



**1 John 3:24**  
**Abiding in the Spirit**

As we have been reading through 1 John together over these past months we have noticed that John is very interested in helping us see there are two types of people in this world – those that have been saved from sin by Christ, and those whose continue to live a life that is centered on themselves instead of God, even if they fancy themselves to be spiritual people.

And John has been using what some people today might consider harsh, divisive language in the process – he says if you call yourself a Christian and yet there’s no evidence of certain things in your life then you’re a “liar” and God is not in you. He’s not being mean, or prejudicial, or bigoted, he’s like a doctor giving us a terminal diagnosis – he’s telling us the truth, even if it hurts.

So, what is this evidence we should be looking for? What is the proof that we really are what we claim to be in Christ? So far John has mentioned two things, two ways that we can know we are Christians. The first is obedience to God, a desire to keep His commandments. Listen to

**1 John 2:3** Now by this we **know** that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.

Of course, we’re not perfect, we don’t do it every time, but the question is: what do we practice – what are we trying to get better at? Am I constantly thinking about how I can get my way in life, or how I can please Him?

The second proof that God has changed us is that we demonstrate, not just feel, a love for other people, other Christians specifically – we do things that will be helpful to them, even when it costs us time or money or effort.

**1 John 3:14** “We **know** that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren.”

And now this morning he adds a third proof – a third way for us to know we are saved and it’s a big one, so we’re going to be slowing things down a bit in our study of 1 John so we can consider all the implications of what we find in this verse and the beginning of Chapter Four:

**1 John 3:24** Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we **know** that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us

John’s driving home the same point we’ve heard him make over and over – obedience is important – but look at what he’s saying about why: it’s because God abides in us, and we

abide in Him, “**And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.**”

Did you hear what the Bible just said? Because it’s a big deal - it said God’s Spirit lives in you, Christian.

What does that mean? What does it mean for the Spirit of God to abide in me?

Well, let’s clear one thing up right away, so we avoid heresy: it doesn’t mean we are God, or that we become God. You can put a diamond in a paper cup and it doesn’t make the cup a diamond. Having God in you doesn’t make you Him.

A few weeks ago we talked about the fact that all human beings have value because all of us are made in the image of God – it doesn’t matter what your race, or ethnicity, or sex, or level of ability or inability is, it doesn’t even matter what your religion or lack of religion is – all human beings, simply because they are alive have value. But, they aren’t all headed for the same eternal destination. They can’t all call God their Father; they haven’t all found forgiveness from the Son of God; they don’t all have the Spirit of God abiding in them.

But, if you are a Christian, you do. If you are a Christian, you can say, along with the Apostle Paul:

**Gal 2:20** I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Think about that – Paul’s saying the same thing as John – God lives in me. “**I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.**”

It’s not easy to understand, in fact it really bends your mind to consider it, but it’s true – somehow, someday, if you are a Christian, God has sent His Spirit to live in you. You interact with God in a way no one was able to do for thousands of years until Christ came, and in a way that no one without Christ can do today.

You find references to the Holy Spirit from the first to the last pages of the Bible. He’s there in Genesis at the creation of the world. Genesis 1:2 says, “the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (Gen 1:2). And He has been at work ever since, empowering people, purifying people, and revealing God and His will to people.

But the way He has done that has changed dramatically as God’s plan of salvation unfolded. Today, this side of the cross, it is a fact that God dwells, universally, and permanently in all Christians. You might not understand it, you might not sense it, but there is no doubt about it – if you are saved, (1 John 3:24) “**we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.**”

It hasn't always been that way. Before Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross God had a different relationship with humanity. God is holy, but the people were unholy, stained by sin – they were looking forward to the forgiveness and cleansing we find in Jesus, but He hadn't come yet, so God's relationship with people, even His chosen people was different, more distant because their sin prohibited close fellowship.

There are times in the Old Testament when we read about God's Spirit coming upon or being in someone, but it was rare, and it was typically for a particular moment of service or accomplishing a specific task – like when the Spirit was given to Bezalel, the craftsman who led the construction of the Tabernacle.

Or the Holy Spirit sometimes enabled people to fulfill an important office – like when the Spirit came upon the Old Testament prophets to speak or upon King David to rule the nation. But it was never permanent or common. God is holy and if the man being used by God was persistent or especially flagrant in his sin, God's Spirit would actually depart.

One of the most haunting verses in the Bible for me is found in the story of Samson, that man who had such great physical strength given to him by God, but who had such a weakness for women that his lusts led him astray. After he famously confessed to Delilah that God was the source of his strength and his long hair was actually a sign of that relationship, she betrayed him.

**Judges 16:19** Then she lulled him to sleep on her knees, and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him. **20** And she said, "The Philistines *are* upon you, Samson!" So he awoke from his sleep, and said, "I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free!" But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him.

