

November 5, 2017  
Sunday Evening Service  
Series: 1 John  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
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*To Ponder . . .*

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from 1 John 4:13-21.

1. How do we know God is abiding in us?
2. Is it possible for us to get even a glimpse of what the apostles saw in Jesus Christ?
3. What is entailed in confessing that Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior of the world?
4. What is the result of having come to know and believe the love that God has for us?
5. What does brother love look like?

### **GOD'S SPIRIT PERFECTS LOVE**

#### **1 John 4:13-21**

To conclude that love is a dominant theme in this letter from Pastor John is to make a bit of an understatement. The word "love" shows up twenty-six times. Through John, God told us to stop loving the world because love for the world system, the world's way of thought, way of acting, indicates we have no love for God (1 John 2:15).

We learned that love comes from God (1 John 3:1) because God is love (1 John 4:8). God doesn't love us because we love Him, but because He chose to love us first (1 John 4:10). God's desire is not

only to show His love for us but to be in the process of completing that love in us. God completes love in us through the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit. And when love is being completed, we cannot help but demonstrate it.

### **We Experience God Abiding in Us (vv.13-16).**

We know the Holy Spirit abides in us. John assured fellow believers, *By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit (v.13)*. The very important teaching in this statement is that God abides in us. This is another one of those astonishing realities about God that we cannot fully comprehend. How can the Creator, Sustainer, and Judge of eternity live in us? This truth reminds me of the similar question Nicodemus the teacher of Israel asked Jesus, "Can a man enter again into his mother's womb and be born?"

To make things even more confusing, John had just written, "*No one has ever seen God . . . God abides in us.*" (4:12). How does God abide in us? God abides in us through the person of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised, "*If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him*" (John 14:23). In perfect conjunction with Jesus' promise, we read the following New Testament explanations of this ministry of the Holy Spirit:

*You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him (Romans 8:9).*

*The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God (Romans 8:16).*

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16).*

*Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own (1 Corinthians 6:19).*

God is literally dwelling in His people individually through the Holy Spirit. Because that is true, there must be a mutual abiding. Surely the Holy Spirit does not come and go from us! Indeed, it is also true that while God the Holy Spirit abides in us, we are abiding

in God. We are knowing that we are abiding in relationship with God because He is abiding in us. This was Jesus' teaching about the vine and the branches. He said, *I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing (John 15:5).*

Take a look at a grapevine or any fruit tree and you will see this principle illustrated. There is the vine that grows out of the root system planted in the ground. Attached to the vine are many different sized branches. They will all have an appearance similar to the texture and color of the vine. We will be able to discern the kind of vine or tree we are looking at by the leaves and fruit hanging on the branches. Under normal and natural circumstances if we find grapes on one branch of the vine, we will find grapes on all the branches. The branches must produce according to the nature and character of the vine to which it is attached.

So what does a Spirit-indwelt kind of life look like? John gave us some pretty good indications through other statements he put in this letter. For example, *Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him (4:15).* To confess is to say the same thing about Christ that God says. We know what God says because we can read His message, His only message to humanity, the Bible. Though it often looks very similar, there has to be a difference between our fruit and Mormon fruit (or any other false religion).

Furthermore, John said the Spirit-indwelt life looks like, *Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked (2:6).* When the Holy Spirit is abiding in us, our lifestyle is identified by Christ. Compared with "normal" people something about us says "Like Christ."

Third, John pointed out that *If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father (2:24).* What we heard from the beginning was the gospel, the Good News that Christ has purchased our pardon. A gospel-shaped life is easily identifiable.

Fourth, the Spirit-indwelt life will fight against sin. *No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God (3:9).*

Fifth, the Spirit indwelt person is sincerely concerned to know God's commands, desires, precepts, rules (or whatever you want to

call them) and to do them. *Whoever keeps his commandments abides in him, and he in them (3:24).*

And even in our chosen text for this sermon we find two more statements describing the Spirit-indwelt person. *If we love one another, God abides in us (4:12). Whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him (4:16b).*

Obviously, everyone is not abiding in God. Obviously, God is not abiding in everyone. It is interesting to read classic stories that were cast in middle nineteenth century Europe. Often there is abundant mention of church, God, prayer, sin, good works, and hope of heaven. Standing back to take a cursory look we discover that, in that period of history in Europe, the false gospel of salvation by works was prevalent. Sadly, a quick perusal of the religious scene in Europe today indicates that most people would consider themselves to be either agnostic or atheist. It seems frighteningly obvious that the American culture is marching lockstep down the same path to the spiritual abyss. There is plenty of talk about religion, God, heaven, prayer, and church. But as the old saying goes, "Everyone who's talking about heaven ain't going there." Only those who abide in God and God abides in them are truly God's children.

