

One Greater than Our Hearts

The events of life tend to wield a sinister power to rattle us in our assurance before God. We tend to sin, disappointing ourselves and others. We tend to measure our self-worth according to the standards of the age. We tend to miss our own goals and fall short of our best intentions. Cumulatively, these things can shake our sense of the standing we have been promised in the presence of our heavenly Father. Our hearts (mind, emotions, conscience, *etc.*) are in tact for good reason. We need inner-mechanisms that bother us when we fail to live up to what God has called us to be. But, while our hearts can speak useful words to us about our failings and our guilt, we find our rest in the fact that only God can speak the final word.

The last surviving Apostle had seen many of his "little ones" battered by doubts through the early decades of the church. John addressed their fears with the following words:

... ¹⁹This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence ²⁰whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. – 1 John 3:19, 20

God's Spirit can speak to our hearts and bring us under conviction for our sins. But, if the heart can be whispered to by the Holy Spirit, perhaps, it can also be whispered to by other entities, spirits that John tells his readers in the following chapter must be tested. The basis for testing such impressions, which by their nature are subjective, is to appeal to objective truth as it has already been made known. What does God's Word say to this heart impression that is under scrutiny? When the Holy Spirit convicts a believer of sin, a remedy is already in place:

... "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us ... But if anyone does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins ..." – 1 John 1:9; 2:1, 2

Even after we have died to sin, the practice of sin resurfaces. When we acknowledge that we sin, Jesus persists in assuring us, "I died for that one too." Satan is a persistent accuser, but Jesus is an even more persistent and far more powerful Advocate. Satan brings up the old baggage. He exploits our failings. He takes advantage of our normal questions about faith. It might also be argued that we give him a lot of ammunition. Our obedience is imperfect. Our love fluctuates between hot and cold. Our pursuits do not always pertain to the "kingdom of God and its righteousness." Jesus once commanded of us, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48) but we are never perfect.

All this gives the accuser occasion to torment the children of God all the more:

"You're a fraud. You fall more than you stand. You confess your sins as you think of them, but if you'd give ten more minutes of sober scrutiny to your life, you'd find stockpiles of unaddressed sin. How can you be sure that you are even saved?"

Our hearts hear such accusations, but what would happen were we to present those same accusations to the Advocate, that One "who speaks to the Father in our defense"? Jesus would remind us:

"Child, the point of that black and white call to spiritual perfection seems to have worked, for I wanted you to see your imperfection as well as your helplessness to do anything about it. Remember, I died for your imperfections so that you might be cloaked in My perfection. Be perfect, indeed, but understand clearly that if you are ever to be perfect, I will have to take you there. I *WILL* take you there for I have already died for your sins. The '*father of lies*' will play with your head. Don't let his accusations deafen you to My promises."

The accusations of the heart are not to be ignored, but tested. F. F. Bruce put it well:

"When God, who is greater than our conscience and pronounces a more authoritative verdict, one based on perfect knowledge of us and of all the relevant circumstances, assures us of the forgiveness of our sins for Christ's sake, we enjoy peace of conscience. The accusation of conscience must always be treated seriously; only when it is overruled by the pardoning edict of God can its voice be properly hushed."

The strongest faith in God is feeble. The deepest loyalty to God is erratic. The tenderest love for God is flawed. But, God knows everything. He knows the yearning of your spirit to be whole. He also sees the perfection that He has in mind for you and He will be faithful to bring it to completion.

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