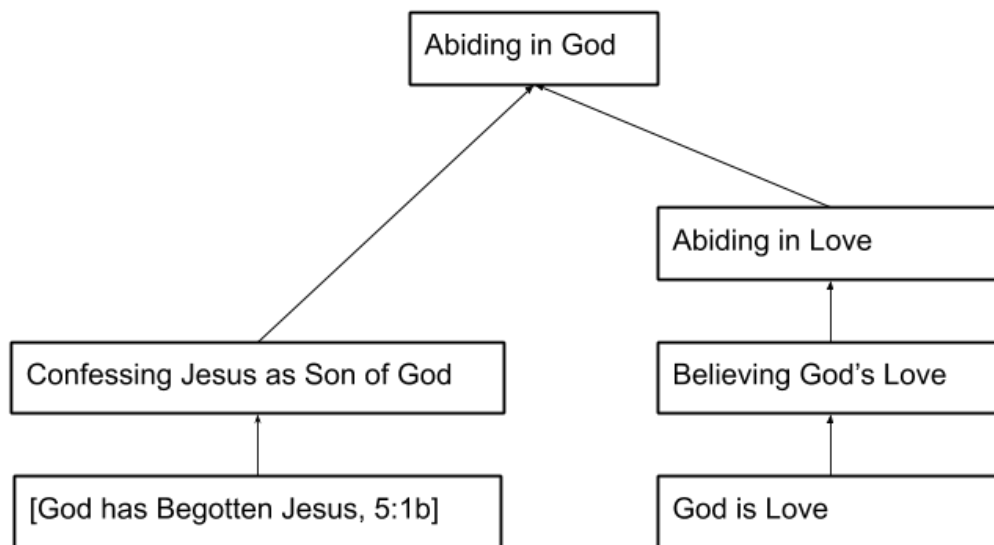


Sermon 41, The Link Between Confessing, Believing, and Abiding, 1 John 4:15-16

Proposition: Abiding in Christ is founded on God's nature as love and as Father, and it demands that we confess Jesus, believe God's love, and abide in love.



- I. The Foundational Truths, vv. 15a, 16b, 5:1b
 - A. God Has Begotten Jesus as His Son, vv. 15a, 5:1b
 - B. God Is Love, v. 16b
- II. The Christian's Response to Those Truths, vv. 15-16
 - A. Confessing Jesus, v. 15a
 1. Stating Truth
 2. Declaring Allegiance
 - B. Knowing/Believing God's Love, v. 16a
 - C. Abiding in Love, v. 16b
- III. The Outcome of Responding to Those Truths: Mutual Abiding, vv. 15b, 16c

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, the passage we just read can be confusing. John says that confessing leads to abiding. Then he says that we know and believe God's love,

that God is love, and that the outcome of that love is abiding. The idea of abiding is clearly central here. I had a hard time wrapping my mind around what John was saying, and so I diagrammed it with the diagram above. As I picture the two verses, we have the reality of mutual abiding. That reality is fed by two different theological truths, both of which John highlights here. The first truth is that God is love. Surely there is no greater truth than this, no more profound statement in the entire Bible, than the truth that God is love. And yet, that love comes to practical expression in the reality that God begot a Son who is exactly like Him. From the very substance of the Father comes His Beloved, His unique, His one and only Son, begotten by Him before all worlds, eternally and therefore freshly begotten at every moment and all moments. Brothers and sisters, from this reality comes the overwhelming reality of abiding in God, by way of our twin responses of confessing and believing. So let's talk about all of this in greater detail.

I. The Foundational Truths, vv. 15a, 16b, 5:1b

The Christian life is based on reality. It is not a free-floating religion of whatever you want to do and feel. Instead, it is based on how things really are. This passage talks about spiritual experience — the spiritual experiences of abiding in love and abiding in God. But it bases that experience on two major truths.

A. God Has Begotten Jesus as His Son, vv. 15a, 5:1b

The first of these is right in the beginning of our text: Jesus is the Son of God. Brothers and sisters, there are two components here. The first of them is the eternal generation of the Son. God the Father is always and eternally a Father; there is no time and never was a time when He was not begetting His Son. This truth is stated in Psalm 2: "You are my son; today I have begotten you." I always wondered what that was supposed to mean. How is that God could beget Jesus on a particular day? Doesn't that imply that at some point, God begot His Son and that He didn't have a Son before that — rather in the way that I begot my son in August of 2015 and didn't have a son before that? The answer is "no." God's generation is not at a single point of time, but at every point of time. It is eternal, which means it is ongoing at all times, and more. Thus, it is perfectly accurate for the Father to say "Today I have begotten you." He did beget His Son on the day that the Davidic king was crowned. That's because He begets His Son every day.

But as glorious as the eternal generation of the Son is, what's even more glorious is the reality that the eternal Son of God came to earth and lived as the man Jesus. The human being Jesus of Nazareth was begotten by God — not by Joseph. God the Father begot Jesus on the day that the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary and placed God's Son in her womb. So in confessing Jesus as God's Son, you are going beyond the confession of the Trinity. You are confessing the Incarnation too. God has a Son. That is much. But for that Son to be one of us? That is more. That is beyond magnificent. That is too great for us to comprehend. And yet it is the clear testimony of Scripture. Indeed, as we know, John tells us throughout this book that being begotten by God is not only true of Jesus, but of us too. Brothers and sisters, you've heard this many times. Does it still excite you? Does it still move you to know that God eternally begets

His Son, and that that Son has come to earth to join us and become not just an earth-dwelling mortal, but a fully human one too?

