

1 John 3:18-24

Set Your Heart At Rest

Everyone in the world has a basic need for love. When you know that someone loves you and cares for you, you feel valued and needed. The world in which we live talks a lot about love. It sings about love. It affirms the value of love. And yet, the world in general actually grows increasingly loveless. Hatred and violence are the norm of the day. In contrast to a world that grows ever more self-centered, the apostle John revealed a stunning truth in the first verse of chapter three.

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!¹

God's love initiated our salvation. We will read later in chapter four, that we love God only because he first loved us. In His love God has done more than forgive our sins. He has filled us with His life and His love in the gift of the Holy Spirit. And as children of God we are called to share this love in all that we do and say. We are to love and serve the family of God and we are to love and serve those who have not yet come to faith in God through Jesus Christ. When we love as Christ loves then we will affect and influence the world around us. This is one reason why John wrote what he did in verse 18.

My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

We must not just say that as Christians we love, there must be action. The love of God that we say we have must be visible and practical. It must be seen as we give and serve with the same heart that God gave His Son and Jesus Christ gave His life for us. We are to love in deed and in truth.

To love in truth means to care and serve according to the standard of God's written Word. It is the height of hypocrisy to say that we believe the Bible, but then to not act on what it says. This is what John was warning his people about concerning false teachers.

The church that John wrote to had endured a terrible split. False teachers had drawn away a number of people from the church by their deceptive lies. The apostle taught that you can tell these people are counterfeit because they

¹ The best Greek manuscripts add "And we are!" at the end of the sentence.

do not really teach the truth of the gospel. They do not obey God's holy will. And they certainly don't really care and love one another. They were hypocrites.²

But there must have still been confusion in the hearts and minds of the people John served. Perhaps they thought, "But, how do we really know that we are of the truth? How do we know that we are really the children of God?" So there was a need for assurance. And the apostle John revealed three tests in his letter, over and over again, on how to know the true believer from the hypocrite.

1. Are you living your life in the light of God's Word? Are you walking in the light as He is in the light? Are you obedient to the will of God?
2. Do you believe the truth about the person and work of Jesus Christ? Do you believe the human Jesus is the Son of God, our Lord and Savior? Do you believe that God raised him up from the dead and that he will return to grant us everlasting life and glory?
3. Do you love your brothers and sisters in the family of God? Are you looking out for the interests of others? When you see someone in need are you ready to give and serve?

This is how we know that we are of the truth.

And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.
(1 John 3:19)

Do you want to know if you are truly a child of God? Then ask yourself this question: do I love others in deeds and according to the truth? As we put our faith into loving actions we assure our hearts before God.³ Or perhaps more accurately "shall set our hearts at rest." Our Father wants our hearts to be at rest in His presence. And loving and serving others is how we experience the life of God in Christ in us that reminds us that we are children of God.

Still, there are times when our hearts are not at rest before God. Sometimes we compare ourselves to other Christians or with the holy standards of Scripture and we don't measure up. Sometimes we know we should love and give, but in our hearts we struggle because we don't want to be

² The word "hypocrite" comes from the Greek name for the large mask actors wore in ancient Greek theater.

³ James 2:14-17

inconvenienced. Or maybe we think the other person doesn't deserve our care. Or perhaps we have just been so self-absorbed and dull that we didn't see the needs around us.

I've experienced this in my own life. Sometimes my passion for God cools. In my heart and mind I am a lamb going astray from the flock. When we are not being faithful to Christ our hearts know it. We know we've wasted precious moments of our lives. And this condemnation within our hearts before God affects our joy and our prayers. But here is a great comforting and encouraging truth. Remember when your heart is in the valley of condemnation that God knows your heart of hearts and is forever merciful.

For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.
(1 John 3:20)

What does this mean? It means that when we say all the right things about being a follower of Christ, but our lives don't match the talk, God knows the inner realities of our hearts better than we do. He knows our strengths and our weaknesses and our failings better than we do. And as His child, He loves us and wants us to know we can still pick ourselves up and love and serve.

