

LIVING RIGHT IN A WRONG WORLD

STUDY TWELVE

You and Your Conscience

1 John 3:19–24

We need a little break where we can take a deep breath and understand that the conscience, while it is often speaking to us, may be incriminating us when it should not. Or it may be convicting us when it should. That's what these verses are about.

—Charles R. Swindoll

OUR conscience holds immense power over our lives because it looks both behind and ahead. It legislates what should be done *and* judges the validity of what was done. It directs which way to go *and* evaluates the way already taken. It can be an uplifting coach or a hammering dictator, a gentle comforter or a biting critic.

What rest accompanies an assuring conscience. Likewise, what anxious turmoil comes with the condemning conscience. And no matter what, the inner talk of our conscience just never stops.

The confused world, void of God's truth, tells you to treat this ever-present voice in two different ways. First, the world will encourage you to ignore your conscience. *Do what you like! Get that millstone off your neck!* Or, second, the world might press or cajole you to conform your conscience to its own image. *Be as I am! Do as I do!*

Considering the conscience's great influence, its pervading presence, and the world's distorted view of it, how vital, then, that we treat our conscience as it should be treated. God designed our conscience to harness His truth as both the light that points the way and the rod that measures our ways.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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Yet, even a mature Christian may possess areas in his or her conscience not molded by God's Word. A conscience may condemn when no condemnation is required, or it may withhold affirmation when affirmation is needed. In the passage of this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, John the apostle addressed cases like these to help us better understand our conscience.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

A soft heart forms the bridge for God's truth to cross over into our lives and shape our conscience. So, before we study the Living Word, we pray for the Spirit to open our hearts to receive it. Pause now and pray for His help. Write your prayer below if you wish.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Effective Bible study always includes studying the context. In his book *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, Chuck Swindoll wrote:

We understand a verse of Scripture better when we grasp its context—when we acquaint ourselves with the surrounding verses. Every verse sits within a larger context. . . . Let me remind you: never isolate a verse from its context. When we seize isolated verses without having a bigger view of how they fit in with the rest of the passage, it leads to error, especially when verses are pulled out of context.¹

Repetition of key words often clues us in to determining the context. This study's passage, *1 John 3:19–24*, opens with a repetition of a key word from 3:18.



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What key word did John repeat in *1 John 3:18–19*? How does this repetition give us the context of 3:19–24, and how does the context help us understand John’s intention for the statements he made in 3:19–24?

In the second half of 3:19, John makes a logical inference based on his first statement in 3:19. How does that inference naturally follow his first statement in 3:19?

An assured heart before God and confidence in our prayers come to us when our conscience has been formed by divine truth and when our actions align with that truth. Jesus does not speak as a heavenly joker, or comedian, or riddler. He doesn’t want us to strain over or guess at His intentions. He wants us to know. And, by knowing, do His will and enjoy His company.



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Observation: When Our Conscience Condemns Us

If you haven't already, read [1 John 3:19–24](#). First, make a few observations below regarding how this passage contributes to our understanding of a larger theme in 1 John: *fellowship*. Note that John uses the word *heart* to refer to our “conscience.”

In 3:19–24, John sets up two scenarios: 1) when we feel confident before God 2) when we feel guilty before God. Look at [3:19–20](#). How did John identify with his readers in these scenarios?

I always love that about a writer I'm reading when I don't feel like he's looking down on us, but he's identifying with us. —Chuck Swindoll

According to 3:19–20, in what way should we take comfort during those times when our heart condemns us even though it shouldn't? What two truths did John say should comfort us?



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We know in part, but God knows in full. A weak conscience may overlook signs that should give courage. If we reflect on our lives and still feel condemned before Him, then we should take heart that the guilty feelings don't reflect God's feelings. God is greater than our feeble hearts.



Interpretation: When Our Heart Does Not Condemn Us

After addressing those times when our heart needles our minds, John then addressed the times when our heart claps and cheers us on.

Look at *1 John 3:21*. According to this verse, what is the benefit of having a conscience that does not condemn us? How does that benefit fuel our fellowship with God, and why is it important in day-to-day Christian living?

Now focus on *3:22*. John added another benefit. What is it? What additional support did John use to buttress our reason for having this benefit?



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Chuck's Commentary Insight

First John Theme: Spiritual Confidence

Because of this confidence brought on by a life of obedience, we don't shy away from prayer. We don't skulk in the margins while others go to God with their requests. Few things keep people from genuine prayer to their heavenly Father more than unconfessed sin and a resulting guilty conscience. Shame is a barrier to fellowship with God. But when we confess our sins, clear the air, and walk in the light, we find ourselves going to God constantly and confidently, thanking Him, sharing with Him, worshiping and praising Him, and letting our requests be known.²

Let's look at the last verses of our passage, [1 John 3:23–24](#). List the two parts to the commandment mentioned at the beginning of 3:23. What does our response to this command reflect about our relationship with God?

