I even conducted his funeral.

When I moved to a nearby town to become a student pastor, I lost touch with her. I intended to contact her but kept procrastinating. One day I saw her obituary notice. I was overwhelmed with grief and confessed my sin to God.

More than 30 years after Paul's conversion, he referred to the time when he had been "a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man" (1 Tim. 1:13). He even called himself the "chief" of sinners (v.15). Yet he repeatedly exulted in the certainty that he was a forgiven sinner.

God, who is greater than our heart and knows us thoroughly (1 John 3:20), has forgiven us for the sins we've confessed (1Jn 1:9). We can believe Him! By Herbert Vander Lugt ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Come now to the fountain of cleansing,  
Plunge deep in its lifegiving flow.  
His mercy and grace are sufficient,  
His pardon He longs to bestow. —Robinson

Confession to God always brings His cleansing.

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**GodAware** - Read: Psalm 139:1-10 | On the FlightAware website, Kathy checked the progress of the small plane her husband Chuck was piloting to Chicago. With a few clicks, she could track when he took off, where his flight was at any moment, and exactly when he would land. A few decades earlier when Chuck was a pilot in West Africa, Kathy's only contact had been a high-frequency radio. She recalls one occasion when 3 days had passed before she was able to reach him. She had no way of knowing that he was safe but unable to fly because the airplane had been damaged.

But God was always aware of exactly where Chuck was and what he was doing, just as He is with us (Job 34:21). Nothing is hidden from His sight (Heb. 4:13). He knows our thoughts and our words (1 Chron. 28:9; Ps. 139:4). And He knows what will happen in the future (Isa. 46:10).

**God knows everything (1 John 3:20)**, and He knows you and me intimately (Ps. 139:1-10). He is aware of each temptation, each broken heart, each illness, each worry, each sorrow we face.

What a comfort to experience care from the One of whom it is said, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Rom. 11:33). By Cindy Hess Kasper ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Beneath His watchful eye  
His saints securely dwell;  
That hand which bears all nature up  
Shall guard His children well. —Doddridge

We can trust our all-knowing God.

## SERMON NOTES

### C H SPURGEON

1 John 3:20, 21—"For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God."

The fault of many is that they will not lay spiritual things to heart at all, but treat them in a superficial manner. This is foolish, sinful, deadly. We ought to put our case upon serious trial in the court of our own conscience.

Certain of a better class are satisfied with the verdict of their hearts, and do not remember the higher courts; and therefore either become presumptuous, or are needlessly distressed. We are about to consider the judgments of this lower court. Here we may have

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#### I. A CORRECT VERDICT AGAINST OURSELVES.

Let us sum up the process.

1. The court sits under the King's arms, to judge by royal authority. The charge against the prisoner is read. Conscience accuses, and quotes the law as applicable to the points alleged.
2. Memory gives evidence. As to the fact of sin in years past, and of sin more lately committed. Items mentioned. Sabbath sins. Transgressions of each one of the ten commandments. Rejection of the gospel. Omissions in a thousand ways. Failure in motive, spirit, temper, etc.
3. Knowledge gives evidence that the present state of mind and heart and will is not according to the Word.
4. Self-love and pride urge good intents and pious acts in stay of proceedings. Hear the defence! But alas! it is not worth hearing. The defence is but one of "the refuges of lies."
5. The heart, judging by the law, condemns. Henceforth the man lives as in a condemned cell under fear of death and hell.

If even our partial, half-enlightened heart condemns, we may well tremble at the thought of appearing before the Lord God.

The higher court is more strictly just, better informed, more authoritative, and more able to punish. God knows all. Forgotten sin, sins of ignorance, sins half seen are all before the Lord.

What a terrible case is this! Condemned in the, lower court, and sure to be condemned in the higher!

## II. AN INCORRECT VERDICT AGAINST OURSELVES.

The case as before. The sentence apparently most clear.

But when revised by the higher court it is reversed, for good reasons.

1. The debt has been discharged by the man's glorious Surety.
2. The man is not the same man; though he sinned he has died to sin, and he now lives as one born from above.
3. The evidences in his favour, such as the atonement and the new birth, were forgotten, undervalued, or misjudged in the lower court; hence he was condemned. Sentence of condemnation does not stand when these matters are duly noted.
4. The evidence looked for by a sickly conscience was what it could not find, for it did not exist, namely, natural goodness, perfection, unbroken joy, etc. The judge was ignorant, and legally inclined. The verdict was therefore a mistaken one. An appeal clears the case: "God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things."

## III. A CORRECT VERDICT OF ACQUITTAL.

Our heart sometimes justly "condemns us not."

The argument for non-condemnation is good: the following are the chief items of evidence in proof of our being gracious—

1. We are sincere in our profession of love to God.
2. We are filled with love to the brethren.
3. We are resting upon Christ, and on him alone.
4. We are longing after holiness.

The result of this happy verdict of the heart is that we have—

Confidence towards God that we are really his.

Confidence as to our reconciliation with God by Jesus Christ.

Confidence that he will not harm us, but will bless us.

Confidence in prayer that he will accept and answer.

Confidence as to future judgment that we shall receive the gracious reward at the last great day.

## IV. AN INCORRECT VERDICT OF ACQUITTAL.

1. A deceived heart may refuse to condemn, but God will judge us all the same. He will not allow self-conceit to stand.
2. A false heart may acquit, but this gives no confidence Godward.
3. A deceitful heart pretends to acquit while in its centre it condemns.

If we shrink now, what shall we do in judgment?

What a waking, to find ourselves condemned at the last!

## QUOTATIONS

When Sir Walter Raleigh had laid his head upon the block, says an eloquent divine, he was asked by the executioner whether it lay aright. Whereupon, with the calmness of a hero and the faith of a Christian, he returned an answer, the power of which we all shall feel when our head is tossing and turning on death's uneasy pillow—"It matters little, my friend, how the head lies, providing the heart be right."—Steele.

As Luther says: "Though conscience weigh us down, and tell us God is angry, yet God is greater than our heart. The conscience is but one drop; the reconciled God is an ocean of consolation." Critical English Testament.

A seared conscience thinks better of itself, a wounded worse than it ought: the former may account all sin a sport, the latter all sport a sin; melancholy men, when sick, are ready to conceive any cold to be the cough of the lungs, and an ordinary pustule to be no less than a plague-sore. So wounded consciences conceive sins of infirmity to be sins of presumption, sins of ignorance to be sins of knowledge, apprehending their case to be far more dangerous than it is indeed.—Thomas Fuller.

Conscience works after the manner so beautifully set forth in the ring that a great magician, according to an Eastern tale, presented to his prince. The gift was of inestimable value, not for the diamonds and rubies and pearls that gemmed it, but for a rare and mystic property in the metal. It sat easily enough on the finger in ordinary circumstances, but as soon as its wearer formed a bad thought, designed or committed a bad action, the ring became a monitor. Suddenly contracting, it pressed painfully on his finger, warning him of sin. Such a ring, thank God, is not the peculiar property of kings; the poorest of us, those that wear none other, may possess and wear this inestimable jewel; for the ring of the fable is just that conscience which is the voice of God within us, which is his law, engraven by the finger of God, not on Sinai's granite tables, but on the fleshy tablets of the heart, which, enthroned as a sovereign in

every bosom, commends us when we do right, and condemns us when we do wrong.—Dr. Guthrie.

The spirit of man, that candle of the Lord, often gives but a faint and glimmering light; but the Spirit of God snuffs it, that it may burn brighter.—Benjamin Beddome.