

SERIES: Authentic Christian Community/1 John, Wk. 3

By Pastor Bryan Clark

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It's really important to remind ourselves, that there are hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of needs in the world today. There's a tendency to think, if God has laid something on your heart and you're really passionate about it, all Christians should be equally passionate about your issue. And if you're not as passionate as I am about that issue, you don't love Jesus as much as I do. You have a lot of Christian celebrities kind of going down that path right now. But isn't it okay, that God calls some people to *this* issue, and other Christians to *this* issue, and our issues of compassion might not all be the same? I think the practical implications over the course of my day are, I'm going to cross paths with people who need something. They're hurting; they're in pain; they're desperate — whatever that might be. Maybe they need a word of kindness; maybe they need a little time; maybe they need a little love; maybe they need a little food; maybe they need a little shelter. Whatever need is in my pathway — if I have the resources to meet that need — I can't just slam the door and say, "I don't care!" If I really have the nature of Jesus within me, wouldn't my heart reflect His heart, wouldn't I have to respond to that?

Now, again, it's really important to understand John is not saying that he believes that his first readers, the recipients of the letter, maybe aren't believers; maybe they don't care about people. He's saying just the opposite. He's actually affirming that they do care! They do have compassion; they do have kindness; they do have love. But he's drawn a comparison with the false teachers — that they don't care. They're all talk; they're no action. They slam the door on people with need, and it reflects a completely different heart. He's trying to say one is true and one is not, and there's quite a dramatic difference.

In the spirit of [1 John 3] Verse 17, as John intended it, we would say that as a church we could say the same is true of us. There's always more we could do; there's always a need to do better. But we also have to understand that one of the reflections that God has changed our heart is, we genuinely care. There are thousands of people throughout the city, on any given week, that are out there in the trenches, involved in compassion ministries. And what John is saying is, "That reflects something has changed." Our system isn't defined by the crud that once defined us. We can't just turn our back. There's a sense of compassion; there's a sense of love; there's a sense of kindness; there's a sense in which we need to meet these needs — and it's something we can affirm together as a church.

Verse 18:

Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, [that's the false teachers; they're just big talkers] **but in deed and truth.** [Let's live out the truth of the Gospel.]
(*NASB, 1 John 3:18)

Verse 19:

We will know by this that we are of the truth, (Vs. 19a)

That's an evidence that something has happened, that somehow my tank has been changed. This crud is getting worked out of my system and I see life differently. I can't just walk by people in need and not care about that anymore. Something deep within me has changed. But there's a problem with that; there's kind of a flip side to this. He says,

...we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things. (vs. 19b-20)

It's a very interesting verse. What the verse is saying is: because something has changed, because we are not utterly selfish anymore, because our system is not defined by this crud anymore, that we actually view the world differently and when we see people in need, when we see people in pain, when we see people that are suffering, it bothers us. We feel the pain of that. There's a sense within us that that's not right; the world shouldn't be this way, and we shouldn't just walk by; we should do something about that! But what happens is: everyday we're faced with the reality that I wasn't as loving today as I should have been; I wasn't as compassionate as I should have been; I wasn't as kind as I should have been. I didn't really meet that need like I should have, and our heart starts to condemn us. When our system was filled with utter selfishness, that didn't bother us. Something has changed, and now it does bother us. And there's the potential that our heart condemns us, and it starts to say, "Man, if you loved Jesus, you'd be more kind; you'd be more compassionate; you'd be more loving; you wouldn't just walk away. So obviously you're messing up; I'm not sure if you even know Jesus!"

So our heart starts to beat us down and condemn us, and that's where God's playbook is to say, "But wait a minute!" God shows up and says, "Wait a minute; that's not right! The fact that this bothers you, the fact that you care, the fact that you have this kindness and compassion, you feel a sense that I'm not living up to what I should be living up to, is a reflection that something deep down has changed." And God is greater than your heart and God knows the truth. That's what the text is saying. Our heart is a reference to our emotions, and our emotions can get out of control, and they start condemning us and they start to say, "You know you're a lousy Christian; I'm not even sure you're saved really." And God comes along and says, "Whoa, whoa, your heart's getting out of control. Your emotions are doing your thinking for you." And God shows up and says, "Hey, I'm greater than your emotions, and I know what's true." The battle is whether or not we believe God tells the truth. Our emotions are saying one thing; God is saying something else. God is saying, "You have changed from the inside out. That's why you feel the struggle; that's why you feel the pain. And trust Me, what's going on inside of you is new, and it's fresh, and it's clean, and it's right, and ultimately, you are going to be something magnificent." God says, "Trust Me with that."

