

God in us and us in God

9/2/20 dkm

Read: John 15:1-17, 1John 4:7-21

Text: 1John 4:13-16

Psalms: 118:1-7, 136:1-9, 51:3-12, 116:5-14, 117

'In the beginning God' are the first words we read when we open the Bible. We read how God created the heavens and the earth. We read about God's work of creation, but still we ask who or what is God? God is a Spirit. The third person of the Trinity is God the Spirit. We read about the work of the Spirit here in 1John 4. God came into this fallen world in his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity. In Jesus we see the revelation of divine love; we see that God is love.

The truth that 'God is love' is the basis of our relationship with God: 'We love because he first loved us' (4:19). A born-again Christian is in a relationship with God, and with Jesus Christ, and has fellowship with other people who are similarly 'in Christ', as Paul would say (1:3). Paul speaks of being 'in Christ', while John speaks of 'abiding in Christ' and of Christ abiding in us. In fact he writes, 'God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God and God in him' (4:16). Father, Son and Holy Spirit all abide in the believer, and we as believers abide in Him. Being a true Christian is not just a matter of belief; it is a matter of abiding in God or living in God. We are not followers of a religion; we are followers of a person called Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And more than followers, we are those who abide in Him, and He in us. The most intimate relationship you can ever have is with God himself.

Before going on, let me quote what C. H. Dodd writes about these verses; 'This closely knit statement therefore places the reality of the Christian experience of God beyond question, guarding against the dangers of subjectivism on the one hand, and of mere traditionalism on the other; placing equal and co-ordinate stress on love to God, which is the heart of religion, and love to man, which is the foundation of morality, without allowing religion to sink to a level of

mere moralism, or morality to be dissolved in mysticism. This passage is the high-water mark of the thought of the epistle'. This scholar also reminds us that the theme of this section is 'the grounds of assurance'.

John is writing to a church being infiltrated by false teachers. He gives the church three tests which can be applied to these men, a doctrinal test, a moral test, and a social test, as Stott calls them. They can be tested regarding their belief in the humanity and divinity of Jesus, in regard to their obedience to the commands, and in regard to their love for one another. These tests can also be taken as grounds for assurance. To keep the commandments and to love one another, and indeed to believe in Jesus Christ, are all works of the Spirit. 'It is the divine indwelling which alone makes possible both belief and love' writes Stott, and further 'Believing and loving are evidence that God's Spirit is at work in us'.

'We know that He abides in us by the Spirit whom he has given us' (3:24). John is prepared to repeat what he says to make sure we get the point; so here in 4:13 he repeats this truth about the Spirit being given to us. Even so, the context keeps changing. John concluded his words about 'God is love' telling us that 'if we love one another, God abides in us and his love has been perfected in us' (4:12). He goes on in the verses we are now looking at to address the first of these assurances, namely that 'God abides in us'. The passage begins with the familiar words, 'By this we know' (4:13). Our three headings will be, 'Coming of the Spirit', 'Confessing Christ' and, 'Continue in love'.

1. Coming of the Spirit

The apostle John heard Jesus promise that the Father would send the Holy Spirit in his name. He is called the 'Paraclete', one who comes along side, or one who helps. Jesus said, 'He will teach you all things and bring to remembrance all that I have said to you' (John 14:26). But first of all, the Spirit will convict of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8). He will make alive hearts that are dead in sin.

If you have been born again of the Spirit of God, the Spirit abides in you. Do not quench the Spirit. Let the fruits of the Spirit be seen in your life; the first of these is love (Gal 5:22).

The Spirit is given by God, and is a seal and guarantee of our standing in Christ (Eph 1:13, 14). If you believe in Jesus it is because the Spirit has quickened your dead heart. So if your heart is alive, and not dead towards Jesus and the cross, you know you have the Spirit and that you belong to Christ. ‘We know’ says John ‘that we abide in Him, and he in us, because he has given us of His Spirit’ (4:13). God does not give us his Spirit one day and take it away the next. We are not a child of God one day and child of the devil the next. Remember this word ‘abide’ or ‘remain’. Remember what Jesus said about abiding in the vine, about abiding in him and bearing much fruit (John 15:5).

