

God Is Greater Than Our Hearts

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[0 : 0 0] Take your Bibles and turn to 1 John chapter 3. 1 John's at the very end of your Bible, just in front of the book of Revelation and a couple other tiny little books.

1 John chapter 3. I'll begin reading at verse 16 to the end of the chapter. This is how we know what love is.

Jesus laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?

Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue, but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us.

For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.

[1 : 4 0] And this is his command, to believe in the name of his son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.

Those who obey his commands live in him and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us.

We know it by the spirit he gave us. Please preach the word to us, brother. Some of us don't like to fly.

And I know that for a fact because I just talked to a sister who would say flying is not her favorite thing to do. No offense to the pilots among us. It's not because you fly the plane poorly.

It's just the whole experience can be stressful. And we're not just talking once you're seated on the plane. We're talking once you leave your home to the time you're seated on the plane.

[2 : 3 9] It is stressful as you have to navigate traffic to get to the airport. And then once you are at the airport, it is this continual process of hurry up and wait.

Hurry up and wait. Get all of your baggage out of the car and then get inside the terminal and wait in a long line. And then navigate all of the crowds of people to get to the security checkpoint.

And we don't need to talk about the security checkpoint. That's a terrible process in and of itself. You make it through, though, and you're not done. You have to get to your gate and you need to run to catch your flight, only you run to catch it and then it waits on the tarmac for half an hour before it departs.

And finally, the plane is in the air and you're sitting there in your window seat with your seatbelt light on and you feel it. You can't relax because you have restless legs.

And there is nothing that you can do about your restless legs because you have that window seat and you have your seatbelt light on and you can't do all of the things that the Mayo Clinic says that you should do to alleviate your restless legs.

- [3 : 47] There's no warm baths on the plane. You can't get up and exercise on the plane. You can't ask the stranger next to you to massage your legs. You are stuck.
- You must endure a miserable flight because you have restless legs. Many of us have had that experience before. But have you had a restless heart?
- Have you had a heart that is not at rest? We're not talking about the organ that pumps blood throughout your body. We're thinking from a spiritual perspective.
- That seat of your emotions and your thoughts and your desires and all that is in you, your heart that the Bible speaks of. Have you had a restless heart?
- And the Mayo Clinic can't help us with a restless heart. But God's Word can. And what we see here in our passage this morning in 1 John chapter 3 tells us what we should do about a restless heart.
- [4 : 48] So we've got two questions this morning that we are going to ask and answer from 1 John chapter 3. Originally, there were seven questions, so be thankful.
- We paired it down to two because seven questions felt less like preaching and more like catechizing. We were just going to do Q&A, Q&A.; So two questions that are of great importance to us this morning.
- And they both have to do with a restless heart. So the first question that we need to ask is what do we do with a restless heart? Look again at verses 19 to 20 in our passage.
- 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.
- So we've been preaching through 1 John in the evenings and this is the text for us that we've now come to. And as we've been journeying through the book of 1 John, we have been called over and over again to examine ourselves.
- [5 : 59] To take a careful inspection of ourselves. To look at our lives and to consider does the way that I live match up with my profession of faith?
- Do I live like the Christian that I say that I am? Is there fruit in my life? Is there evidence that I am a Christian?
- Is the pattern of my life one of indulging my sin? Or is the pattern of my life one of seeking after righteousness? These are challenging questions.
- These are questions that are meant to probe our hearts. They're not meant to fill us with warm, fuzzy feelings. They're not meant to comfort us. They are meant to challenge us. They poke and they prod us for our good.
- So God's word to us in 1 John has repeatedly told us this is what the children of God look like. In fact, we just read of that in verses 16 to 18, a reminder from last week.
- [7 : 07] The children of God love one another. It's an evidence that they are indeed God's children, born of God. So we have to ask ourselves, do I look like this?
- Does my life match up with what the word says that a Christian's life looks like? Am I of the truth? Am I of God?
- Or, am I self-deceived? And I'm actually of the evil one, the one who is full of lies. So those are important questions for us to consider.
- Because there are times that people profess faith, but do not actually have faith. There are times in which people say that they are Christians, but they are deceived, and they are not Christians.
- And self-examination is a way in which we realize this, and then there are times that God in His grace brings a sinner to true repentance and true conversion by His grace.