What makes you so sure you are one of those people in whom God abides? We know how and why God abides in us. The whole relationship with God begins when we know that Christ the Savior has come. John wrote, *And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world (v.14).*

The apostles had the unique privilege of living in the presence of the Savior of the world. Eleven men like John walked with Him, talked with Him, ate with Him, learned from Him daily. They watched, observed, scrutinized, analyzed Him. In the process, God the Father opened the spiritual eyes and hearts of the apostles to believe and receive the Savior. It is as Jesus instructed Peter when he confessed that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed God the Son, the Christ, the Savior of the world. *And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 16:17).*

That is the case for all of us who are abiding in Him. How astonishing to be able to walk in daily fellowship with the one and only Savior of the world! How amazing to know intimately this one

who described Himself as the unique Son who came to save. We love and fellowship with this Savior who described Himself thus: *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him (John 3:16-17).*

But by and large the world that God loves rejects the Savior. People do not agree with John and the apostles. They do not see and testify that God has sent the Savior. And so distinction is unavoidable. Jesus went on to describe the conflict between Himself and the world. *“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (John 3:18).* We believe. That makes us different.

We know that confession of Christ establishes the relationship with God who abides in us. *Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God (v.15).* We acknowledge what we have “heard from the beginning” (2:7,24; 3:11). We confess that Jesus of Nazareth was God in the flesh, lived perfectly, proved repeatedly that He is divine, died innocently, bore our sins, paid our penalty and rose from death in victory. We, unlike most, enjoy the mutual abiding between God and ourselves. We know that He abides in us and we in Him. And that is the most important thing you can know in life.

The result is that we know love because of our relationship with Christ. *So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him (v.16).* To know the Savior and, therefore, to know God abiding in us is to know love.

John teaches us that we have learned by experience, the love God has for us. It is true that we have learned about this love from the Bible through which God reveals Himself. But it is also true that our experience of fellowship with God has affirmed all the truths the Bible teaches. Have you really come to know this love through experience or are you still relying on Bible concepts and the testimony of others? When we have come to know this love, it has continuing effects in our lives. We firmly trust what we have come to know. Faith grasps the truth of God’s teaching. Faith is increased as

we experience God’s teaching. The result is: If we really believe it, we live it.

Again, the definition of love is God (v.16b). It is difficult to conclude anything more truthful or settled than the fact that “God is love.” If I wonder what love is like, I look at God. If I wonder if I am loving, I am measured by God. If I wonder how to love, I consider God. Mutual abiding in God (i.e. God abiding in me and I abiding in Him) is built on this foundation alone. If I am not loving, it is a good indication that I am not abiding in God. If God is abiding in me, I will love like God does. Obviously, as in all matters of sanctification, this is a growing, maturing process.

### **We Demonstrate Love Being Completed in Us (vv.17-21).**

What is “love perfected” as John speaks of it? It is love brought to completion. One thing we learn is that this completed love offers confidence. *By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world (v.17).*

This is John’s third reference to love being completed. The first reference is, *But whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him ( 2:5).* The second reference is, *No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us (4:12).* And here we learn that love is perfected in us *because as he is so also are we in this world.* While God is abiding in us, we are becoming more and more like Him. While we abide in God, walking in fellowship with Him, we are becoming more and more like Him. We are in a very real sense representing God in this world. In a very real sense, the people of the world should be able to look at us and have some idea of what God is like.