Let me give you the example of Peter. It was the night of Christ's betrayal and arrest. Jesus and the disciples had eaten the last supper together. And Christ took bread and wine and talked about giving his body and blood to inaugurate the new covenant. After supper they went out to pray. And Jesus Christ told all the disciples they would desert him. Peter objected vigorously. Here's the story.

And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. ²⁷ Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep will be scattered.' ²⁸ "But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee."

²⁹ Peter said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble, yet I *will* not be." ³⁰ Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you that today, even this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times." ³¹ But he spoke more vehemently, "If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And they all said likewise.
(Mark 14:26-31)

Well, we all know what happened. Christ was arrested and the disciples fled in fear. And Peter vehemently denied Christ three times. Peter was so crushed by his denial and lack of faith that Scripture says he wept.⁴ The Greek word translated “wept” means to cry and wail in agony and despair. Peter had failed and his heart was not at rest before God. Peter had been a coward, a hypocrite. He felt unworthy of ever serving God again.

But I want you to see God's love and mercy towards Peter. The verses we will read occur on the day of Jesus Christ's resurrection. The women had gone to the tomb to anoint Christ's body. But when they arrived Jesus Christ had already been resurrected. And they saw an angel and here is what he said.

But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. ⁷ But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you.”
(Mark 16:6, 7)

Did you catch the point of mercy? “He is risen...go tell his disciples” the angel said. Then after a short pause, he said, “and Peter.” The angel, the messenger of God, singled out Peter so that he would be assured that despite his failure, he was still one of the apostles. God's knowledge of Peter's heart was greater than Peter's knowledge of himself. If you find yourself in the valley of condemnation realize that even in your weakest moment God knows your heart and He is not condemning you. The Bible asks,

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who *can* be against us? ³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? [*Shall*] God who justifies [?] ³⁴ Who is he who condemns? [*Shall*] Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us [?]
(Romans 8:31-34)

God justified you; therefore He will not reverse His verdict and now condemn you. Christ gave his life for you and even now intercedes on your behalf. Therefore if your heart condemns you because you have not loved and

⁴ Mark 14:72

served as you should have here is what you can do. First, realize that God is greater and more merciful than your own heart. Secondly, pick yourself up and get back to living life as who you are—a child of God. Love and serve as a child of God should so that others are blessed and your heart is at rest.

Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.
(1 John 3:21)

This is the way God, our Father, wants us to think and feel. We are to have confidence and boldness in His presence. The Bible declares that we have “boldness and access” to God through our Lord Jesus Christ.⁵ Scripture encourages us to “come boldly to the throne of grace.”⁶ The Word of God states that we can have “boldness to enter the Holiest” presence of God “by the blood of Jesus Christ.”⁷

And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.²³ And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.
(1 John 3:22, 23)

When we believe in the name of Jesus Christ and we love each other our prayers are answered. To believe in the name of Jesus Christ means to trust in him as your Savior, to honor and obey him as your Lord. To love one another is to do what Jesus Christ does for us. When our lives are full of faith and love then our hearts will be in the right place. And our prayers will be in harmony with God's will and shall be answered.

Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.
(1 John 3:24)

The apostle has already referred to the gift of the Spirit before, in chapter 2. There he called it “the anointing” that abides in us. But this is the first explicit mention of God's holy Spirit. We know God is in us because of His Spirit at work in us. We can manifest the Spirit by speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues,

⁵ Ephesians 3:12

⁶ Hebrews 4:16

⁷ Hebrews 10:19

prophecy, word of knowledge, word of wisdom and healings.⁸ We can also evidence the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, goodness and so on.⁹ But what the Word of God is concerned about here is love. Romans 5:5 tells us that

the love of God has been poured out in our hearts
by the Holy Spirit [that] was given to us.

We have the love of God within us; let's share it! The family of God needs your love. The world needs your love. Love is how we are going to make a difference in someone's life. The world is in darkness and blindness until a child of God lives like one.

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed
on us, that we should be called children of God!

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but in deed and in truth.
(1 John 3:1, 18)

⁸ 1 Corinthians 12: 7-11

⁹ Galatians 5:22, 23