

"Lord God, you have appointed me as a pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all."

1 JOHN 3

¹⁶This is how we have come to know love: Jesus laid down His life for us. And we also should lay down our lives for our brothers. ¹⁷Whoever has worldly wealth and sees his brother in need but closes his heart against him—how can God's love remain in him? ¹⁸Dear children, let us love not only with word or with our tongue, but also in action and truth. ¹⁹This is how we know that we are of the truth and how we will set our hearts at rest in His presence: ²⁰If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and He knows everything.

²¹Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God. ²²We also receive from Him whatever we ask, because we keep His commands and do what is pleasing in His sight. ²³This then is His command: that we believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and that we love one another just as He commanded us. ²⁴The one who keeps His commands remains in God and God in him. This is how we know that He remains in us: We know it from the Spirit, whom He has given to us.



There is a great deal of heart going around. People concerned for each other's health. People encouraging one another to help others. People with a passion for life and a desire to have meaning. People with big hearts.

Yet big hearts don't just love. Big hearts hurt. Big hearts grieve. Big hearts hate. Our hearts, the seat of our emotions, affect everything we do. We are led by our hearts and guided by them to some greater good. Big hearts aren't always right. When our emotions and feelings are wrong, we listen to ...

GOD'S WORD FOR THE OVER-SIZED HEART

1. How to grow the heart – the Son

As usual, John is skilled at showing us how to love. He is good at showing us how to do good works, without ever leaving the grace and mercy of God behind.

First, John begins with gospel. He paints the model picture of love, “*Jesus laid down His life for us*” (16). This is how we come to know love! Believers in Christ have something the unbelieving world does not—the key to knowing love. That is the Good Shepherd battling to the death for us, and by His death finishing our rescue and eternal good.

Then, based on that gospel, John launches into how to love. “*We also should lay down our lives for our brothers*” (17). He gives an example, that of “*worldly wealth*.” If I’m not moved by the weaknesses of my brother or sister, then I surely do not love anyone. John even says that is a good test whether we have love (19). From the fruits of love we learn that we have love.

Then verse 18, love “*not only with word or tongue, but also action and truth*.” Let the whole man love—let love involve the whole person—as Jesus says in Matt. 22:37. Or as Paul says, “*For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk, but in power*” (1 Cor. 4:20). To love a brother who is kind and pleasant in return—this is a trivial matter, the way the world also loves. Even the pagan, Cicero, says, “The crowd judges friendships by their usefulness.” Nor is it exactly Christian love to help and feed only the people who can give back. It’s certainly not how Christ loved. John doesn’t say, “Let us love those who are saintly, agreeable, and rich.” He says, “*Love comes from God*” (4:7). He says, “*We love, because He first loved us*” (4:19). We love, not because of usefulness and not because of praise. Whoever is learned should serve him who is not learned. Whoever is rich should serve him who is poor. Whoever is sensible should serve him who is foolish. Whoever has a big heart should serve him who has a fragile heart. Whoever has love should serve him whose heart is cold.

Think about God’s mercy. His mercy is real. He is unchanging. He loves without regret and He doesn’t tire easily of compassion. This is also how we should do good; with compassion, and not tire of it.

And with that, our hearts should swell. The gospel grows the heart! We know love and we show love, and our heart swells twice, three times, 10 times what it once was. If the whole Christian Church was constantly checking in on our love as John recommends, basing it on the gospel of Jesus Christ, what would the world be like?

2. How to silence the heart – not with more love

But now we have a problem. If I listen to what John says about showing love, I have a big problem. It's my heart. It's TOO big, it grows my conscience. And when I finally slow down from loving sincerely out of faith, suddenly it occurs to me what I did not do.

One day my heart and conscience will bear witness before God that I have not loved my brother enough, that I have not assisted the poor, that I have not given enough, that I have not succeeded, have been an adulterer, that I have stolen, that I have hurt feelings, and that I missed chances to encourage. The recollection of some long-forgotten sin may suddenly stir up inside me, and I may be seized with a terrible fright. God knows everything! How am I going to hide this guilt from Him?

Really the problem is not only that our hearts are too big, it's that our hearts are also misguided. Our feelings run amok and cannot be trusted. Our consciences are sometimes on point, and we can rise to the occasion and do good; at other times, our consciences aren't sharp enough, and we don't feel bad at all for the sin we committed. Sometimes, our hearts are overconfident; other times, we lose heart entirely. Sometimes, our heart takes note of our laziness and lovelessness and it condemns us. Other times, it agrees with the Gospel and it gives us confidence. Condemnation and confidence are complete opposites, and it just shows how our hearts fail.

Our hearts are not going to save us from our sins. Love cannot calm our heart. Even our attempts to love like Jesus Christ leave our hearts wanting more, because we will never be perfect like Jesus. A Christian may feel the accusation of his own heart, that is, his conscience, and when trying to quiet his heart, he may hear a voice telling him that he is damned, that he has no forgiveness of his sins and no grace, that he is not a child of God and cannot hope for eternal life.

We need something greater to set our hearts at rest, or our hearts will always be restless. Even though there are many ways we have offended even a brother or sister, there is relief. It is where we started. It is in the gospel.

3. How to live with yourself – the Spirit

To this, the beloved apostle John tells us, "*If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts*" (20). God is greater than our hearts.

Idleness blames you? Do not despair. Conscience makes us faint at heart and presents God as angry? Still, “*God is greater than our heart.*” For it is the sum and substance of the gospel that you should believe and hope. Lacking works does not mean you must lack faith.

Properly speaking, grace is never in man’s heart, but in God’s heart. First, a person must believe; after that we may feel. Feeling proceeds from faith, not faith from feeling. If a person’s faith proceeds from feeling, it is not genuine faith; for faith requires a divine promise which it lays hold of.

Our heart is indeed a judge, yet only a subordinate one. A higher Judge, namely, God, is above our heart. I can say to my troubled heart, “Be still, my heart! Keep silent, my conscience! I have appealed to a higher court and inquired of God, the supreme Judge, whether I am rid of my sins. From the higher court (which can always reverse the verdict of a lower court) I have a verdict that my sins are forgiven, for I cling to the Word of God.” Anyone who by the grace of God is enabled to believe this is really blessed.

The psalmist knew this, “*My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the Rock of my heart and my Portion forever*” (73:26).

At the point when nothing will be able to sustain us, we need this. When we really feel our sin in our hearts in anxiety and anguish, no creature will be able to lift our chins for us or comfort us. Only this great gift given to us when we first believed; only this Comforter alone, the Holy Spirit; can raise us to life in heart, soul, strength, and body—the very commandment we broke. He raises us to life in His Word and sacraments, because He has to speak to our hearts and hold up to them the precious payment, which Christ has made for all sins. Then the Spirit lives with us. Although we SHOULD consider ourselves unworthy, yet the Spirit thrusts into our hands the grace of God. He has a Word for our over-sized hearts; He is an over-sized God. Jesus Christ’s cross of love overcame our sin. Did our sin increase? So did God’s grace. He offers us an over-sized gospel. Amen.

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.