

Living in Love

(1 John 4:13-16)

What is True & What to Do:

God's love in His people gives evidence of His Spirit's presence, so be assured that if you confess the Son as your personal Lord and Savior and have come to know the love of God, you have the Spirit of God indwelling inside you. Knowing the truth, do not doubt, friend, rightly believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God!

Background:

Our study of John's letter thus far has examined several tests by which a person who has become a child of God may know that he or she is authentically a member of God's household. Part of that confession is properly knowing God as Father, Son, and Spirit (in Trinity). John previously concluded (v. 12) that if we love one another, two things follow: (1) God remains in us, and (2) God's love is perfected in us by God's Spirit.

Now, John begins to elaborate on these points. First, God's indwelling of the believer is discussed in greater detail (v.13–16, our passage today). Second, the perfection of love is examined (v.17–21, next week's passage). That the Holy Spirit is the focus of today's passage is apparent from the threefold repetition of the concept: "we remain in Him and He in us" (v.13), "God remains in him and he in God" (v. 15), and "the one who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in Him" (v.16).¹

John, in our passage today, once again focuses us on how we can have the confidence that we know God. First, we know that we abide in God, and He is in us because of His Spirit (v.13). Second, we have the assurance that God has given us His Spirit as a Helper because we have come to believe in Christ and selflessly love other believers.

"The believer's experience of divine love is really an experience of the work of the Triune God. We see the Spirit in verse 13, the Son in verses 14–15, and the Father in verses 14–16. God sent His Son to die for us. He sent His Spirit to live in us. Both are gifts of grace. Both are evidence of His amazing love for us. And the love we now have for God and His children is a revelation of the Holy Spirit within us through our relationship with Jesus. Love is certified proof that God now resides in us, not in a pantheistic sense, but through His personal presence."²

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *The Epistles of John: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 118.

² Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in 1,2,3 John* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014), 1 Jn 4:11.

³ James Montgomery Boice, *The Epistles of John: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 117.

1.) The gift of always abiding with God's Spirit (v. 13)

- We have confidence that we are truly saved because God has given us His Spirit to indwell our lives. The presence of the Spirit indicates we are joined to Christ (we keep on "abiding" or "remaining" in Him). Our conduct toward others will match God's character, and our love for others will evidence God's love.
- "God is always first in spiritual things, and apart from his gracious activity by the Holy Spirit to open blind eyes to perceive the truth and move the rebellious human heart (will) to turn from sin to the Savior, no one would believe in Christ or love the brethren."³
- When does the Holy Spirit come to dwell in the believer? Answer: At the moment of our conversion (Tit. 3:5, 1Cor. 12:13, Jn. 14:17)!
- "At that moment we are baptized by the Holy Spirit into the Body of Christ, the Church universal (1 Corinthians 12:13). Notice here that the Holy Spirit is the agent of baptism, not the one into whom we are immersed. There is one baptism of the Holy Spirit, but there are many fillings of the Holy Spirit. This is the clear teaching of the book of Acts as well as the Pauline epistles."⁴ After Jesus' resurrection, believers could live in Him, that is, in God, because His Spirit could live in them.
- God's Spirit never leaves those who truly believe. See Jn. 3:36, 5:24, 6:39–40, 10:28–29, 14:16, 1 Jn.2:19, 1 Jn. 5:13 (belief, not works, Eph. 2:8–9), 1 Pet. 1:5, Eph. 1:6, 12–14, 4:30, Ro 5:2, 8:38–39, 11:29, James 4:5, 2 Tim. 2:11–13, Col. 3:3–4.

2.) God is at work spiritually in you if you profess sound doctrine concerning the Triune God (v. 14–16)

- Humanity is in rebellion against God; sin separates us from God.
- Jesus is fully God and fully Man; Spirit is God; Father is God
- The mission of Jesus is to be the "Savior of the World," and this is the Father's purpose in sending Jesus.
- You believe the love God has for you in sending Jesus (v.14, 16). God's motivation in the work of salvation is "the love God has for us" (v. 16). He wants none to perish (Jn. 3:16).

