Dateline: Clive Baptist Church  July 6, 2014

Text: I John 3:19-24

shape the agenda for congregational conversation and action

HOW DO WE KNOW?

“A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. – Oscar Wilde, The Soul of Man under Socialism

The last word we have from the NT church is the Epistles of John. John is vintage; a patriarch of the early church. John taught many who became the leaders of that next generation church. A true elder and bishop of Christ. John guides us to the life and practices of the true church. John has a pastoral heart. He is deeply concerned for the personal struggles every believer faces. One of the primary reasons he writes this letter to give us reassurance and confidence ‘before God.’

In this passage, a kind of a resting point, John pauses the forceful advance of his teaching to review and ask us how we are doing.

The paragraph is tied together in common paragraph style. He begins by stating his subject, “by this we shall know” and then ending by wrapping up the same subject, “by this we do know.” The first time he says it in a future tense, the second time he affirms it in past tense.

THE SUBJECT:
What is it that we shall and do know?
It is the thing struggling Christians wrestle with.
It is the thing that our weak, deceiving hearts deny us.
It is are we accepted ‘before him?’
Do we even have ‘the life’, eternal life? (1:2)
Are we part of the fellowship with other believers and with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ? (1:3)
Are we really walking in the light, or are we a living lie? (1:6)
Will he really forgive our sins? (2:2)
Are we practicing righteousness, or does the Devil own us? (3:4f)
And what about the hate & violence that well up in us? (3:11f)
Oh there is so much to condemn us ... no wonder our ‘heart condemns us’ ... The more we want to be sincere before God the more we are conscious of our failings.
Finding your way through the spiritual & psychological land-mines of life is no easy journey. Many either lose their courage or get blown up along the way.
We need reassurance, because there are times ...

I. WHEN WE DON’T KNOW :19

:19. By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our hearts before him.
1. “by this we shall know:”
   By what? The truths just spoken, That if we found our centre in the self-sacrificial love of Christ, rather than the violent hatred of Cain we would realize that God will not reject us. It goes against His nature, which matters more than our nature.
   But this phrase is also forward looking; he is about to tell us in another way ‘what’ brings us assurance.

2. “we are of the truth:”
   An important point here, (that John will clarify later), is his concept “of the truth.” This speaks of something that is not an experiential truth. It is not ‘truth to me’, or ‘my truth’.
   He means the objective, declared truth, manifested in the gospel of Christ. It is the God truth, not how truthfully or not I line up with it, which matters.
   So here is the pre-condition. Do I stand in the line of that truth from God? This is the determiner.
   John Stott: “so it is knowledge which alone can quieten the condemning heart.”

3. “reassure our hearts:”
Assurance is the consequence. If we are found to be ‘of the truth’ we will, it follows, reassure our hearts.

Instead of **obsessing at the alter of our own heart** and how it is feeling, we should be more focused on the way that is truth out there in God. We need to look out, not in, if we want assurance. God is reassuring; I am not.

Word “**assure**” has two thrusts:
- To convince or persuade; hence, knowledge and truth do their work.
- To pacify; to still the emotional thrashing, soothe the alarm.

The warm emotional cocoon that so many seek today is a consequence of convincing ourselves with knowledge of the truth. The reason so many today a desperate to pacify their emotions is because they are not convinced of the truth. Truth settles emotions.

Emotions do not lead to truth.

4. **“before Him:”**

   It is Him that matters. Not me. (Heresy in a self worshiping age)

   Devil wants to threaten us, and draw us off to be ‘before him’ in riveting fear; or keep us obsessed before ourselves.

   Being ‘before God’, ‘before Him’ is the only place a person who is in-the-way-of-the- truth should be. Before Him is assurance.

II. **GOD KNOWS ALL** :20, 21

V:20.

“Whenever our heart condemns us”, and it will; you will experience that.

“God is greater.”

God is greater than our heart.

God knows everything.

God knows the battle.

God knows your struggle, failures,

God knows Satan traps you and them accuses you.

God knows it all.

God knows how he is going to redeem you in the end.
God knows that you can’t do it on your own.

There are two ways to read the tone of this verse; the grammar is ambiguous. Is the greatness of God a challenge or a comfort; is he more merciful or more rigorous?

<1. Moderns, tend to see it in the larger context of affirming encouragement.

<2. The Early Fathers & reformers read it as a dire warning; God knows all, we can escape nothing, which is why our hearts condemn us. Our conscience is but an echo of God’s. If our hearts condemn us, how much more he in his great righteousness. Nothing escapes him.

Therefore we must be especially diligent not to do things that will lead to condemnation either from our hearts or God.

The only assurance then is the truth and to know that we are of the truth.