Now, we'll see the application of this in a moment. It's to confess Jesus. But first, let's look at the other foundational element in the spiritual experience of mutual abiding.

B. God Is Love, v. 16b

That element is the truth that God is love. This love, of course, is seen most clearly in God's eternal triunity. He not only loves; He is love. We have said before that theologians call this the simplicity of God. What they mean is that God does not hold properties, as we do; rather, He is His properties. We are kind; God is kindness. We are loving; God is love. If He merely did these things, He could stop doing them. He could change. But He does not merely do them; He is them, and He cannot change who He is, because He is immutable. For God to stop being love, He would have to stop being God. He would also have to stop begetting the Son and breathing out the Holy Spirit. He loves His Son and Spirit perfectly, eternally, for He is love. And He loved you even before you existed, for again, He is love.

God is not wrath, not hatred, not meanness. He does express wrath, but He does it out of love. He never hates; He's never mean. His nature is best seen at the cross and then at the manger. In both of these places, we see the Son, who is the perfect image of the Father. And we see the Father's love, and how His love has exhausted and swallowed up His wrath without undoing or harming His justice. Brothers and sisters, you and I need to worship this God!

II. The Christian's Response to Those Truths, vv. 15-16

We also need to abide in Him. How do we do that? We do it by engaging in three activities.

A. Confessing Jesus, v. 15a

The first of these is the most obvious, perhaps. We need to confess that Jesus is the Son of God. John mentions that in the beginning of v. 15.

1. Stating Truth

In the first place, to confess is to state the truth. The etymological root of the word is a Greek compound meaning "say together." To confess today means to speak, even to admit, something you know to be true. To confess Christ, then, is to say "Yes, Jesus is the Son of God. That is a true statement."

2. Declaring Allegiance

But the second element of confessing Christ is to declare your allegiance to Him. To say that Jesus is the Son of God is a true statement is to declare that you believe in Him, that you worship Him, and that you claim Him as your God.

You can see this by thinking about the difference between saying "Christians historically believed that a Jewish carpenter was the Son of God" and saying "Jesus was a Jewish carpenter, and He is the Son of God too." In one you're making a statement about the beliefs of some group without committing yourself one way or the other. But in the second statement, you're admitting your own beliefs. You're saying "I believe."

John tells us here that confessing Christ is an essential spiritual practice. If you want to abide in God, then you need to say that Jesus is God's Son. This is not a one-time admission, but an ongoing confession, admitting repeatedly, over and over over, that Jesus is exactly who He said He was, and that we ought to believe in and love Him and worship Him. This is a huge part of what worship is about. We gather to affirm to God and to one another that Jesus is the Son of God. We sing songs about it. We read the original eyewitness texts that tell us this. We listen to explanations of what we already know and believe. Why do we do these things and find value in them? Because we confess that Jesus is the Son of God. We don't gather to celebrate the Founding Fathers, or J.R.R. Tolkien, or Johann Sebastian Bach. We may like those historical figures and appreciate their work. But we don't confess them together. However much they may enhance human culture, they do not bring us to God. Jesus does. We confess Christ because we want to abide in God.

B. Knowing/Believing God's Love, v. 16a

But in addition to confessing Christ, we need to know and believe God's love. Is there a difference between knowing and believing in John's mind? I don't think he would draw a fundamental distinction there. We believe, and we have such confidence in the evidence (and ultimately in the Christ we know and love) that we further say we know. We are totally convinced that God loves us.

Brothers and sisters, this too is an essential spiritual practice. If you don't know God's love and practice believing it, then you will be a miserable Christian! How do you learn to know and believe God's love? Reading His word and seeing what He says to you is a great start. But ultimately, you won't know and believe that love without seeing it acted out in your own life and in other human lives, in the community God calls the church. When you not only read about it, but see it happen in the church, then you know and believe God's love for you. By the same token, if you've been in angry, bitter, mean churches, then you'll have a hard time believing God's love for you. The way to heal this is not to hide from church, but to find a loving one and experience and express the love of brothers and sisters in Christ.

C. Abiding in Love, v. 16b

When you do that, you see, you abide in love. God is love, and so to live in love is to live in Him. What does it mean to live in love? We can clarify this point to ourselves by thinking of what it means to live in hatred, or to live in fear. To live in hate and fear is to have a life characterized every day by those feelings and the actions that flow out from them. And the same is true about abiding in love. Again, John is talking about the love that is in us but not of us. He means the love only the Holy Spirit can generate. To abide in love is to abide in God, and to have God abide in you, because love is not only like God. It is actually from Him, created and efficiently caused by Him in us.

III. The Outcome of Responding to Those Truths: Mutual Abiding, vv. 15b, 16c

And so, when we respond to the truths that God is love and that in love He has begotten His Son, who came and lived among us as Jesus of Nazareth, what do we do? We confess the truth about

Jesus, and we know and believe His love. The outcome of confessing and believing is to abide. We stay with God, and He stays with us. We remain with Him, and He remains with us. This is a permanent relationship. It will not break up, terminate, or come to an end, because God wants us to abide in Him. When He commits, He commits hard.

Brothers and sisters, God loves you with and you with Him, in a relationship that will last for eternity. You were made for nothing less.

Do you want to live with the one who is love, who is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? Then confess Him. Believe Him. And you will abide, for He is great to the end of the earth and to the end of eternity. Amen.