- [8 : 16] It is good to examine yourself, to be forced to grapple with the question, am I a child of God? Is that my identity?
- And some of us realize we're not. We're not a child of God. But by God's grace, we turn in faith and we humble ourselves in repentance and we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.
- You cannot claim to be a Christian and then live your life however you want. You cannot claim Christ and then live a self-indulgent life.
- You can't claim Christ and then live a life that is focused on you and your ways and going those ways. If you do, you are deceived. You are self-deceived if you think that you can.
- So 1 John makes it clear to us, if you are a child of God, you will live like one. Some of us may not be in Christ, but we think that we are. You need to examine yourself.
- [9 : 19] You need to hear the words of 1 John. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, 1 John says. You need to look at yourself.
- Stop claiming Christ and then bringing shame to His name. You need to turn from your sin. Throw yourself at the feet of a merciful Savior.
- That may be some of us here this morning. Turn to Christ. Believe on Him. Many of us here this morning are Christians. Many of us are indeed saved by grace through faith and the finished work of Christ on the cross.
- But we struggle with assurance. We struggle with that. We struggle to have confidence that God really has saved us.
- That He really has made us His own. That we are indeed His children. And part of that struggle with assurance is that we can have a condemning heart.
- [10 : 22] A restless heart. heart. So what is a condemning heart? This is really the only time in the scriptures that we read of this kind of phrase. A heart that condemns us.
- So what is it? We're going to see in our passage that it is a heart that has an imbalanced understanding of assurance. A condemning heart is a heart that is over-emphasizing one aspect of assurance at the expense of others.
- we need to unpack that. But first we need to unpack what assurance itself is. We need to think through what assurance is.
- So you can be a Christian and you can have doubts that you are. You can be a Christian but you can struggle to really know that you are. You can struggle to be confident that the Lord has saved you.
- It's because of that very struggle with assurance that 1 John was written. for us. 1 John 5.13 says, I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.
- [11 : 34] In other words, John is saying, you believe but I want you to have confidence that you believe. You are a Christian but I want you to have certainty that you are a Christian.
- You have eternal life. John writes to us who are in Christ that we might grow in our assurance that we are indeed in Christ.
- So you might be familiar with this illustration to help us understand assurance. The three-legged stool. I've heard it from this pulpit. I know some of us are familiar.
- The three-legged stool. You need all three legs of a stool for a stool to be useful. The most obvious statement of the morning. You have two legs, that stool might as well be scrap wood.
- If you lose one leg, you can't sit on that stool. Assurance can be understood like a three-legged stool. We gain greater assurance of our salvation as we understand all three legs of that stool.

[12 : 40] So what are those legs? The first leg John has addressed over and over and over again in his letter. The fruit that God produces in our lives.

Those who are saved should see God's grace at work in their lives. They should see this greater and greater conformity to the likeness of Christ. We should look more like Jesus if we indeed are walking with him.

If you see no changes in your motivations, no changes in your thoughts, no changes in your words and actions which are the fruit that others may indeed see, that's a problem.

That very well may be a telling sign that you actually don't know the Lord. A Christian will have fruit on display for others to see.

That's the first leg of the stool. There's the second leg of the stool. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. This is what Romans 8.16 says when it speaks of the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

[13 : 54] God's Spirit is at work in the children of God to remind them that they do indeed have this new found relationship with God. We are reassured. We are reassured of our status before Him.

We have this sense of greater and greater fellowship and communion with the Father and this is the work of the Spirit to reassure our hearts. That's the second leg of the stool.

Here's the third leg. The promises of God. We look to God's Word and we remember what He has indeed promised to us.

And God can never lie. God does not go back on His Word so what He says like we've seen in Sunday school we take it at His Word.

We listen. We believe that what He says is true because He has said it. So we cling to promises. Promises like everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

[14 : 57] We know that is true. Or promises like we sang of in the song Jesus Strong and Kind. If anyone thirsts let him come to me and drink Jesus says.

We cling to that and we know that is true. So as we look to this reliable trustworthy Word of God we are reassured we are reminded that our salvation it's preserved by God.

He saves us in His grace He keeps us in His grace. Philippians 1.6 He who began a good work in us will bring it to completion. So we need to remember the three legs of the stool of assurance.

Not a one-legged stool it's not a two-legged stool it's a good hearty three-legged stool that the Lord has given us. Here's something else that we need to remember that our passage in 1 John is driving at.

Those legs of the stool can't be out of balance. If you've got one leg that's twice as long as the other legs of a stool that's also not a really well-built stool.

[16 : 06] You're going to teeter off that stool you're going to fall off that stool unless you've got it on a hill. So if we remind ourselves of the promises of God if we hyper-focus on the promises of God but we are neglecting to examine fruit in our lives or we're neglecting the Spirit's witness in our hearts we're going to struggle with assurance.