The truth is that God has revealed himself to be ‘the life’, the light, that if we confess our sins and walk in the light then he has provided a propitiation, forgiveness and moral cleansing, and so we are invited into fellowship with him.

:21 “confidence toward God.”

This is a confidence based on God, not on our own driven emotions.

It is confidence, toward or before God, who is the only one who matters.

Part of his goal is to establish this confidence in believers; in you.

2:29 now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame

3:21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God

4:17 By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment

5:13, 14 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life. 14 And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.

Such confidence comes from KNOWING. 25x.
III. **THINGS WE DO NEED TO KNOW**

John takes the two great commands of Jesus, to love God and love your neighbour, and combines them into one.

1. **Believe**

   What is belief?

   Several thrill seekers had crossed Niagara Falls on a tightrope. One of them wanting to ‘up the ante’ decided he could push a person across in a wheelbarrow. He practiced, with a load of gravel. After several trips a bystander said, “you’re ready! All you need now is a man who trusts you enough to sit in the wheelbarrow.”

   “Are you absolutely sure I’m ready?” asked the rope walker.

   “Yes,” said the man.

   “Good,” said the walker, “Get in the wheelbarrow.”

   If you really believe, you will get in the wheelbarrow with God. He will carry you over the great turmoil’s of life.

2. **Love**

   There was a time when it seemed that singer Willie Nelson’s career was almost totally wrecked. Then came a turnaround.

   Willie talked about it in an interview with Barbara Walters. He said the power to reverse everything came from the love of his wife.

   At that point he sang to Barbara the song he wrote to celebrate his wife’s love for him.

   It is called, *Angel Flying Too Close To The Ground*, and contains this beautiful line: “Love is the greatest healer to be found.”

   Have you ever been healed by another’s love?

   How have you healed another with your love?

   Only two things; Believe and love. In these there is life, light, and we have fellowship with each other and with the Father and his son Jesus Christ.

   The evil of this world, the lies, the darkness, the sins, the lusts, the anti-love, anti-Christ, the Cain conjurers of this world all seek to break down and destroy belief and love.

   We must abide in them. We must keep the command to believe or love. 1:14.
Belief and love are the closest we can come to Utopia in this world. Word **Utopia** was coined in 1516, by Sir Thomas More, in his novel of that name. It is a play on two Greek word pairs. ('ou-topos' [no place], 'eu-topos' [good place])

The novel: the political arrangements of the imaginary island country of Utopia

Jesus & John call us to the way of truth, in which Belief and Love are the things we really do need to know because they lead to ‘the good place’ and deliver us from ‘no place.’

The two things we do need to know, if we are at have confidence before God, are that we believe and that we love.

## IV. HOW DO WE KNOW?

How do we have confidence before God, in our soul?

John says it different way.

1. Are of the truth. When we don’t know what we believe we are emotionally insecure, at risk. Searching for emotional highs won’t help. 4 laws: Engine of truth pulls the caboose of feelings.

2. Keep the commandments:
   - Belief in Christ
   - Love for the brethren
   - Moral righteousness

Stott “Abiding in Christ is not a mystical experience which any man may claim; its indispensable accompaniments are the confession of Jesus as the Son of God come in the flesh, and a consistent life of holiness and love.”

3. :24, “by this we know that He abides in us, by the spirit whom he has given us.”
   - Not some subjective fuzzy feeling of assurance.
   - Think in terms of the works and fruits of the Spirit.
   - Jesus said the spirit is like the wind you can’t see it; but you can see & feel the effects of the spirit blowing.
   - Rather it refers to what John has been affirming; objective, evidence in life behaviour. The spirit inspires us to believe; empowers us to live rightly, and love one another.
- To assure our hearts we look for evidence of the Spirit working in us, and through us: believing, living, & loving. These are what the spirit does. We know & we abide when the spirit is working in us.
- The position of abiding is this comprehensive obedience.

**CONCLUSION**

In ancient Egypt, Exodus 1:9-11, Egyptian rulers became fearful of the growing vigour of the children of Israel.

“So the Egyptians put slave drivers over them to crush their spirits with hard labour.”

Archaeology seems to support this story. A stone carving of Ramses II says, “he built the city of Ramses with Asiatic Semitic slaves.”

And, a separate tomb painting shows Semitic-looking slaves making bricks.

The spirit of Egyptian tyranny arises in every person’s life. The effect of this is to cause you to be filled with doubts, to crush your spirit, to feel condemned – within and before God.

Slavery, oppression, condemnation all ‘break the spirit’, crush life, hope.

John wants to reassure you.

In the gospel of JC there is life and fellowship; the truly ‘good place’ vs ‘no place’.

The way of truth, the way to the ‘good place’ is defined by Belief, Love & righteous behaviour.

Abide, make your home in the good place.

AMEN