



[1 John 3:20](#)

(20) For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

King James Version

This is vitally important to us because we of all people are subject to intense feelings of self-condemnation and guilt from knowing that we are not living up to God's standard. We truly care about what [God](#) thinks of us because we know more than most about Him.

Our [faith](#) is not to be blind and unthinking but based on truth. Our application of faith in light of this verse necessitates a fascinating balance between two extremes that arise from our more precise knowledge of God's way. Both extremes are wrong. The first extreme is that we live life in constant guilt and fear that God's hammer will fall and smash us to smithereens at any moment due to our imperfections.

The second is a laissez-faire, God-is-very-merciful-and-tolerant, He-understands-my-weaknesses attitude. In this extreme, sins are accepted as part of the normal course of life, and no determined effort is made to overcome them. Some have given in to a particular [sin](#), exclaiming, "God understands my needs." God also understands rebellion.

But whatever happened to Jesus' strong admonition, "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out," or "If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off" ([Matthew 5:29-30](#))? Certainly, He does not mean this literally, but it illustrates the serious determination, vigor, and strength we are to employ in overcoming sin. Those who minimize sin come close to trampling the Son of God underfoot and putting His sacrifice to an open shame (see [Hebrews 6:6](#); [10:29](#)).

How good is the sacrifice of such a person's life? He is guilty of practicing sin. John writes, "Whoever is born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God" ([1 John 3:9](#)). Later, in [Revelation 22:15](#),

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he adds, "But outside [the New Jerusalem] are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie." Such people will not be in God's Kingdom.

Their consciences have adjusted in a similar way to the situation in Malachi 1. Sin, a defiled life, is acceptable, and their attitude seems to be that God will just have to be satisfied with children who will not strive to overcome. This is dangerous business indeed because God says only those who overcome will inherit all things ([Revelation 21:7](#)). Is God satisfied with such a situation? Does He not desire a better offering from His children for their welfare and His glory? If He is not content, the fellowship is either already broken or is breaking down.

Our concern, however, is for those who *are* striving to overcome but still failing from time to time—those who *know* they are not living up to the standard and struggle with a guilty conscience and feel their fellowship with God is cut off because of occasional sin. The majority of us probably fall into this category.

When we commit the occasional sin, are we no longer acceptable to God? Is our fellowship truly cut off? While it is true that sin separates us from Him, do we remain unsatisfied because we feel there is no communion? Once again, God's grace rescues us from what would otherwise be an impossible situation.

The answer to this confounding situation lies in a change of our natures arising from [repentance](#), receipt of God's [Holy Spirit](#), and—perhaps above all—access to God through [Jesus Christ](#). Through these come fellowship and experience with Them throughout the remainder of life and access to God's [merciful](#) grace when we fall short. There can be no doubt we are saved by grace through faith. Our depression and extreme self-condemnation reveals a lack of faith in God's willingness to forgive upon repentance. Though works are required of us, we cannot earn our way into the Kingdom through them because they will forever fall short in providing payment for sin.

There is a tension between the two extremes of excessive guilt and feelings of worthlessness in contrast to the casual, careless, irresponsible, "God will just have to take me as I am" disregard of our responsibility to glorify God in all we think, say, and do.

This is why John says, "God is greater than our heart." He is ever willing to accept us as Christ—even though we personally bring Him blemished offerings in our life's experiences—as long as our attitude has not turned to trampling the sacrifice of His Son underfoot and treating it as a common thing.

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We will never enter into God's acceptance and fellowship based on any work of offering we sacrifice to Him. The only thing He will accept is the unblemished offering of Christ's life, and because it accompanies or precedes us into His presence, we are accepted, have communion with Him, and are fed.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:

[The Offerings of Leviticus \(Part Four\): The Peace Offering](#)

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