

1 John 3:18-24 “God Is Greater Than Our Hearts”  
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1 John 2:28-3:3 (NKJV)

**18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. 19 And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. 20 For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. 21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. 22 And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. 23 And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.**

**24 Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.**

### God Is Greater Than Our Hearts

Where do you go for assurance, or comfort? Where do you go when you feel overwhelmed by suffering, persecution, or your own sins, and need a solution? As humans, we all look somewhere. We all have coping mechanisms, as some of us heard on Wednesday night. Do you think about or turn to money? Do you think “if only I had more money, or more possessions, then I’ll be happy and convinced of God’s love for me. Then the suffering will be over” Maybe you turn to politics. Perhaps you think “If I just champion this cause and get everyone on board, we can fix what’s wrong. Then, God will be pleased with me and the suffering will stop.” Perhaps its smaller things, like music, or sports, or time with your family. Now, none of those, in and of themselves, are bad things. They are wonderful gifts of God (yes, works of justice are blessings from God!). But that’s just the thing. They are from God. And that is what John is teaching us today. John is telling us not to find assurance of God’s love or comfort during suffering in the material things that God gives us. Rather, he says that **the source of all our assurance is God Himself.**

God is the source of our faith, He is the source of our works, and it is to His work that we go to assure and comfort ourselves. What does it mean that God is the source of our faith? Let’s explore that for a bit.

In the Small Catechism, we read this concerning the Third Article of the Apostle’s Creed: “What does this mean?” “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in the true faith” John reiterates this point in verse 24. John says that we know that God abides in us because we have the Holy

Spirit. How do we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit? By faith! How do we know we have the Holy Spirit? Again, by faith!

As we encounter the Word of God, the Holy Spirit works through it. As we hear the convicting word of Law saying that we have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, the Holy Spirit works repentance in us. Then, as we hear and believe the comforting word of the Gospel, that Christ has paid the penalty for our sins, and as such, we are declared righteous by faith in this work for us, the Holy Spirit creates faith in us and comforts and assures us.

So, we believe because of God's gift of faith given to us by means of the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 2:8-9 say that faith is a gift of God, not our own work. Salvation, then, is not our work, but the work of God. He sends His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for you, for us, and then graciously He gives you the gift of faith to believe that that work was for you!

Faith is one of the very first, and most important, fruits of the Holy Spirit. It is by this faith that the Holy Spirit both assures you as you read and believe God's Word, and gives you confidence before God the Father, as verse 21 says. Out of faith, the Holy Spirit prompts us to pray for all that we need, and we have the promise in verse 22 here that we receive from God all that we ask and pray for.

Now, this promise is not the promise that we can twist God's arm through prayer and good works to get whatever we want. Rather, it is the promise that, as we turn to God our Father in confident faith, wholeheartedly believing that He loves us, has forgiven us in Christ, and has adopted us as His children, He hears us and graciously provides for us, just as earthly fathers provide for their children. The prayer may be answered in ways we don't expect and in a different time than we expect, but we can be assured that our Father will provide for us, because He has already provided us with everything that we need for salvation, as well as our daily bread.

So, God is the source of our faith, He is the source of all the good things that we receive, and He is the source of all our good works, as well.

Just as the Holy Spirit works to create faith in us, so too He encourages us to do good works, and does those works through us as well. And He works genuine, real good works in us. He does not just cause us to speak loving things to one another, but He also prompts us and encourages us to go and actually love our neighbor.

The Spirit both convicts us when we read verse 18 and realize that we haven't loved in deed and truth as we ought to, and He encourages us to love in word, deed, and truth by showing compassion to our neighbors, or making meals for them, or whatever is needed to help them and care for them. These works that pour out of our faith are a natural result of abiding in God, and Him abiding in us. They are part of the evidence of the Spirit mentioned in verse 24.

