

# By This We Know

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Preacher: Rev. Andrew Ong

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at [ChristChurchEastBay.org](http://ChristChurchEastBay.org). Good morning, Christ Church.

My name is Stevie. I'm part of the North Berkeley Community Group. And this morning's scripture reading is from John's first epistle, chapter 3, verse 19 through chapter 4, verse 6.

By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him. For whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart and he knows everything.

Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God. And whatever we ask, we receive from him because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.

[ 1 : 08 ] And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as he has commanded us. Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God and God in him.

And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us. Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God.

For many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God, every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.

And every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the Spirit of the Antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

Little children, you are from God and have overcome them. For he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are from the world, therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them.

[ 2 : 12 ] We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us. Whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the Spirit of error.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to be God. Thank you, Stevie, for that scripture reading. Good morning, everyone. My name is Andrew. I'm one of the pastors here. It's good to be with you and to deliver God's word to you this morning. Will you join me in prayer? Lord, your word says to us here, whoever knows God listens.

Whoever is not from God does not listen. But your Spirit has been given to us, the Spirit of truth, that we might discern the Spirit of error. So would we listen closely to the Spirit this morning?

And would the Spirit speak so loudly to us, more loudly than any other spirit in this world, more loudly than any other voice? And would we believe what the Spirit has to say to us?

[ 3 : 14 ] Because this is the Spirit of Christ. So would you be honored in the preaching of your word this morning, God? And would you change us by your Spirit for your glory?

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. All right. So if you are new, this is the 11th week of our lead pastor's long overdue and well-deserved sabbatical.

And so that means that this is my 11th Sunday solo pastoring as the assistant pastor. And thanks to so many of you, especially our wonderful staff here. Oh, okay.

I wasn't expecting that. I don't think that was exactly deserved, but I'll take it. But thanks especially to our amazing staff. I'm happy to report that it hasn't been a disastrous 11 weeks.

It hasn't even been an unmanageable 11 weeks as I expected. As far as I know, no one has deconverted, you know, from Christianity to Satanism. So not bad, right?

[ 4 : 13 ] Praise God for that. But, you know, in the spirit of full disclosure, I still have to admit that even with plenty of support and no major shipwrecks in this season, this sabbatical season, to no

one's fault really, this season has still managed to trigger within me my own personal and lifelong struggle with imposter syndrome.

You know, every Sunday I get up here, even before the sabbatical, but especially recently, and every Sunday I get up here at night, I wonder if this is going to be the Sunday when I'm found out. When I'm found out that I'm not supposed to be up here, that I have no business preaching and being a pastor here and being a counselor and being a leader, and it was all a huge mistake to ordain me a year ago and let me lead in this season because I'm not enough. Because I'm not good enough morally, spiritually. I'm not wise enough as a leader. I'm not skilled enough as a preacher. Because maybe I'm not responsible or disciplined or diligent enough to get better or to get better faster enough.

And so every, you know, B- sermon or worse, and I feel like there have been a lot of those, every pastoral interaction that could have gone better, after every visitor that doesn't return, every regrettable leadership decision, every failure in my own life, in my own home, and in my neighborhood to practice what I preach, to love my wife and my children, and to serve my community in the name of Jesus.

[ 5 : 48 ] Every failure and less than perfect outcome often becomes for me an occasion in which my heart condemns me. An occasion for that inner critic within me to say things like, Andrew, you are not enough, and you're not doing enough, and what you're doing, you're doing wrong, and everything that's gone wrong is all your fault.

And Andrew, if anyone knew who you truly were, they would know that you are a fraud, and they too would condemn you. And my heart condemns me, not just as a bad pastor, but also often as a bad husband, and a bad dad, and a bad brother, and son, and friend, and colleague, and neighbor, and citizen.

Just this past week, we spent some time with my wife's side of the family, and she has a brother, he's one of my best friends, and they have a four-year-old girl, she's nine months older than my oldest, Cammie.

And we were hanging out with them, and this four-year-old girl, she could read in Chinese and English. She read the word butterflies to me.

She can ride a bike. She was subtracting seven minus two equals five, man. And so I went to bed that night, and my heart condemned me.

