

1 John 3:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.

Analysis

Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.

John addresses the opposite situation—when conscience doesn't condemn. "Beloved" (agapētoi) again expresses affection. "If our heart condemn us not" (ean hē kardia hēmōn mē kataginōskē)—when our conscience is clear, not accusing us. This assumes we've examined ourselves and found evidence of genuine love in deed and truth (vv. 18-19).

"Then have we confidence toward God" (parrēsian echomen pros ton theon). Parrēsia (παρρησία) means boldness, confidence, or freedom of speech—the right to speak openly. This confidence is directed "toward God" (pros ton theon)—in our relationship with Him, in prayer, and in anticipation of final judgment. When our love for the brethren evidences genuine faith, we can approach God with confidence, not cowering in fear or doubt.

This confidence rests on assurance of salvation and acceptance before God. It's not presumption or self-righteousness but the appropriate posture of children before their Father (Romans 8:15, Hebrews 10:19-22). However, this confidence requires an informed conscience—not ignoring sin or refusing self-examination, but honestly assessing our lives and finding genuine evidence of saving faith through love demonstrated in deeds.

Historical Context

The concept of *parrēsia* had political meaning in Greek democracy—the right of citizens to speak freely in the assembly. In religious contexts, it meant the privilege of approaching deity without fear. Ancient pagans approached their gods with terror, offering sacrifices to appease anger. Judaism's temple system, while God-ordained, involved mediated access through priests and sacrifices.

Christianity revolutionized access to God—believers approach Him directly with confidence through Christ. This wasn't irreverent familiarity but the security of adopted children before a loving Father. The writer of Hebrews similarly exhorts believers to come boldly to the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16). John connects this confidence to the evidence of love, showing that assurance and holy living are intertwined.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. What confidence toward God do you currently have, and on what basis does that confidence rest?
2. How can you cultivate a clear conscience through genuine love in deed and truth?
3. What's the difference between biblical confidence toward God and presumption or false assurance?

Interlinear Text

ἀγαπητοί,	ἐὰν	ἡ	καρδία	ἡμῶν	μὴ	καταγινώσκη	ἡμῶν
Beloved	G1437	G3588	heart	our	G3361	condemn	our
G27			G2588	G2257		G2607	G2257
παρρησίαν	ἔχομεν	πρὸς	τὸν	Θεόν			
confidence	then have we	toward	G3588	God			
G3954	G2192	G4314		G2316			

Additional Cross-References

1 John 2:28 (Parallel theme): And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.

Hebrews 4:16 (Parallel theme): Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

2 Corinthians 1:12 (References God): For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.

Psalms 101:2 (Parallel theme): I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.

1 John 5:14 (Parallel theme): And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:

Hebrews 10:22 (Parallel theme): Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

Job 22:26 (References God): For then shalt thou have thy delight in the Almighty, and shalt lift up thy face unto God.

Job 27:6 (Parallel theme): My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.

1 John 4:17 (Love): Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

1 Corinthians 4:4 (Parallel theme): For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.

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