

May 14, 2006
Easter 5

"God Is Greater Than Your Heart"

1 JOHN 3:18-24

Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. ¹⁹ This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence ²⁰ whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. ²¹ Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God ²² and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. ²³ And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. ²⁴ 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.

Mother's Day- what an opportunity to say, "I love you, Mom. Thanks for all that you have done for me." Phone calls, flowers, cards, gifts, and special meals will underscore the deep love and appreciation we have for our mothers.

Mother's Day is also a day of mixed emotions and feelings. One mother told me this past week with sadness in her voice that she would not be seeing her daughters this Mother's Day because of their busy schedule. It was obvious that she had not seen them for some time and she missed them very much.

Mother's Day is also a day when we have to suppress our feelings of not being the perfect kids to our moms or the perfect mothers to our children. Jesus is the only person on the face of this earth who honored and respected his mother perfectly. The rest of us have fallen far short of his standard and his glory.

Has your heart ever condemned you for the day that you upset your mother and made her cry? It happened years ago, but when flash backs come it seems like only yesterday. You didn't listen to her when she told you to stop fighting with a brother or sister, and she lost her temper. You didn't call her when you came home late during the teen years. Mothers also know what it is like to have their hearts condemn them because they know they have not always had the patience with the kids that the Lord requires.

When our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart. That's the message that we have here before us this morning from this letter that John wrote to Christians whom he called his dear children.

Your heart will condemn you

You cannot make it through this life as a Christian without having moments when your heart condemns you for something wrong in the past. You are extremely sensitive to how God wants you to hate sin and love what is good. You are born again. You are attached to Christ the Vine. You are spiritually alive. Listen to what John says to his beloved Christian

people. "Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue, but with actions and in truth."

It is easy to say to your mother this afternoon, "I love you" but we need to follow up our words with deeds. Complete the following sentences with me. "He is all talk, and no ... walk." "Do as I say, don't do ...as I do." You are a branch attached to Jesus the Vine. Because of that connection you are producing fruit in your lives. Galatians says that the fruit of the Spirit is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control." When you don't see that fruit coming forth the way the Lord wants it to grow your heart starts to condemn you.

I believe one of the hardest things to do is to love with actions that includes the truth of God's Word as John tells us "love with actions and truth." A mother told her daughter that it was not right for her to be living together with a man without marriage. The daughter quickly corrected her mother with the words, "Mother have you not read the Bible. Didn't Jesus say, "Judge not and you shall not be judged?" The mother was so taken back by her daughter's words that wondered if she had said the right thing.

Warning children about the dangers of sin and weakening of faith may be one of the hardest things a mother or father ever has to do as parents. How often haven't you agonized over the right time to tell someone the truth about heaven and hell, and Jesus being the only hope of salvation? When you fail to follow through with your convictions and beliefs, your heart begins to condemn you. It is not just the things we do wrong that condemn our hearts, it is the failure to follow through with our convictions in helping people, especially letting them know the truth of God's Word.

A man once confessed to me something he did wrong when he was twelve years old. A cousin from the city came to visit on the farm in Alabama for a couple of weeks. When the city cousin said goodbye, he could not find his new red pocketknife. This man had stolen it from his cousin and never told anyone. Now 40 years later he is wondering if he should call his cousin and confess to stealing the red pocketknife. Our hearts will condemn us. The closer you walk to the Lord, the more aware you become of sin.

I recently read the story of a boy who was walking down a dirt path near his house. He saw a toad hopping along, picked up a sharp stick, stuck it through the toad and then went on his way. When he came back he saw the toad was still alive, still alive and looking up at him, blinking its eyes in pain, almost crying out, "Why did you do this to me?" He could not sleep at night. All he could see were the eyes of the toad staring at him and condemning him. Have you ever hurt someone and saw pain in their eyes? Those eyes, those eyes, they haunt you and you cannot sleep at night. If your heart condemns you, and it will, how can you ever be sure that you are a true believer and your sins are forgiven. The answer lies in knowing that even though our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts.

God is greater than our hearts

John writes, "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." How can we have peace, when our hearts condemn us? How can we know that we belong to the truth? The word for condemn in the

original Greek has the thought of thoroughly knowing yourself. When you thoroughly know yourself, you see yourself for what you truly are. You know that you cannot stand before God in the final judgment and plead your case before him. Romans 3 says, "Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth will be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God." When I know myself and look at every aspect of my life honestly, all I can do is put my hand over my mouth and say, "I have nothing with which to defend myself. I am guilty before God." I have only one hope and that is to place my trust in God that he has already placed my sin on Jesus and took away my condemnation.

Oh what peace we find in these words this morning: "God is greater than your heart and my heart." He found nothing in us that could possibly make us worthy, so he provided salvation for us in Jesus. The Lord God knows everything. Psalm 139 says, "O Lord you searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar." Your life and mine is an open book before God. Everything ever done wrong, even the least bit of lack of love and kindness shown to our mothers when we were little children, everything was taken up and placed on Jesus. God is greater than your heart and my heart. He knows everything. He knew exactly the amount of suffering Jesus needed to finally cry out from the cross, "It is finished." So we can say with Paul, "There is now therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ." We can rejoice in the words of Jesus that tell us, "You are clean through the word I have spoke to you." God is greater than our hearts.

Think of how your life has now changed. The Lord can look at your life and mine and see every sin expunged from the record. In place of the life I have lived, I now I have the life Jesus lived for me. The perfect love he showed to his mother even as he was dying is now my perfect love. Because of Jesus my heart no longer condemns me. I have peace with God through Jesus.

Listen to John as he tells us what that means for us this morning. "Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything that we ask, because we obey his command and do what pleases him." Because your heart no longer condemns you, you wake up each day with this burden of shame and guilt removed from you. You are led by the love Jesus has for you to obey his commands and do what pleases him. You show kindness and compassion to your mother and father, brother and sister, simply because that is how Jesus wants you to live. He is the vine and you are the branches. Because you are a new person and clean through him, you don't have to hesitate to go to the Lord in prayer and ask for whatever you need. Hebrews 4 says, after pointing us to the perfect sacrifice of Jesus, "Let us approach the throne of grace that with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need."

God is greater than your heart. He wants to open your heart to believe in the plan he has to rescue you as John reminds us, "And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he has commanded." The night before he died Jesus washed the feet of his disciples and told them, "As I have loved you, love one another." The more I see the love that Jesus has for me, and the strength this love gives, the more he opens my heart to believe and the less my heart condemns me. I am able to rejoice in the perfect, clean, pure and holy life that he has won for me. As Jesus said in John 15, "I have told you this that my joy might be in you and that your joy might be

complete.”

John tells us, “Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them.” It is a privilege to bear fruit out of love for what Jesus has done for us. After saying he is the Vine and we are the branches, Jesus said, “This is my Father’s glory that you bear much fruit.” I never used to like the words of 1 Corinthians 13, the great chapter on love, because I thought that could never be me. “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps not record of wrongs. Love does not rejoice in evil but delights in the truth.” That could never be me, I once thought. Our hearts condemn us but God is greater than our hearts. He shows us how we are attached to Christ, clean through what he tells us, and how Jesus gives us the power and the capacity to love with patience and kindness.

And for further proof that God is greater than your heart, look at how he gives you the Holy Spirit. “And this is how we know that he lives in us; we know it by the Spirit that he gave us.” Romans 8 says: “The Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” When our heart condemns us, the Holy Spirit keeps bearing witness to us that we are children of God. This morning we are amazed again as we reflect on how much our mothers loved us. We are even more amazed at how much God loves us. Even when our hearts condemn us, he is greater than our hearts. Amen.