[ 7 : 04 ] I'm not just a bad pastor, I'm a bad parent. I'm an awful parent. And I wonder if you struggle with this too. Maybe your own version of imposter syndrome, or just plain old-fashioned guilt, shame, and regret.

Maybe your heart condemns you concerning all the things that you've done that you ought not to have done. Those words or those actions that you so wish that you could just take back.

Those wounding words that did not honor someone's vulnerability with you, but exploited it. That particular moment of weakness when you just gave in to what you knew was a wicked desire that would be destructive and have destructive consequences for you and for all those around you.

Maybe your heart condemns you over your shameful habits of self-medicating with drugs, alcohol, porn, sex, or maybe some other more culturally acceptable mode of consumerism.

Maybe for you it's just binge eating, or binge Netflix, or binge shopping. Or maybe your heart condemns you for the things that you haven't done, that you ought to have done, for not loving your neighbor as yourself.

[ 8 : 13 ] Maybe your heart condemns you for not actually caring that much about what's going on in Ukraine, or at our border with our Latin American refugees. Maybe you don't care that much about our unhoused neighbors under your freeways.

Maybe we don't care that much about these women who have unwanted pregnancies, or about these unborn children. Or maybe your heart condemns you just for not loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, for not committing to Him the time and the attention that He deserves.

As we open up God's Word, and as we listen for His voice this morning, I want to ask us all to consider this question, what does your heart condemn you about? What does your heart condemn you about?

And as we ask this question, I hope we'll see how God would have us to respond to the self-condemning hearts that reside within each and every one of us. Now I want to ask, why do we

even have self-condemning hearts in the first place?

Where did this burdensome affliction even come from? Maybe you're here today and you're skeptical about God and Christianity for this very reason. You read, look with me at chapter 3, verse 19.

[ 9 : 24 ] You read this first verse, verse 19. By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before Him. And you're like, well that's why so many of us struggle with self-condemnation.

It's because of this oppressive notion of God and truth that have been externally imposed upon our society by, you know, legalistic religious types of people. These primitive religious boundaries making insiders and outsiders these arbitrary standards employed as power plays to control people's lives.

And thus, maybe you are persuaded that the remedy for self-condemnation is actually freedom from God. And really from every external source of alleged authority outside of your internal self. This is the conclusion that New York Times best-selling author Glendon Doyle promoted in her book, *Untamed*. In her memoir, she retells the various ways that men and institutions and cultural norms and even Sunday school teachers in her life tried to tame her and to fit her into simplistic boxes.

But she says, I will not stay, not ever again, in a room or conversation or relationship or institution that requires me to abandon myself. This life is mine alone, so I have stopped asking people for directions to places they've never been.

[ 10 : 43 ] And that sounds pretty compelling, right? It sounds pretty compelling. Why allow myself to be tamed like a zoo animal by other people and other institutions' culturally constructed standards when I was meant to be a free-roaming cheetah?

Cheetah. Oh, that's the language she used. She likes to call herself a cheetah. And this is why so much of our, you know, a modern secular psychology emphasizes the self-talk, right, of positive psychology, cognitive behavioral therapy.

If we just practice positive self-talk, rewire our brains and the stories that we tell ourselves, if we just practice self-kindness and speak positivity against the self-condemnation that we've wrongly internalized from outside of us, then we will discover and express our truest, most authentic selves and become invulnerable to all condemnation.

But may I ask, is it really that simple? Is it really that simple? Can all our self-condemnation really be extinguished by even the largest dose of self-compassion?

And is all our self-condemnation really just because we've all just foolishly, you know, mindlessly accepted arbitrary external standards imposed upon us like passive, gullible, naive children?

[ 11 : 59 ] Or might there be a grander, more nuanced explanation for the problem of self-condemnation in all of our hearts? So I want to suggest that the grand narrative of Scripture has a far more nuanced, far more compelling story of where self-condemnation comes from and how to deal with it.

See, humanity was created in God's image to flourish, to confidently, before God, be sons and daughters in all the world, making true and right evaluations and judgments, using our mind to evaluate all that we've experienced, thinking God's thoughts about the world and about ourselves. But what happened, what led to our self-condemning hearts, is what the Bible calls sin. That is people, you and me, and all the rest of humanity, going our own way apart from God, walking in darkness instead of light, walking in death instead of life, walking in falsehood instead of truth, and this broke our evaluative capacities and our verdicts became faulty and we stopped thinking like God about Him and about the world and about ourselves.