He had been used mightily by God up to this point, his name was known throughout the land, he was famous for what he had done – what God had given him the ability to do, but he never really, truly, appreciated the fact that God was the one enabling him to succeed and so he allowed himself to make stupid choices, and finally God said, that's it, My name will no longer be associated with yours and God dumped him like a sack of potatoes.

Fortunately, if you read the rest of the story, you know there's something of a reconciliation in the end, but imagine the shock Samson felt when he went to go flex his strength, the supernatural strength that had always been there, and it was gone – the LORD had departed – *and he didn't even know*. He was that numb spiritually and it suddenly showed physically.

But Samson wasn't the first, or the last, man used mightily by God who made stupid, sinful choices about a woman who wasn't his wife. Think of David's famous sin with Bathsheba. Here was another man God's Spirit had come upon, but after he blew it, he knew he was in danger of losing that special relationship and he begged God not to go.

Turn with me to Psalm 51 and look at what David has to say after he finally comes to his senses:

**Ps 51:1** Have mercy upon me, O God,  
According to Your lovingkindness;  
According to the multitude of Your tender mercies,  
Blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
And cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I acknowledge my transgressions,  
And my sin *is* always before me.

4 Against You, You only, have I sinned,  
And done *this* evil in Your sight—  
That You may be found just when You speak,  
*And* blameless when You judge.

5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,  
And in sin my mother conceived me.

6 Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts,  
And in the hidden *part* You will make me to know wisdom.

7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

8 Make me hear joy and gladness,  
*That* the bones You have broken may rejoice.

9 Hide Your face from my sins,  
And blot out all my iniquities.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

11 Do not cast me away from Your presence,  
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,  
And uphold me *by* Your generous Spirit.

13 *Then* I will teach transgressors Your ways,  
And sinners shall be converted to You.

14 Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,  
The God of my salvation,  
*And* my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.

15 O Lord, open my lips,  
And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.

16 For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give *it*;  
You do not delight in burnt offering.

17 The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit,  
A broken and a contrite heart—  
These, O God, You will not despise.

18 Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion;  
Build the walls of Jerusalem.

19 Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness,  
With burnt offering and whole burnt offering;  
Then they shall offer bulls on Your altar.

David knew he had blown it, so he owns it. He confesses his sin, and he begs God here in vs. 11, “Don’t take your Holy Spirit from me, don’t leave me, don’t depart from me.” David knew the special presence of God in his life and he knew that was tenuous, it wasn’t guaranteed, God could depart at any moment and leave him alone again and that prospect terrified David.

It’s too bad it didn’t terrify him before he took action on his lustful desire for Bathsheba, and it’s too bad it didn’t scare him enough before he took action to cause her husband to die on the battlefield, but sin is like that, isn’t it? We keep going a little farther and little farther into it bit by bit until we finally wake up for just a brief moment and realize what we’re doing and who we’ve become.

In our early days we never would have thought we would do this or that kind of thing and yet now we find ourselves chest deep in a pit of sin – those words really came out of my mouth, or that really just happened, I really just did that. Well, David had that moment of clarity – in his case it was brought on by the rebuke of a prophet, and it sobered him up fast. Ultimately he wound up praying, and then, notice PUBLISHING his lament. Begging God, PLEASE, don’t take your Holy Spirit from me.

Because, He could. God could, take His Spirit from David. He had done it with David’s predecessor Saul. Saul was the first king of Israel, and since God loved His people, He wanted to bless their king, but Saul made dumb, self-centered choices that defied what God had instructed on multiple occasions and so eventually, “[the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul](#)” (1 Sam 16:14) and God raised up David to be king instead. So now, when David knows he’s blown it too, he confesses his sin and cries out to God for mercy “take not your Holy Spirit from me!”

Many years later Keith Green wrote a famous worship song based on David’s experience and the words of Psalm 51. Perhaps some of you have sung it? It’s titled “Create In Me A Clean Heart,” and it goes like this:

Create in me a clean heart, O God.  
And renew a right spirit within me.  
Cast me not away from thy presence, O Lord.  
And take not thy Holy Spirit from me.  
Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.

And renew a right spirit within me.

It's full of sincerity and a desire for restoration, I bet David would have loved it, but it's actually not a song for Christians to sing.

Now, how can that be, if it's based on Scripture? Well, David knew God could take His Holy Spirit away, he knew his relationship with God was fragile because of his own sin. But now, this side of the cross, all of that has changed. David's Psalm is useful for us because it shows us a way to pray to God, a way to confess our sins, to be honest with the Almighty, but there's also a massive difference between what David prayed and what Christians today should pray – remember what we've read in 1 John:

**1 John 3:24** Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He **abides** in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us

Today, for Christians, God's Spirit isn't just with us, or upon us, or even in us temporarily, but He *abides* in us, He lives in us, *permanently*. It's like we've gone from a dating relationship to a marriage. We don't just see each other occasionally, we live together now. That doesn't mean you can go about sinning whenever and however you want because God's not going to leave, anymore than being married means you can stop being kind to your spouse. In a good marriage you're going to keep pursuing each other, loving each other, growing closer toward each other. It's the same way in our relationship with God. He's not going to go away, but that doesn't mean we should neglect Him.