We're going to run into all kinds of problems with assurance just like if you sit on a stool with one leg that's longer than the others. So a condemning heart is a heart that is imbalanced in its understanding of assurance.

A condemning heart has made one leg of the stool longer than the other two legs and here in 1 John that means that we have an over-emphasis on the need for fruit in our lives to the neglect of the promises of God and the work of the Spirit in our lives.

Our hearts condemn us when we move from good appropriate self-examination to hyper-fixation. When our hearts give us tunnel vision with our sin and all that we see is our sin and we are overwhelmed by our sin and we look at our sin that still remains in our hearts and we say can I really be a Christian?

Am I really a child of God? Because I see my sin and I see it in abundance. There's a difference between the work of the Spirit to convict and the work of our own hearts to condemn.

[17 : 44] Your own heart accuses you. Your own heart makes it a point to constantly remind you of your sin to keep your sin front and center focused to hold a record of accounts.

This is the debt. Here it is. See your sin. Your own heart has become the judge in the courtroom of heaven and your heart delivers the verdict condemned.

That's what it means to have a condemning heart. That is a heart that is not at rest. So what do we do about this condemning heart?

What do we do with a restless heart? What's the solution? God gives it to us here in his word. What does God say in verse 20? God is greater than our heart and he knows everything.

So a condemning heart sees too much of ourselves and not enough of God. A condemning heart only examines ourselves and it fails to examine God in his word.

[18 : 50] We should see ourselves. We should see our sin. We should see the ways in which we continue to sin. We should hate our sin and we should fight our sin.

The spirit doesn't condemn us. The spirit convicts us of our sin but then we turn in repentance to God. Condemning heart says see your sin now wallow in it.

It's popular to hear people say things like listen to your heart or follow your heart go wherever it leads and that kind of thing should be like nails on a chalkboard to our ears even though I know chalkboards are absolutely going out of style and everybody 10 years old and younger hears that and says what does that sound like?

Kids it sounds terrible. It's a terrible it makes your skin crawl when you have that nails on a chalkboard. We should not listen to our heart and when we hear that we often associate that with indulging in sin with not looking to what God says in his word but just looking to ourselves and doing what we think is best.

That's dangerous. We shouldn't do that. But then we can think kind of in the opposite direction as well. We should also not listen to our hearts when our hearts overwhelm us with the reality of our sin.

[20 : 21] So we move from doing whatever we want, indulging in our sin, to now being overwhelmed by our sin. Don't listen to your heart then, don't listen to your heart now.

We shouldn't listen to our heart because it's also capable of condemning us. So on the one hand, don't listen to your heart when it tells you don't worry about sin.

But then on the other hand, don't listen to your heart when it condemns you for your sin. Both are bad because we're listening to our heart and we're not listening to God's word.

A condemning heart is selective in what it recalls from God's word. It is failing to bring to mind all of the truth that God's word teaches us, such as Romans 8, 1.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Condemning heart is not telling us that.

[21 : 27] It's telling us the opposite. If you are in Christ, you are no longer condemned. If you are in Christ, you are no longer under the wrath of God.

You are no longer dead in your sins and guilty before God. The devil may say otherwise and accuse you before God. Your heart may say otherwise and condemn you as well.

But the devil, your heart, they're wrong. Because there is only one who is the judge in the courtroom of heaven, and it's not your heart.

And the judge has wrapped his gavel, and he has declared not guilty. You are innocent. You are free to go.

God is greater than our hearts. God holds the final place of authority over our hearts as well. When our hearts condemn us, when we are overwhelmed by our sin, how natural is it for us to turn in on ourselves in guilt and shame?

[22 : 37] John here is saying, no, don't turn in on yourself. Turn towards God. Remember the truth that God's word teaches you. God is greater than your heart.

Your heart may condemn you, but God does not. He has forgiven us on account of Christ. We are blameless before God because Christ went to the cross for our sins.

So there is no record of wrongs that God keeps. There is no debt that is still to be paid. God is the final authority, so we listen to what He says and not what our hearts say.

God is greater than our hearts. And, 1 John says, God knows everything. So yes, God does see your sin.

He sees your sin, forgiveness, but He knows you as one who is forgiven before Him. He knows those who belong to Him, those that He has set apart for Himself, those that He has chosen for Himself.

[23 : 45] God sees the whole picture. He ordained the whole picture to come to pass. So God is not forgetful. God is not mistaken.

He doesn't see your sin, but then forget His forgiveness towards you, Christian. Your heart can have that tunnel vision.

Your heart can fail to remember all that is true, all that God has said in His Word. Your heart can be mistaken in its evaluation of you, and it is mistaken when it evaluates you on the basis of your sin, when it looks at your sin, and says, hmm, we have a problem here.