Do you remember what happened when Adam and Eve went their own way, when they went the serpent's way rather than God's? What happened? They lost a sense of who they were.

They lost a sense of who they were. They became entangled in the lie of the serpent. The serpent's lie about who God was and who they were and who they could be. They were no longer of the truth but complicit with the serpent's lies and so the assurance of heart that they once enjoyed in the garden when they went for walks with God Himself was gone because of sin.

[ 13 : 36 ] Because of their sin, the presence of God all of a sudden became a threat, right? An unsettling reality in which they were no longer sure who they were for they no longer had the confidence that children ought to have in the presence of their father.

And it wasn't that anything had changed in God, right? Nothing had changed in God. Even His love for them did not wane for one single second. But because God is light and because in Him there is no darkness at all and because they brought darkness into the world, this was the beginning of all of our self-condemning hearts.

Our hearts condemn us because of sin. See, because of sin, three things happened. First, our hearts now condemn us because there is within each of us now something truly worthy of condemnation.

Our ultimate accuser actually has a real case against us now because of our sin. Think about it. Would our self-condemning hearts be so convincing, so heavy, so burdensome if they were not at least partially true?

Right? And then secondly, our hearts now condemn us because we no longer see like we used to when we took our eyes off of the light of the world. We lost our 2020 vision and we no longer see God, the world, or ourselves rightly.

[14:54] And thirdly, to add to the confusion, the introduction of darkness into the world has resulted in many evil spirits and false prophets, all these false voices adding to the distortion.

That's why it says here, that's why it talks here in chapter four, verse one about, beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God. For many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Verse three, every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. See, this is where our self-condemning hearts come from.

Our hearts condemn us because of sin. Sin in us worth condemning and sin clouding our view of God and ourselves and sinful voices outside of us trying to persuade us of falsehood.

Now let's talk about how to deal with this affliction, this affliction of self-condemnation. How does God want us to process and engage with these hearts of ours that condemn us? Well look with me again at verse 19.

[15:57] By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him. So first John is saying that the way to have assurance and to be in God's truth is this, verse 20, for whenever our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our heart and he knows everything.

I want you to notice what first John doesn't say. Whereas modern secular psychology might tell us to engage in more positive and affirming self-talk and self-compassion.

I'm not saying that that's all bad and that's all wrong but I do want us to notice that first John doesn't point us there first. It doesn't point us to our own voice first. First John points us to who? To God.

I mean think about it. If your heart condemns you and your therapist just tells you to more mindfully speak to yourself alternative truths about who you think you are in opposition to what your heart is saying about you, it's still going to be a battle.

It's still going to be you against you, your head against your heart and in the worst case scenario, this only perpetuates the pitfalls of self-expressive individualism where you have to be your own hero because you belong only to yourself and you must bear the crushing weight of determining your own identity and your own destiny and it's still on you to talk back to your already powerful self-condemning heart with words that you have to come up with yourself and I don't know about you but to me this is not a desirable scenario.

[17:23] In this book that I'm still highly recommending our elder Bill Barnes read it, he loved it, he even contacted the author, I feel sorry for the author because Bill Barnes could talk a lot but this is a great book and I hope everyone will get their hands on it, it's called You Are Not Your Own.

I'm going to advocate, promote it all the time, it's by Alan Noble and this is what he says, to be your own and belong to yourself means that the most fundamental truth about existence is that you are responsible for your existence and everything it entails.

No one else has the right to define me, to choose my journey in life or to assure me that I am okay, I belong to myself but the freedom of sovereign individualism comes at a great price.

Once I am liberated from all social, moral, natural and religious values, I become responsible for the meaning of my own life with no God to judge or justify me.

I have to be my own judge and redeemer. This burden manifests as a desperate need to justify our lives through identity crafting and expression and Alan Noble, he goes on to talk about how this has contributed to our crazy competitive culture where our very identities and our senses of worth and meaning and purpose are on the line based on our performances in comparison with one another

and so you wonder why we all have self-condemning hearts because I look at Instagram too much. [18:50] That's why. I follow these celebrity preachers and I say, I can never preach like that guy. I can never be a dad like that guy. That's why we have self-condemning hearts.