APPLICATION:

- What you believe about the Father, Son, and Spirit matters! Love comes from God and is expressed to us in Jesus. Believers should practice this love daily. It is not a hollow demand that Christians love God or one another. Do you know God like this?

⁴ David L. Allen, *1–3 John: Fellowship in God's Family*, ed. R. Kent Hughes, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 200.

JOHN IS CONCERNED THAT BELIEVERS HOLD CORRECT BELIEFS IN GOD AS FATHER, SON, AND SPIRIT. FIGHTING HERESY AND ERROR IN THE CHURCH, THE FIRST LETTER OF JOHN IS A CORRECTIVE TO FALSE DOCTRINE. THE FOLLOWING EXCERPT, PROFESSING “SOUND DOCTRINE” (THAT IS, THE RIGHT THINGS), COMES FROM THE EARLY FIRST-CENTURY CHURCH.

THE TRUE HUMANITY OF JESUS CHRIST⁵

Ignatius of Antioch is considered one of the earliest Christian writers after the New Testament period and lived through roughly half of the first century AD. Before being martyred, Ignatius wrote six different letters to various churches and one to Polycarp, one of which was his letter to the church in Smyrna. In the following selection from that letter (no. 1–4), Ignatius defends the belief that the Son of God came in the flesh and suffered *against those who wrongly taught that Jesus only appeared to be human.*

“I glorify God, also Jesus Christ, who has given you such wisdom. For I have observed that you are perfected in an immoveable faith, as if you were nailed to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, both in the flesh and in the spirit, and are established in love through the blood of Christ. [You are] fully persuaded with respect to our Lord, that he was truly of the seed of David according to the flesh and the Son of God according to the will and power of God; that he was truly born of a virgin, was baptized by John, in order that all righteousness might be fulfilled by him; and [that he] was truly, under Pontius Pilate and Herod the tetrarch, nailed [to the cross] for us in his flesh. We are of this fruit by his divinely blessed passion, that he might set up a standard for all ages through his resurrection to all his holy and faithful [followers], whether among Jews or Gentiles, in the one body of his Church.

Now, he suffered all these things for our sakes, that we might be saved. And he suffered truly, even as he raised himself, not, as certain unbelievers maintain, that he only seemed to suffer, as they themselves only seem to be [Christians]. And as they believe, so shall it happen unto them, when they shall be divested of their bodies, and be mere evil spirits.

For I know that after his resurrection, he was still possessed of flesh, and I believe that he is so now. When, for instance, he came to those who were with Peter, he said to them, “Lay hold, handle me, and see that I am not an incorporeal spirit.” And immediately, they touched him, and believed, being convinced both by his flesh and spirit. For this cause, also they despised death and were found its conquerors. And after his resurrection, he did eat and drink with them, as being possessed of flesh, although spiritually he was united to the Father.

I give you these instructions, beloved, assured that you also hold the same opinions [as I do]. But I guard you beforehand from those beasts in the shape of men, whom you must not only not receive, but, if it be possible, not even meet with; only you must pray to God for them, if by any means they may be brought to repentance, which, however, will be very difficult. Yet Jesus Christ, who is our true life, has the power of [effecting] this. But if these things were done by our Lord only in appearance, then am I also only in appearance bound? And why have I also surrendered myself to death, to fire, to the sword, to the wild beasts? But, [in fact,] he who is near to the sword is near to God; he that is among the wild beasts is in company with God, provided only he be so in the name of Jesus Christ. I undergo all these things that I may suffer together with him, he who became a perfect man inwardly strengthening me.”

NOTES:

⁵ Bell, James Stuart, ed. *Ancient Faith Study Bible*. Nashville, TN: Holman Bibles, 2019.