God is never mistaken. If you belong to Him, He always evaluates you on the basis of His Son and His perfect record of righteousness, and the blood that was shed, so that you would then have that record of righteousness before God.

Now, this is not a warrant to sin. This isn't to say that sin is not a big deal, but it's a reminder to us that we are forgiven in Christ.

[25 : 07] What did God say in His Word just back in 1 John 1 9? If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

So you have a restless heart, a condemning heart. Let's not be overwhelmed by our sin. Confess your sin and remember the promises of God.

Remember this leg of the three-legged stool. Now, don't forget the first leg.

don't forget the good need for us to have self-examination in our lives. John isn't crossing out everything that he had written earlier in his letter.

He's made it clear that fruit in our lives matters. 1 John 2 5 says, By this we may know that we are in Him. Whoever says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same way in which He walked.

[26 : 10] Our passage very much finishes with getting back to the theme of remember there's fruit that needs to be had. Our passage finishes by saying, Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God and God in Him.

You want evidence that you indeed are a Christian, you will be one who keeps his commandments. So God is not telling us you need to write off the rest of this letter, but He's bringing a good balance to us, a well balanced stool.

So do examine yourself. Do you live like a Christian? And when you see sin in your life, do you remember the promises of God as you fight your sin?

Or do you fall into despair because your heart condemns you? Look to God. Remember the promises of God because God is greater than our hearts.

That's the first answer to the first question. What do we do with a restless heart? Aren't we glad there's only two questions this morning and not seven? What do we do with a restless heart? we remember the promises of God as we fight against our sin?

[27 : 18] Now here's the second question. What do we do now that we have a heart that is at rest? What's next? My heart now is at rest.

I see no longer this condemning view of myself. I see now I am forgiven for Christ's sake. Now what? How then do I live?

this second question is answered in the remainder of our passage. Verse 21. 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.

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. So what do we do with a heart that is at rest? With a heart that has been reassured?

[28 : 24] We approach the throne of God with boldness. We come before God with confidence. The assurance that we have as we look less to ourselves and we look more to God, that assurance enables us to now come before God with confidence.

And it is this beautifully multi-layered confidence. We see that we have confidence to come into his presence. We have confidence that when we enter into his presence, we are accepted.

We're not denied access to him because we come with an advocate, 1 John 2 says, Jesus Christ the righteous. So we come into his presence with confidence.

We don't come thinking, will God receive me or not? God is not fickle. He doesn't change his mind. He doesn't say, you know what, right now you are accepted on the record of my son, but perhaps tomorrow when you enter my presence, it'll be a little different and you won't be accepted.

God never does that. God has forgiven you and now you are forgiven, forever forgiven in Christ. So we come into his presence with confidence.

[29 : 43] The guilty come before the judge with far less confidence. The guilty come before the judge fearful of what that verdict will be, fearful of the punishment that follows the verdict, but not so with those who are in Christ.

Our hearts have been reassured and they've been reminded that God is greater than our condemning hearts. God knows all things. He remembers our sins no more. He's forgiven us in Christ.

So that gives us confidence simply to enter into his presence. But then we have confidence that God hears us when we come into his presence.

And if you look at that passage, it doesn't say God hears us. It doesn't say it there. We could look elsewhere in Scripture but we could also see just by inference he hears us.

Why? Because what we ask we receive. This is Luke 11 really all over again. Just a good refresher on Luke 11 here in 1 John chapter 3.

[30 : 49] Back in Luke 11 just in the last few weeks we saw that our heavenly father doesn't give us a serpent instead of an egg. that he doesn't give us a serpent instead of a fish.

He doesn't give us a scorpion instead of an egg. We saw in Luke 11 that he gives good gifts to his children. That's what 1 John is teaching us as well.

In fact, 1 John 3 this passage finishes just like Luke 11. Look at that last verse. So God gives good gifts.

He gives his Holy Spirit. God perfectly answers our requests because he hears us when we enter into his presence.

He's listening. We have confidence to come into his presence. We have confidence he hears us when we make our requests. parents, how often would you say that your children are unwelcome in your presence?

[31 : 59] We immediately think, never. Okay, there's a few very specific instances where I say it's three in the morning, you're not welcome. But no, we would never reject our children when they come to us in a very loving way.

We don't reject our children. We would not turn our children away. But how often do we fail to listen because we are distracted by unnecessary things, preoccupied with other things that we think hold more value in that moment than the requests of our kids.

And so we do hand them that scorpion. We do hand them that serpent because we're not listening as they enter into our presence. God is not so.