We're comparing with one another. And so what I want to ask us is, is this the kind of life we want to live? Is this the kind of world that we want to live in, a world where we are just our own?

And if so, how will we ever escape then the threat of self-condemnation? See, there is no more fertile ground for self-condemnation to grow in than in the soil of which we are just our own.

But see, that's why verse 20 says, for whenever our hearts condemn us, God. God. Whenever our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and he knows everything.

Now, what does this mean and how is it good news for us with our self-condemning hearts?

Because at first, it kind of seems like bad news, right? Like, oh shoot, God knows everything?

Everything I ever did?

[19:49] Everything I ever failed to do? Man, I feel even more condemned in the presence of God.

But see, that's not the point that 1 John is trying to make. When verse 20 says, for whenever our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and he knows everything, the point is actually that it is not about you.

God is greater than your heart. What this is saying is that there is a voice that speaks with infinitely higher authority than the voice of your own heart.

And even when your heart is speaking things that might very well be true about what you've done or what you've not done, God is greater than your heart and he knows everything. And when it says he knows everything, it's not just saying he knows everything about you, but it's saying, yeah, sure, he might know everything about you, but more importantly, he also knows everything about himself and about his will and about his ways.

And his will is not to condemn us, it's to redeem his children. And this is the gospel. This is the gospel that God's voice speaks with more clarity and more authority than our self-condemning hearts.

So to all of us who struggle with a self-condemning heart, God's word to us today is, child, am I not greater than your heart? Beloved child, am I not greater than your heart?

[21:17] Like, think about it. A self-condemning heart, it is not a sign of humility before God. It's just the opposite side of the coin to self-righteousness.

I recently read a magazine article by a professor of biblical counseling, and he told a story from his childhood about how he was, you know, a doughy, bookish little boy who was so embarrassed and so ashamed because he could never measure up to the lean, athletic soccer gods who graced the halls of his junior high school.

And he told of how one day his self-dissatisfaction just boiled over one night and he said something out loud that he'd only said many times just in his head. He said, I hate myself.

I hate myself. Anyone here mutter that to themselves? Maybe not in those words, but just in grunts or maybe curses under your breath out of regret. He said, I hate myself.

And his mother, always known for her gentleness and her care, she responded in a way that he had not expected. He expected pity from her, but what she gave him was far better.

[22:27] And with an unexpectedly steely glance, she looked at her son who had just declared his own self-hatred and a deep offense was clearly awoken within her as she sternly responded to her self-loathing son, you have no right.

You have no right. See, a self-condemning heart that views itself as bigger and greater and more authoritative than God who made us and loves us and plans to redeem his beloved children, a self-condemning heart that is lowered over my own identity is an arrogant and prideful heart that is anti-Christ.

And it's also the kind of heart that not only judges ourselves according to our blurred vision of reality, but it ends up leading us to compare ourselves and judge others and hold them up to our faulty standards too.

See, there is no good news for anyone. There is no hope if God is not greater than our hearts. Or think about it this way. If God is not greater than your heart, then of course your heart will condemn you forever.

If God cannot overcome your heart's self-condemnation, then what hope is there for you? Maybe you can't forgive yourself for whatever heinous, hurtful, unpardonable thing that you've done.

[ 23 : 46 ] Well, God says that's the point. You can't forgive yourself. But I can. Because I am greater than your heart. You have no right to condemn yourself or to forgive yourself.

But I have the right to condemn you and to forgive you. And I choose forgiveness. In fact, I purchased it on the cross. And this is the amazing news of the gospel.

That the one who is greater than our hearts, the one who is greater than any voice, the one with ultimate authority to tell us who we are and whose we are and whether or not we have worth and value, the one who knows everything, the one who knows us to the bottom, he loves us to the heavens.

He who is greater than our hearts and knows everything still does not condemn us. And this is the gospel. The gospel says to us, if God is willing to forgive your sins and to justify you by the atoning blood of his son, you have no right to self-condemnation.

You are a child of God. You are a child of God. And this is what verses 21 to 22 are getting at.

Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God and whatever we ask, we receive from him because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.