That's why Verse 21 says:

Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us... (Vs. 21a)

In other words, what he's saying is when our emotions start getting out of control, and start telling us all this stuff about how lousy we are as a Christian, God comes along and says, "Whoa, whoa, you're My child! What's happened in you is radical, it's spectacular. It's taken a while to get the crud out of the system, but I'm making you into something wonderful as My child." If I believe God tells the truth, then my heart no longer condemns me. I see this through the eyes of

God, and I get my emotions back under control, and actually now I feel a sense of safety in the presence of God, and that's what he says.

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 the things that are pleasing in His sight. (Vs. 21-22)

What he is saying is, our heart no longer condemns us, because we choose to believe that God tells the truth, and something inside is radically changed. We've gone from death to life. Therefore, I have confidence in the presence of God. It's really hard to be intimate with God, if you feel like every time you show up, He's going to smack you down! And sometimes our emotions start to feel that way. God says, "That's not Me; that's not how I feel about you! I want you to feel safe in My presence; I want you to feel a sense of confidence that I'm doing something radical within you. So when we're in the presence of God, we can ask for what we will and we will receive it, because our lives are starting to be defined by what's on the heart of God, what pleases God. Now this is not a verse that says if we go through the checklist, God will give us everything we want. It's not a consumer verse. What he is saying is, that as we begin to believe God tells the truth, and align our lives with what God says, we begin to fall more deeply in love with God, and our hearts start to resonate with the Spirit of God, with the essence of God. So what bothers God, bothers me. What God cares about is what I care about. Where I have kindness, God has kindness; where I have compassion, God has compassion. Suddenly, there's a sense of synergy; there's this alignment. What God cares about is what I care about, and I start to ask for the things that God cares about. I start to ask for what God is most concerned with. So my prayers are answered, because now I'm in alignment with God and everything's starting to change. That's what he's saying there.

Verse 23:

This is His commandment, [singular, notice that] that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us.

It's interesting that he takes the two commands and puts them into one. He says actually what I'm trying to say is, "If you believe and experience God's salvation, you will love." They're actually one commandment. If you have the presence of Christ — the seed of God — if you've gone from death to life, if you have the heart of God, it will manifest itself in love. It may take a while to get the crud out of the line, but something radical is changing from the inside out. Notice when he says **...believe in His Son Jesus Christ**, that's the full title there. This is where the false teachers were misleading them. **His Son** is the idea that Jesus is the eternal God, the eternal God that created everything that is, engaged in the life of the Trinity for all eternity: **His Son Jesus**, He became a man — Christ the promised Messiah, the Anointed One, the Savior of the world. If you believe in the person and work of Jesus, then you're radically changed from the inside out, and the outflow of that will be different. The crud will work its way out and you'll be defined by the love of God.

In Verse 24:

The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

That's a summary of what he's been talking about: that, at the end of the day, if you've experienced His Salvation, something has radically changed. You've gone from death to life; you're the very seed of God; you have the very Spirit of God; you have the very nature of Jesus; you have the very heart of God. This hasn't just been a mild change. The entire tank has been replaced; the tank full of corrosion that was sending crud into the line is gone. This is a brand new tank. It's been changed at the foundational, fundamental level. And because of that, it's going to bring new, fresh fuel, which is going to manifest itself over time in the changes to us on the outside, because we've been dramatically changed on the inside.

So what does all this have to do with community? I think this has everything to do with community. Sometimes people talk about the fact that it's safer to be real with unbelievers than it is within the church. Why is that? The reason is because unbelievers understand their tank is full of crud and everyone has crud in their tank. That's just the way it is, so, when you open up, they're not trying to fix anything. We all have crud and they just kind of accept that. But then you get exposed to the possibility that there is another way to live; there is a way to experience life at a higher level; it doesn't have to be that way. But herein is where we sometimes make our mistake. We don't understand the implications of what we just studied. We begin to lose sight of what part of this is God's part and what part of this is my part. You know, who's the mechanic here — God or me? And if we don't understand that, that something is radically changed at the fundamental level, we start trying to fix one another. We start picking at one another; we start trying to change one another. We've lost sight of the fact that God is responsible to change us.

Our assignment is to celebrate, is to cheerlead, is to believe this and embrace this in one another. That is, if you have trusted Christ as Savior, something radical inside you has changed, and it will manifest itself in what's on the outside. The crud is working its way out of the line. I have to believe that! I don't need to fix you; I don't need to pick at you. You know, we have these accountability partners and we have cards, and we have questions we ask, so every week we can remind ourselves that we're blowing it! We're losers! "How did you mess up this week?" "This is how I messed up." And everything focuses on the negative, and we're trying to manage each other, and we're trying to fix each other.