God is not preoccupied. God is not distracted. God hears us. He welcomes us into his presence. He listens when we come in.

Then we can have confidence that we do receive what we ask. In fact, 1 John says that we receive whatever we ask.

[33 : 12] That sounds like a blank check. That sounds like I could get anything. Anything that I ask for, God will give. Before we get this kind of blank check thinking in our minds, we need to see what God says directly thereafter in the passage.

This very helpful caveat that keeps us grounded. Because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. So we will receive what we ask for because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.

And then John immediately spells out what that means to keep his commandments. Verse 23, 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.

So do you know Christ? Do you know him as your Lord and Savior? Do you confess Christ? Is he your only hope in life? Is he your only hope in death?

Because of his finished work upon the cross and his resurrection from the grave. Have you believed on him? And then those who believe on him, they live like it.

[34 : 25] Do you love your brothers? Do you love your sisters in Christ? And if so, we can fully expect our request to be answered. Because those who know Christ, and they live in a manner that demonstrates they know Christ, they will request the very things that God delights to give.

They come to him in humble, submissive obedience. They come asking not according to their will, but according to his. This is Luke 11.

Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done. Or perhaps we could think of Psalm 37 4. delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Why can the psalmist say that? Why can the psalmist say that the Lord will give us the desires of our heart? Because the desires of our heart will be aligned with God's very heart.

We will want what he loves to give. Or as 1 John 5:15 says, and this is the confidence that we have toward him.

[35 : 41] That if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the request that we have asked of him.

We receive what we ask for because we ask according to God's will. Those who know the Lord and live in obedience to the Lord, they can expect to receive from the Lord as they come to him with his requests.

Now we need to be sure that we understand this. God can't be manipulated. We can't twist his arm. We can't force his hand.

Don't think that your obedience will compel God to give you what you want. We might be tempted to think in our heart, okay, so God, if I obey you, then I can expect you to give me what I want.

That's not how it works. That's not true obedience. That is a sorry attempt to manipulate a God who cannot be manipulated. God desires obedience from the heart.

[36 : 54] Hosea 6:6 says, For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. obedience. Now, in Hosea 6:6, the people of Israel were doing the things that God had told them to do.

They were showing outward obedience. They were offering their sacrifices. They were bringing their burnt offerings. But their hearts were far from God.

They were just doing an outward show in the hopes that God would be okay with them. And God wanted nothing of their fake show of obedience.

So don't fool yourself and think that outward displays of obedience are true obedience. That's just a facade. God's arm can't be twisted.

And that's not true obedience. We can't fake our way into getting our way. God sees right through our motives. So we can manipulate people.

[37 : 59] They can't see our motives. They can't see the thoughts and intentions of our heart. But God can't be manipulated. So we don't keep his commandments and do what pleases him so that eventually we can get what we want.

A better way to think about it would be this. As we keep God's commandments, as we do what pleases him, our heart's desires are aligned more and more with God.

We will want what God delights to give. God will be to God and God in him.

Those who have this real, genuine fellowship with God, those who abide with God and he abides with them will want what accords with God's will. And so we will receive from God what we ask for.

It's not for our own benefit. It's for his glory and for the good of his people. So do you see what wonderful confidence that we have before God? We come confidently into his presence.

[39 : 07] We come confident that he hears us. We come confident that we will receive what we have asked. But we only come with that confidence when our hearts are at rest.

So what do we do when our hearts are restless? We remember the promises of God and his word as we take our sins seriously. We remember that God is greater than our heart and he knows everything.

And then what do we do once our heart is at rest? We enter into God's presence with confidence knowing that we will receive what we ask for. Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, help us to not take for granted that at this very moment your people are indeed gathered in your presence.

That we are coming before you with confidence. Confidence that you hear us. Confidence that you answer our requests. And confident that we are received because of Christ.

[40 : 18] We pray Lord that that would not be lost on us. The gravity of that would not be lost. And we pray Father that you would indeed give us that love for one another.

Give us hearts that yearn for you. We pray Lord that you would give us hearts that are at rest. Help us to remember what your word says.

Help us to live by what your word says. Help us to walk in obedience to what your word says. God bless us. We thank you Father that you have given us answers to these questions that keep us up at night.

That bring fear and uncertainty. Thank you that you have spoken to us and you've addressed them here in your word. What a gift that is to us Father. Help us then to cherish what you've said and to live by what you've said.

And to rejoice that because of Christ we are indeed welcomed into your presence. We pray all of these things in the magnificent name of your Son Jesus Christ.

[41 : 24] Amen.