[ 25 : 11 ] This is the kind of confident father-to-child relationship he desires to have with us. Who is the only one in the world who could ask the prime minister to tie their shoelaces? Their child.

See, the only way our hearts won't condemn us is if we understand that he is greater than our hearts and he knows everything and that he knows us not as enemies to condemn but as children to commend.

The only cure for a self-condemning heart is to come before God with the confidence and the faith that we are known by him as his children and we can ask him anything just happily and trustingly following the pleasing way of our father in heaven.

And this will not happen apart from the presence of God's spirit in our lives and that's why verse 23 says and this is his commandment that we believe in the name of his son Jesus Christ and love one another just as he has commanded us whoever keeps his commandments abides in God and God in him and by this we know that he abides in us by the spirit whom he has given us.

And I wish I had more time to unpack and to talk about the spirits in chapter 4 verses 1 through 4 but let me just wrap up by saying that there are far more spirits at work in this world than we realize influencing this world in ways that we take for granted and are likely oblivious to influencing what we think about God and the world and ourselves but what's important to know is that the spirit of God is unlike any other spirit for every other spirit will only lead to self-condemnation but because the spirit of God is the spirit of Jesus Christ who came in the flesh to put our condemnation to death on a cross and rise from the grave and ascend into heaven in power and victory both the condemnation of our hearts and the condemnation of the devilish accuser himself have been ultimately overcome by the God who is greater than our hearts and also greater than he who is in the world.

[ 27 : 09 ] And the application question for us is which spirit will we listen to? Which spirit will we allow to speak into and inform our heads and our hearts? Verse 5 They are from the world therefore they speak from the world and the world listens to them we are from God.

Whoever knows God listens to us these apostles of Jesus whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

You see there is not a single second of our lives that is lived in neutral territory. For those who have eyes to see there is a spiritual war that is going on a spirit of fear and condemnation that seeks to envelop us and swallow us up and we must not naively think that we are unaffected.

The devil delights in our self-condemnation so we need to be spiritually sober and discerning and guided by God's words. Just the other week I went to a spiritual director for the very first time I had no idea what it was about but I wanted to try it because Jonathan was really into it and I just went in there and I said I just want to be closer to God and it was actually a really good experience helping me discern what God was trying to reveal to me particularly in my unique situation and there was one question that he kept asking me returning to I'd maybe say something like you know I think God wants me to be a more intentional more sacrificial father but then he'd say well that may be objectively true in general but right now in this moment in this season is that from you or is that from God or is that possibly from another spirit God's word today invites us to consider the words spoken into our minds and our hearts by the spirits among us and to listen for the clear pure gracious voice of God's spirit who does not want to condemn his children but wants to reassure us in his love Christ Church what are the words we're allowing to be spoken into us I'll end with this quote from the great 20th century British preacher Martin Lloyd-Jones who suggests that we don't just listen to

ourselves but that we draw upon the scriptures the very words that God has given us these words that maybe we've read and memorized and meditated upon and then we use those words the very words of God to talk to ourselves right to speak back against our self condemning hearts and the condemnations of all the spirits who are at war against us this is what Lloyd-Jones says the main trouble in this whole matter of spiritual depression in a sense is this that we allow ourself to talk to us instead of talking to ourself am I just trying to be deliberately paradoxical far from it this is the very essence of wisdom in this matter have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself take those thoughts that come to you the moment you wake up in the morning you have not originated them but they start talking to you they bring back the problems of yesterday somebody is talking who is talking to you yourself is talking to you the main art in the matter of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself you have to address yourself preach to yourself question yourself you must say to your soul why art thou cast down and say to yourself hope thou in God instead of muttering in this depressed unhappy way and then you must go on to remind yourself of God who God is and what God is and what God has done and what God has pledged himself to do then having done that end on this great note defy yourself and defy other people and defy the devil and the whole world and say with the psalmist

[ 30 : 59 ] I shall yet praise him who is my God when God is greater than our heart when our hearts condemn us Christ church God is greater than our hearts God is greater than our hearts that's his word to us would we let him speak that into our lives we meditate on that and live like he's greater than our hearts will you pray with me and then God and what's Your love is sir stuen thank you for His God and His love will you be as if I can let him say I can't say James that's her thing will you nak or you I can tell the song is and email free to your YouTube andaca■■■z and and