How do we know the Spirit abides in us (1 John 3:24)? What does the last statement in this verse mean? How would not having the Spirit hinder our assurance?

How refreshing to have confidence before God, to know that He hears our prayers, and to receive the sustaining assurance of the Holy Spirit. Such benefits we find nowhere else and in no one else. These benefits can quiet anxious tension, lift the weight of depression, and help you sleep at night. They can strengthen you through difficulties and give you a foretaste of glory divine.



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Correlation: A Purified Conscience

The author of Hebrews wrote of the importance of having a clear conscience and how it fosters a thriving relationship with God. Below, we will explore how Hebrews complements what we learned in 1 John 3:19–24.

First, read [Hebrews 9:9; 9:14](#); and [10:2](#). How did the author of Hebrews relate the sacrifice of Christ with the Christian's conscience? How do these verses complement 1 John 3:19–24?

There is nothing like knowing the truth. O, how it empowers us to live at peace with yourself. Those who do not know the truth live their lives constantly unsure, lacking in confidence, lacking in assurance, fearful of sickness, scared to death of death. They don't know the truth. But if you know the truth, it's amazing how that will assure your heart.
—Chuck Swindoll

Now, read [Hebrews 10:22](#) and [13:18](#). What benefit accompanies a clear conscience? How does a clear conscience connect with how we conduct our lives? How do these verses complement 1 John 3:19–24?

Possessing a clear conscience creates ripple upon ripple of benefits in our life. We enjoy a greater sense of God's presence, act with a clearer mind, live an honorable life, and hold the deep conviction that death will only take us straight to the presence of the Almighty. "No guilt in life, no fear in death, / This is the power of Christ in me."³



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Application: Three Thoughts

Begin application by summarizing what you learned about the role of your conscience in your spiritual life and how trusting Christ benefits our conscience.

After serious reflection on 1 John 3:19–24, Chuck Swindoll noted three thoughts he would like you to consider and practice:

- 1) *When your conscience accuses you, look back and ask why.* Did you act with an ill motive? Did you speak from a heart of pride? Did you react in anger?
- 2) *When your heart affirms you, look around and see why.* Consider the gifts God has given you, the people He has placed in your life, and the benefits of knowing Him. Let your heart swell with gratitude and thanksgiving.
- 3) *When the Spirit assures you, look within and know why.* He will never leave you. He will channel to you all the divine riches from heaven's storehouse so that you enjoy life with God.

Which of the three thoughts do you find most useful in this season of your walk with Christ? Why? Also, note any other application you would like to take away from your time of study.



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The pure truth of God’s Word provides us with a far better response than what the world will tell us. We have access to God’s forgiveness so we don’t have to hide or dismiss our wrongs. We have access to kingdom living and the King Himself, so there’s no need to follow our feelings or conform to the destructive ways of the world. *Hallelujah!*



A FINAL PRAYER

Take a few more moments to meditate upon the truth you learned from this study. Then end with a fitting prayer that aligns with those truths.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 85, 86. To review Chuck’s *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, visit the website sts.insight.org. If you do not have Chuck’s *Living Insights* commentary on 1 John in your library, *grab a copy* at the Insight for Living Ministries web store.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude*, Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 14 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2018), 93–94.
3. Stuart Townend and Keith Getty, “In Christ Alone,” <https://www.stuarttownend.co.uk/song/in-christ-alone/>.

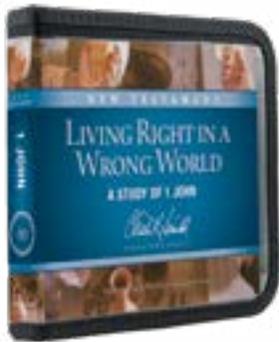


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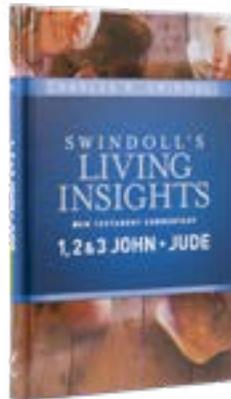
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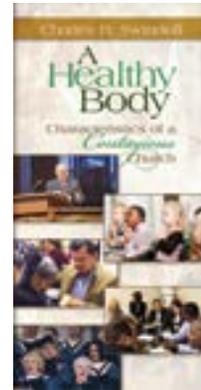
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For the 2020 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Aaron Massey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.