But, how did we get here? When and how did this big change occur between what Samson and David experienced and what we experience today with God permanently living in us? Well, promises of this new kind of relationship are found in the Old Testament prophets, they spoke of a day when God would pour out His Spirit on all of His people.

And at the Last Supper, on the night before He was killed, Jesus promised the disciples that day was about to come. He was going to the Father but He would not leave them alone as orphans in this world, He would send the Holy Spirit and the Spirit would go from being with them, to being in them. And the Spirit would lead them and equip them and empower them and comfort them as they adjusted to life here on earth without Jesus at their side. And Jesus said this was actually a BETTER arrangement.

So, Christian, think about that – let it really go down deep into your heart, mind and soul – Jesus said it was actually BETTER for us to have the indwelling of His Holy Spirit than for Him to be here personally. So be careful with your thinking and wishing that you could just go back in time and be there with Jesus. He says what you have now is BETTER.

In the book of Acts, Luke tells us how Jesus' promise unfolded.

**Acts 2:1** When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. **2** And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. **3** Then there appeared

to them divided tongues, as of fire, and *one* sat upon each of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

And people in the area who were not Christians didn't know what to make of it – some said they were drunk and acting crazy. The Bible says the onlookers were “amazed and perplexed” and asked one another “What does this mean?”

God did something to these people, something unusual, but something real – this isn't a story, there aren't any droids or unicorns or people playing Quidditch in Jerusalem. This was a real event in real human history. And it happened for a reason – to prove that God was doing something new – that He was coming to dwell among all those who have been washed in the blood of Christ.

So Peter got up and told the crowds “this is what God said would happen – it's proof that Jesus was real and that He was right. God has accepted His death as the atonement for our sins and now He has sent us the Holy Spirit and this is proof.” And that day about 3000 people were saved.

So, what should all of that mean for us? What difference does it make if the Holy Spirit lives in us? Well, turn with me to the book of Ephesians where we will see one difference it makes. We jump in just as Paul is telling his readers what and why he prays for them:

**Eph 3:14** For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height— 19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

“Filled with all the fullness of God.” Does that describe your life? Does it describe mine? I don't think so. But it's supposed to be a work in progress, right? God wants to make Himself known to you in greater and greater measure. No matter what you have experienced thus far there is more for you to know, appreciate, and consider – and that's true for the youngest as well as the oldest Christians in the room.

What about “being rooted and grounded in love”? What about comprehending “the love of Christ which passes knowledge”? These are the things that can happen in us as God dwells in our heart.

And there's one last very practical thing here that I want to close with: according to Paul if the Spirit is dwelling in you, living in you, permanently there, you should find a source of spiritual strength welling up within you. You should be “strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man.”



This is an important reminder for us individually and as a church. Individually, we need to know that God doesn't just tell us what to do, He also promises to give us the strength to be able to do it. That doesn't mean it's always going to be easy, but He doesn't go around giving us all kinds of commands we can't fulfill – He wants to be our strength to obey His commands.

And that's important for us to remember as a church too, because a church is just a collection of individuals. And we individuals need to remember that this is His church and He's the One who is going to build it, not by hype, or clever marketing and media, or slick programs, but by His Spirit who dwells in each of us enabling us to serve and to call others to Christ.

There are too many churches out there that have fallen into the trap of thinking it's up to them to build the church on their own. So they organize. They pay professional musicians to perform in the worship team and lead the praise of God's people like it's just another session or gig. Or they hire a media director to make sure they're really leveraging their social media and they're putting together the coolest video announcements you've ever seen.

Friends, we don't need all that. Let's keep things simple and pure. If we have a great website, that's cool, fine. If we wind up recording our worship and publishing it, great. But let's never forget that God cares far more about what's going on in our souls than what's coming out of our speakers.

I don't want anyone to be burned out or bummed out by serving here in the church. I have no problem with letting a ministry fall apart if you're holding it together with your own strength. That's not what ministry should be like. We're not looking for volunteers or ministry leaders that feel guilted into serving. We're looking for people that you can't keep back from serving because they're so caught up in what God is doing and has done that they want to be a part of what ever happens next.

So if you're worn out and you're not ministering out the overflow of the Holy Spirit, if you're not serving with His strength in response to what He's doing in your life, I'd rather see you step down for a season and repair that connection. For as much as I appreciate your willingness to grind it out and endure, it's better for you and the people you're serving if you do it from a place of spiritual strength that comes from resting on the power of the Holy Spirit in your life.

We'll take this topic up again next week and dig a little deeper into what it means for the Spirit of God to abide in us, but this week I want us all to know and wonder at the fact that He does. We abide in Him, and He abides us, **“And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.”**

Let's pray.