

Briefing Document: 1 John Lesson 68

Wednesday – July 8, 2026

Executive Summary

This briefing document examines the relationship between salvation, holiness, and the human conscience based on 1 John 3:18-24. The central theme is that true salvation is not just a past event or a feeling, but a continuing process of transformation called sanctification. Key evidence of a genuine relationship with God includes a sacrificial love for other Christians and the presence of an active, cleansed conscience. The document also explores how the conscience acts as a spiritual warning system and how it can be damaged or neutralized by outside influences.

The Relationship Between Salvation and Holiness

A common view in some modern churches is that salvation is a "permanent nature of regeneration" but a "temporary nature of experience." This means some people believe they are saved and delivered from hell, yet they continue to live their original, sinful lifestyles without change.

However, the historical teaching of the church, supported by figures like Jonathan Edwards during the Great Awakening, argues that true salvation must result in a holy life.

Key Insights on Sanctification

- **The Pursuit of Holiness:** The pursuit of holiness is the theological proof of salvation. This process is called **sanctification**.
 - **A New Nature:** When a person is saved, they receive a new nature that naturally desires to be holy. Edwards described this as a "holy breathing and panting after the spirit of God."
 - **The Purpose of Salvation:** Holiness is not separate from salvation; it is the very purpose of it.
 - **Lifelong Transformation:** Once a person is renewed by God, a life of holiness begins instantly and continues until the end of their life, when they reach "perfection in glory."
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The First Indicator: Love in Deed and Truth

The Apostle John provides specific tests to help believers know if they are "of the truth." The first major component of a religious life that proves salvation is a genuine love for other Christians.

Characteristics of Christian Love

- **Action Over Words:** 1 John 3:18 states, *“My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”* True love is not just something a person says; it is something they do.
- **Sacrificial Nature:** This love is unique because it involves sacrifice. It may even require a person to "lay down their lives for the brethren."
- **A Change of Heart:** Salvation changes a person's affections. They begin to love people they once considered strangers or who were outside their social circle.
- **Church Attendance:** A lack of desire to be with other believers or to attend church can be a reason to question the validity of one's salvation.

The Second Indicator: A Functioning Conscience

A second indicator of true salvation is a very active and well-informed conscience. In the biblical context, the "heart" refers to the center of a person's thoughts, while the conscience serves as a mechanism of "self-knowledge."

The Mechanics of Conscience

Feature	Function
Observation	The conscience observes everything you do.
Testimony	It gives testimony about your behavior to yourself.
Excusal	It provides a sense of joy and satisfaction when you do what is righteous.
Accusation	It attacks and condemns you when you commit sin, acting as a spiritual warning system.

The conscience is compared to the physical nervous system. Just as physical pain warns a person of bodily danger, the conscience warns the soul of spiritual danger. Without this "pain," a person would plunge deeper into sin until it becomes deadly to them.

The Three Ways Conscience is Neutralized

Because the conscience is a critical device for a Christian's walk, there are three primary ways it can be neutralized or silenced:

1. **Misinforming the Conscience:** This happens when a person is given a false or low standard of morality. If the standard is low, the conscience will not react to sinful behavior.

2. **Silencing the Conscience:** Modern culture often tells people they should never feel guilty and should focus only on self-esteem. This silences the inner warning system.
 3. **Searing the Conscience:** If a person continually ignores and violates their conscience, it becomes covered in "scar tissue." This is referred to as a "seared" conscience, where the "morality nerves" are dead and the person feels nothing when they do wrong.
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The Cleansing Power of Salvation

When a person becomes a believer, their conscience is not just activated; it is cleansed. Before salvation, a person may feel overwhelmed by the weight and indictment of their sins.

- **Conviction:** The Holy Spirit stirs up the conscience, leading to a "desperation mode" where the person seeks God's mercy.
 - **Cleansing:** Hebrews 9:14 says, *"how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"*
 - **New Life:** Salvation washes the conscience clean, allowing the believer to serve God without the constant "accusing" weight of past dead works.
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Conclusion and Final Reflections

The briefing concludes with the reminder that even godly people in the Bible fell into sin, including Peter, Paul, and David. However, the mark of a genuine believer is that they get back up, repent, and continue the process of sanctification.

Key Memory Verse: *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding;"* (Proverbs 3:5).