2. Confessing Christ

‘And we have seen and testify’ continues John (4:14). Our new life begins when the Spirit convicts us of sin and leads us to confess Christ. The Spirit’s work must be accompanied by knowledge, knowledge of who Jesus is and what he did to save us from sin and death. It is always the word and the Spirit together. John is very clear about no one having ever seen God, but also clear about seeing the Son of God, Jesus Christ (4:12, 1:1).

Is John only referring to the apostles when he says, ‘we have seen him’ (4:14). It is, of course, the apostolic witness that we must believe regarding Jesus, his life, his death and his resurrection. Yet there is a sense in which, by the power of the Spirit, all who believe see Jesus. We are given eyes of faith, eyes to see the historical facts impact our life and destiny. When we believe and confess the facts and the truth about Jesus as revealed in the Bible, God abides in us and we in God (4:15). Let no one think that being a Christian is a matter of inheritance, of traditions, or of performing rituals. It is a matter of personal confession and belief, brought about by the indwelling Spirit of God.

What is it that we have seen and to which we testify? Firstly, that God the Father sent God the Son into this world. God the Son is none other than the person Jesus Christ, whom John saw and heard and touched (1:1, 4; 14, 15). As proto-Gnostics, the false teachers could not honestly make such a confession. They did not believe that Jesus was the incarnate Son of God, God in the flesh (4:3).

We often refer to Jesus as Saviour but the Scriptures do not use this term very often. In John's gospel it was a believing Samaritan who first called Jesus 'the Christ, and Saviour of the world' (John 4:42). John uses the same words here in 4:14. John previously spoke of Jesus making propitiation for our sins, and 'also for the whole world' (2:2); by 'world' he means sinful society, people ruled by Satan. Back there we rejected any suggestion of universal salvation, and we do so again here. Jesus is the Saviour of the world in that, for anyone in the world to be saved from sin and death they must confess their sin and believe in Jesus Christ as he is presented in the Bible. Jesus is the only Saviour, the only Mediator between God and man (1Tim 2:5).

For Jesus to be your Saviour you must confess your sin and believe that Jesus is the Son of God whom God sent into this world. When you do this, God abides in you and you abide in God. As amazing as this is, it is what John tells us (4:15). This is the same as saying that our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ (1:3). If we have such fellowship we will also have fellowship with one another; we will love one another by virtue of being in Christ or abiding in Him.

3. Continue in love

John continues, and concludes with another, 'And we have known' or 'have come to know' (4:16). We know and believe that God loves us because God is love. This is where we started, and it is where we finish- not just today but in the journey of life itself. This is a fundamental, unchangeable truth about God that John repeats (4:8,

16). It was love that led God to sending his one and only Son into this world. It was love that took Jesus to the cross, love for sinners like you and me. ‘This is how we know love, because He laid down his life for us’ (3:16). This is ‘*agape*’ love, unselfish, self-sacrificing love. We did nothing to attract God’s love. We could do nothing to please God.

God set his love upon us while we were still sinners (Rom 5:8). God sent his Spirit to quicken our dead hearts, after providentially bringing us to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. God’s providence may be your coming to church today, or growing up in a home where you hear the Bible read. His providence may be a fellow student or a fellow worker telling you about Jesus, or even a tract in the letter box. His providence might include someone praying for the Spirit to touch your heart. All acts of providence demonstrate God’s love for you. How are you going to respond to his love?

When you do believe, you will know how much God loves you. You will know that you abide in God and God in you. On bended knee, the apostle Paul declares by way of a doxology, ‘That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height- to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God’ (Eph 3:17-19).

John concludes, ‘He who abides in love abides in God’ (4:16), by which he means that if we know God’s love and his abiding presence in our life, we will reflect his love towards those around us. We will be telling others that God is love. People today need to hear this message more than ever before. We will be telling and showing the world ‘*agape*’ or Christ-like love. Not everyone will appreciate such love but some will- the elect will.

We will help people in practical, tangible ways but remember, if you truly love someone you will want them to know that God is love and that ‘God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life’ (John 3:16). Love does not withhold the truth, and this is the truth that has been revealed to us in the word of God, and in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. God abides in us, and we in him, to the glory of God.