Let me ask you a question, "How many of you love to be fixed?" How many of you thrive on that? How many of you breathe life into your soul? How many of you like to be picked at every day? How many of you like to be reminded every day that you've blown it? This is what happens; none of us like that. And so what happens is, we start going underground. "I'm tired of you picking at me; I'm tired of you trying to fix me; I'm tired of you trying to change me. I'm tired of you reminding me every day, every way, that I've let you down. So I'm going to tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to take my junk and I'm going to go underground with it, and I'm going to pretend. I'm going to pretend that everything is fine; I'm going to pretend that I've got it all together, because, if I tell you what's really going on, you'll try to fix me. You'll pick at me and I've had enough of that." That's what happens when we forget what's God's part and what's our part.

Think about it this way: what do my kids need from me? Do they need me every day picking at them, trying to fix them, reminding them every day, every way, they've let me down? Nobody wants that; nobody thrives on that. What they need is for me to believe in them. What they need is for me to celebrate them. If I believe that they have trusted Christ as Savior, something radical and dramatic has happened on the inside, and God is doing a spectacular work. I have to believe that! And my job is to believe that, is to believe in them, is to celebrate them, is to cheerlead them and it's to remind them that, regardless of how they feel about themselves, seeing them through the eyes of God, I think they're magnificent. If they don't get that from me — their

earthly father — how are they possibly going to believe that that's true of their heavenly Father? But it isn't just the parenting model; it's the discipleship model.

You don't need somebody picking at you; you don't need somebody trying to fix you; you don't need somebody reminding you every day all the ways you've blown it. You need somebody that believes this theology is true. We're going to take one right out of God's play book. And if God can say, "Whoa, whoa, your emotions are out of control. I know you may feel that way today, and I know you're discouraged, but this isn't really true. God has radically changed you. He's changed you from the inside out. There's something really radical going on inside of you and these are the ways that I see it in your life every day. I want you to know I'm proud of you, and I see it, and God's alive and well in you, and He's going to make you into something unimaginable — according to Paul — something so unimaginable, '...no eyes have seen, no ears have heard the wonder of what you will become in Christ.'"

Just in case you're possibly a little bit discouraged, feeling like maybe this week you weren't the greatest Christian; maybe this is another week where you blew it — another week where you weren't as kind as you should have been; you weren't as loving as you could have been; you weren't as righteous as you should have been; you weren't as obedient as you should have been, and your emotions are starting to condemn you, saying, "You know you're such a loser; I'm not even sure you're a Christian; what a hypocrite sitting here worshiping God" — this is what happens when our emotions start to get out of control. I want to remind you, that's not true! **If you have trusted Jesus as Savior, what has happened in you is radical. You have been dramatically changed from the inside out.** You have the seed of God; you have the Spirit of God; **you're in Him and He is in you.** You have everything you need to make it to the finish line. Even though your emotions today may be condemning you, **God is in the process of making you into a masterpiece of His grace** and, just in case nobody told you this week, I want to tell you, "If you have trusted Jesus as Savior, I think you are magnificent —because you are!! (Applause)

Our Father we are thankful that You tell the truth. You just do, Lord. This isn't some sort of crazy pep talk. This isn't like positive thinking. You said this is true. And You said that when our hearts condemn us, that You say that's not true, that what is happening on the inside is dramatic, and what's happening on the inside will manifest itself on the outside, as we work the crud through our system. Lord, we're thankful this is true. Lord, just give us the faith to believe, Lord, that we would understand, that in the opinion of the only One that ultimately matters, as our heavenly Daddy, You say we're magnificent. Lord, for that we're thankful. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

You know, John, the writer of our epistle, was also present with Jesus in the upper room, when Jesus washed the disciples' feet, including John's feet. Jesus said, *a new commandment I give to you, that you love as I have loved you.* He even went so far as to say, *by this, the world will know that you are my disciples.* In other words, to love as Jesus loved, would require new birth. It would require a change from the inside out. I find myself wondering as a pastor, how our churches might change, if we spent more time celebrating one another, and less time trying to fix one another. I mean, if we actually believed what John is saying is true, that the people around me at church have become new creations in Christ, I'm guessing we'd have less pretending, we'd have less mask-wearing and we'd have more authenticity and true community. So I'm encouraging you to try that this week, when you're around people that you know have trusted

Christ as Savior, to believe what John is saying, not only for yourself, but also for the people around you. **This week, celebrate the believers in your life.**