If we are living like that, demonstrating Christ-ind of love, we lose all fear of standing before Him at the judgement. Let me illustrate. A young wife and husband are separated because he has been called to active duty and shipped to the Middle East for one year. During that time, the wife and husband communicate by letter, pictures, emails, texts, and when possible by Facetime. They thoroughly enjoy those minutes together and regularly tell each other

that they miss each other, love each other, and can't wait to be together. Finally the day comes when G.I. Joe will return to the States, released from active duty and reunited with his wife. Does she look forward to that day with fear and trepidation? Of course not. She longs for that day because she knows she loves her husband and she is also assured that he loves her.

John's argument flows from the fact that we will stand one day before the judgment seat of Christ. Paul wrote, *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil (2 Corinthians 5:10)*. Does that scare us? Are we afraid? Do we try not to think about it? But wait. Stop and consider how your communications with your beloved Savior have prepared you for that day. You don't feel like you are going to stand before a stranger, do you? We will stand before the One who loves us and gave Himself for us, the One who we love and have demonstrated to the world. Then how could we be afraid?

John taught that God's children should not be afraid of future judgment because completed love removes fear. *There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love (v.18)*. This is John's fourth reference to love completed. Christ's love completed in us casts out all fear. There is no room for fear and anxiety in our relationship with Christ. In fact, if we are abiding in Christ and He in us, we do not even need to fear fellow humans. Solomon concluded, *The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe (Proverbs 29:25)*.

But the application here is in our relationship with God. We begin the relationship fearing God greatly because we know we offend Him and we know He can destroy us for eternity. That fear is replaced by love for Him and deepest, awesome respect for Him who loves us.

John specifically pointed out that we fear punishment. Okay, because that is the case, the sinner ought to fear much! But when we trust Christ to save us, we realize that He took all of God's punishment for our sins. How can God punish us for what He punished Christ for? Even human laws do not allow for double jeopardy.

If you are looking toward meeting Christ and fearing punishment, something about your relationship with Him is terribly wrong! This is especially true in light of what John taught us previously in this letter. *See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are . . . (1 John 3:1a)*. *By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us (1 John 3:16)*. And our text, *So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. (4:16)*. Because God's love is perfected in us, we do not fear His punishment.

And because God's love is perfected in us, we demonstrate perfected love. We love like we do *because he first loved us (v.19)*. We do not love because we are by nature loving people. We are not. Nor do we love properly because we had wonderful parents who taught us how to love. We do not love because we have endured much abuse and choose to love others. Again, strong feelings, warm emotions, random acts of kindness are not the kind of love we learned from God.

We know real, God-kind of love by identifying God's love for us. Stop to remember the fact that we are His enemies. Though He is our Creator, we reject any of His intentions to govern us. We do not desire to please God at all. Our sins are an abomination to Him. We cannot even get to God to ask for forgiveness unless He opens the way. We know love because we know "For God loved the world so much. . ." God made a conscience decision to do the very best for us by providing the means to have our sins against Him forgiven at the infinite cost of His own sacrifice in our behalf. That is love.

God's love is not mindless, careless expressions of warm feelings that only provide tears in our eyes and waves of emotionalism. God's love is intentional, determined, and full of deeper compassion than we can imagine.

Then should not God's love impact how we love? Yes. *If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen (v.20)*. The rule is clear and rather blunt. If you say you love God but do not love your brother, you are a liar. Liars are never right with God.

Right relations with each other begin with right relations with God. When God is abiding in us, we can and will love each other.

Because God is abiding in us and we are abiding in Him, we make conscience decisions to do what is best for each other—even if it means that we have to sacrifice our own comfort, pleasure, plans, or desires. And a brief description of what that love looks like is how Paul described love. *Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (1Corinthians 13:4-7).*

If all else fails to convince us, we love because we must love. *And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother (v.21).* John's argument is that if we really have confessed Christ as our Savior, God the Holy Spirit indwells us, and because God is abiding in us, we will show His love to fellow Christians. But, if that is not enough to motivate us, God also leaves us with a command. If you really love God, you have to love your brother.

God has demonstrated His love in so many ways that we have no excuse not to know what it is like. The problem generally is not that we are ignorant of God's love. The problem almost always is self-love. I don't demonstrate God's love for brothers and sisters because my plans, purposes, desires, comfort, pleasure all get in the way and take first place. That is self-love. That is abiding in self. That is to crowd God out of abiding in us. That is idolatry. We need to spend some time with God and allow Him to show us what He sees about us from the inside where He is living.