

Module 14: 1 John 3:19-24 (Part 1)

Group Exercise 1

Verse 19 begins with “We will know by this”. Does “this” refer to something written before it or something written after it? What is “this”? Compare with 2:3, 5; 3:16, 24; 4:2, 6, 13; and 5:2.

Group Exercise 2

The Greek word *kardia* appears in 1 John only four times in 3:19-21. It is translated “heart” in the NASB. What is its meaning in these verses as found in *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*?

Group Exercise 3

What do you observe about the singularity or plurality of the four occurrences of “our heart” in verses 19-21? What do you think John is conveying with this?

1) Observations and Observational Questions that guide Interpretation

- a) Read 1 John 3:11-3:24 for context.
- b) What words do you see as important, either because they are repeated often or they are part of a key teaching in verses 3:19-24?
- c) What title do you suggest for the paragraph starting in verse 3:19?
- d) Difficult passage to translate:
 - i) Some variations in the Greek texts.
 - ii) Even using the same Greek text, this is a difficult passage to interpret.
- e) Transition – links to previous verses
 - i) Truth (18)
 - ii) We will know (16)
 - iii) And (19, in some texts. See “*kai*” below.)
- f) “We will know” (19)
 - i) Future tense
 - ii) “John’s use of the future tense indicates that what his readers would eventually grasp was not something intuitive or indefinite, but a promise based on an existing reality.” (MacArthur)
- g) “By this”
 - i) Does it refer to something before or after? The grammar of verses 19-20 in the Greek does not lend itself well to a forward reference, because there is nothing fitting to which to refer. The reference is more naturally backwards.
 - ii) May refer to “truth” in verse 18. (Stott)
 - iii) May refer to the admonition for brotherly “love” in verse 18. (MacArthur)

- iv) [*Kai*] in brackets, because it is found in about half the Greek texts and not in the other half as the first word in verse 19.
 - (1) Does this affect the translation of verse 19 any?
 - (2) Its presence would strengthen the view that “this” in verse 19 refers backwards to verse 18.
- h) “Assure”
 - i) *Peitho* – one time in 1 John (19)
 - ii) Most commonly means “to persuade”
 - iii) Here it means “to tranquilize, pacify, set at rest”; hence to give confidence.
- i) “Heart”
 - i) *Kardia* – used 4x in 1 John, all in 3:19-21.
 - ii) The seat of physical life
 - iii) The set of moral nature and spiritual life. The seat of grief, joy, the desires, the affections, the perceptions, the thoughts, the understanding, the reasoning powers, the imagination, conscience, the intentions, purpose, the will, and faith.
 - iv) In this passage, it refers to the “conscience”.
- j) “Before Him”
 - i) This is the emphasis in this phrase, because these words are positioned in front of the phrase in Greek – “before Him shall set at rest the heart of us”
 - ii) The picture is of the believer standing in the presence of God. Therefore, his “assurance” is justified, since it is experienced in the very presence of God. The expression was at times used of the individual standing before the judge, with the sense of accountability to the one before whom he appears.
- k) “Our heart”
 - i) Singular “heart” with the plural possessive pronoun
 - ii) 5x in the gospel of John (12:40; 14:1, 27; 16:6, 22), 4x in 1 John (3:19, 20 twice, 21)
 - iii) Suggests the oneness of God’s people in the experience.
- l) “In whatever our heart condemns us”
 - i) *hoti ean* → *ho ti an*
 - ii) for if (KJV) → if whatever (NAS)
 - iii) Varied things may cause our heart to condemn us.
- m) “God is greater than our heart and knows all things”
 - i) “It is not that God minimizes or disregards our failures. In fact he knows them better than we do, for he sees and understands us even more deeply than we can ever know ourselves.” (Jackman)
 - ii) “It is better to have the all-knowing God as our judge than our own conscience” (Hiebert)
- n) Summary of 19-20: “Still the apostle John understood that at times true believers can struggle with their assurance. Some of his readers may have been so overwhelmed by the memory of their past sins and awareness of present ones that they found the thought of God’s forgiveness nearly impossible to accept. Their overactive consciences, beleaguering them with their own shortcomings, perhaps made it difficult for them to have a settled confidence in their right standing before God. So John wrote to encourage those believers and enable them to

accurately evaluate their own spiritual condition. In so doing, he sought to solidify their conviction, rightly inform their conscience, and strengthen their assurance with a true understanding of their transformation and its evidences.”

(MacArthur)

- o) What other observations do you see? (Words, grammar, construction, history, content, etc.)

2) Interpretation

We all will come to understand that we are genuinely converted according to the written truth when we witness our loving according to the truth. This will set at rest our conscience as we stand before God

even in the midst of the various things that cause our conscience to accuse us. We have this confidence and reassurance, because God is superior to our conscience and is omniscient. He sees our thoughts and intents clearly and He views us justified by Christ.

3) Applications

- a) Various things may cause our heart to condemn us. List some that are a result of our sin, that is, “true” accusations. List some that are inspired by the devil, that is, “false” accusations (Revelation 12:10). What should be our response to these accusations, according to verses 19-20.
- b) The tone of verses 19-20 is not of judgment, but of reassurance and tranquility. What practical difference does this make in your life?
- c) What other application do you have?