It is as Jesus says in our Gospel lesson. Apart from Him, we can do nothing. Apart from God abiding in us through the Holy Spirit, we would not come to Christ for salvation, nor would we do true good works that are pleasing in God's sight

On our own, we would probably do the good works for more selfish reasons, like doing it to gain a favor from someone later, for example. But, when we have the heart of faith that the

Holy Spirit works in us and uses to join us to Christ, all of our good works are pleasing to God. They are pleasing to God because they are done in faith for the sake of our neighbors

And so, in a way, good works can then become the evidence of our faith that we can look to. As verse 19 says, this is a way that we can know that we are of the truth. If we hear and see that we are doing good, that can be a comfort and a blessing. To give a timely example, when I got to hear about some of the ways that I have been a blessing to you at my wedding shower last week, that was a blessing to me! It was a comfort to know that I'm being faithful to the calling that God has called me to! So thank you!

However, we do not rely on works ALONE for our assurance of salvation. While the Holy Spirit certainly can comfort our hearts and assure us by pointing us to our works, that is not the chief place to look. Satan is always clever and cunning, and he knows how to twist looking at our works against us. He can cause us to look at our works and then become prideful, thinking we're such awesome Christians and that God must be especially pleased with us because of all the good we're doing. Or, he can cause us to despair, putting our failures and our lack of works to the front of our minds and causing us to think that we're not really Christians because we're not doing this good work or that.

Now, look at verse 20. It says that when our hearts do condemn us, God is greater than our heart. It is to the work of God that we go to assure and comfort ourselves

When we don't do what we're supposed to do and we're convicted about it, God is greater than our hearts. He knows that we have failed to do things perfectly, but He is always there to offer His mercy, grace, and forgiveness to us. When we're overwhelmed by the evil and the suffering of the world, God is greater than our hearts and knows that all the forces of evil will be put to an end on the Last Day.

As we abide in Him by faith, we have the promise from our Gospel lesson that He abides in us. He abides in us not because of our ability to continue to do work to "keep ourselves in" the faith. Rather, He abides in us as we continually repent, believe, and look to Him in hope.

So, continue to daily believe and do good works, for that is the Commandment John tells us to keep in verse 23! It's the same thing we've been hearing throughout this series on 1 John. Believe that Jesus is the Christ, the risen Son of God, who died and rose for the forgiveness of your sins, and then go and do good works to serve your neighbor.

Continue to keep that Commandment, and everything else will follow and fall into place. What does it mean, though, to keep His Commandments, especially the primary one of believing and loving?

Oftentimes, when we read that, we immediately think of doing the commandment, doing the good works. That is certainly true, but it's more than just simply doing. In Scripture, the word "keep" is often used with a sense of loving and holding on to something, as well as doing. To "keep" something often means to love it and hold it dear. So dear, in fact, that you're willing to lose everything else, as long as you get to keep the thing you're holding on to.

So, keeping His commandments is so much more than just doing them. It's loving them, and holding them dear. It's believing that they are good and true and beautiful, and then doing them. It is to continually believe and to hold salvation in Christ dear, and then to love to do His will. Even when we do not do it perfectly, we will desire to do it, clinging to Christ for grace, mercy, and the encouragement to go out and do it. It is to continually turn to God our Father for all things, believing that He will graciously grant us all that we need out of His great love for us.

And so as we do so, He graciously grants us faith, forgiveness of sins, and the desire to go and love our neighbors. We then go out and love our neighbors, fully assured of our status as God's children because of what God has done for us in Christ. But as we come to the end of the day and become convicted of not loving our neighbor as we ought, we turn again to God for forgiveness, grace, and increased love for neighbor and hatred of sinning.

So is the daily cycle of Christian life. The daily cycle of repentance, assurance of salvation, and loving our neighbors in our vocation. It is a daily returning to God, for **the source of all our assurance is God Himself.**

God is the source of our faith, God is the source of our works, and it is His work that we go to when we need comfort and assurance

When you are overwhelmed by your own sins, the sins and evils of the world, persecution, suffering, what have you, John points you to one place, and one place alone: the Lord. He reminds us that God is greater than our heart, and He has given us faith, salvation, the Holy Spirit, and everything we need to be saved. Having all of that and more, we then go and love our neighbor by using our gifts, such as money, or playing music, or working for justice. And as we go and love our neighbor, we daily return to God, trusting in His great love for us in Christ as we endure all that the devil and this world throw at us. And as we do so, we go forward with the peace of God that surpasses all understanding and guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord until He returns. Amen.