

# Abiding Love

1 John 4:13-21

One mother put her son to bed on the eve of his fifth birthday. She was trying to communicate that birthday idea to him. “Kevin,” she said, “this is the last night of your fourth year. Do you understand that?” For a full year, Kevin had shown people four fingers for his four years, and now he was ready to add a thumb. Seeing his four fingers, his mother nodded, and said: “When you go to sleep tonight, you’ll still be 4-years-old. But do you know how old you’ll be in the morning, when you wake up?” Kevin nodded enthusiastically, added his thumb to his four little fingers and said, “Tomorrow, I’ll be a handful!”

Every mother knows that kids can be a handful. That’s why it takes so much love to be a good mother. That principle is true for Christians also. Life can be a handful. Other people in our family, our church, at work—they can all be a handful at times. That’s why it takes so much love to be a Christian. Today we are going to examine where all of this love starts.

Last week in v.12 we recognized the fact that **"no one has seen God at any time."** God is invisible. However, **"if we love one another"** God becomes visible in us. People can’t see His essence but they can see His actions. Jesus said it this way, **"By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another"** (Jn.13:35).

Maybe you’ve heard the story of the American GI in Europe at the close of WWII. The countryside had been ravaged by war and was in ruins. The saddest part was the plight of the orphaned children starving in the streets. Early one cold morning this soldier was walking in the streets when he spotted a little boy with his nose pressed to the window of a pastry shop. Inside the cook was kneading dough for a fresh batch of doughnuts. The hungry boy drooled, watching the baker’s every move. The soldier said, **"Son would you like some of those?"** **"Would I!"** responded the lad. The compassionate GI stepped inside and bought a dozen pastries and then handed the sack to the boy. As he turned to walk away, the stunned child called out, **"Sir, are you God?"**

John writes this little letter to tell us that we are never more like God than when we act in love. In fact, God not only wants us to act in love, He wants us to abide in love.

I want you to look at that word **"abide"** in verse 13. Some of your Bibles may translate it “dwell” or “live.” It means to “stay with” or to “remain close to.” John uses that word a lot; 21 times throughout this letter. The apostle John declares that God doesn’t just want a relationship with us, He wants fellowship with us. He wants us to **"abide"** or settle down in an intimate, passionate relationship with Jesus.

Remember that in verse 8 John says, **"God is love."** He says it again in verse 16. When we abide with God, we abide in love. Someone might say, *"Pastor, how can I know I am abiding in love with the Lord?"* John answers that question by giving us three assurances and three attributes of abiding love.

## I. Three Assurances of Abiding Love (vv.13-16).

### A. The Discernable Presence of the Spirit of God (v.13).

**“By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.”**

1. John says that we can "**know that we abide in Him**" and that "**He is in us**" on the basis of the fact that "**He has given us of His Spirit.**" Notice carefully that it doesn't merely say He has given us His Spirit but that He has given us "**OF His Spirit.**" Literally this translates "out of His Spirit." When we love as God loves we are drawing on the resources of the Holy Spirit.

2. Rom.5:5 tells us "**...the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.**" When you became a Christian the Holy Spirit came to permanently reside within you. That's what v.13 means by "**He in us.**" He "**poured out**" God's love in you so that you have all the resources you need to love as God loves.

Gordon Brownville wrote about the great Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen, the first to discover the magnetic meridian of the North Pole and to discover the South Pole. On one of his trips, Amundsen took a homing pigeon with him. When he had finally reached the top of the world, he opened the bird's cage and set it free. Imagine the delight of Amundsen's wife, back in Norway, when she looked up from the doorway of her home and saw the pigeon circling in the sky above. No doubt she exclaimed, "**He's alive! My husband is still alive!**" So it was when Jesus ascended. He was gone, but the disciples clung to his promise to send them the Holy Spirit.

3. How do we know that "**we abide in Him and He in us?**" We know or understand this by the discernable presence of the Spirit, we can sense the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We can hear His still, small voice in our hearts. We sense His conviction, encouragement and direction.

4. If you cannot discern the presence of God's Spirit one of two things could be wrong in your life.

a. *First, you might not have a RELATIONSHIP with God.* 2 Cor.13:5 says, "**Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?**" You can pray a little prayer, be baptized, go to church for years, you can appear on the outside to be a Christian but if you don't have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in your life, you don't have salvation. Rom.8:9 says, "**Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.**"

b. *Second, you might not have FELLOWSHIP with God.* It may be that you are genuinely saved and you used to hear the Spirit's voice in your heart but not anymore. You may be living in rebellion and all you feel is guilt and conviction. You may have filled your life with busyness so that the frantic noise of your schedule drowns out the still small voice of God.

5. If you belong to Christ and abide in Him, "**of His Spirit**," out of the abundance of His Spirit you can love as He loves.

D.L. Moody was to have a campaign in England. An elderly pastor protested, "**Why do we need this Mr. Moody? He's uneducated and inexperienced. Who does he think he is anyway? Does he think he has a monopoly on the Holy Spirit?**" A younger, wiser pastor rose and responded, "**No, the Holy Spirit has a monopoly on Mr. Moody.**"

#### B. The Confident Confession of the Son of God (vv.14-15).

**"And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God."**

1. John says, "**We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world**" (cf. **1:1-3**). For over three years they had "**seen**" Jesus. However it was only after they received the Comforter, the Holy Spirit on Pentecost did they have the power to "**testify**" of "**the Son as Savior**."

2. Jesus is not "**the Savior**" of *everyone* in "**the world**" but He is "**the Savior**" of *anyone* in "**the world**" who comes to Him in faith. He is the adequate "**propitiation... for the whole world**."

3. V.15 says that anyone can know that "**God abides in him and he in God**" if he "**confesses that Jesus is the Son of God**."

4. "**Confesses**" does not merely mean "believes." Many people *believe* Jesus is the Son of God but have no relationship with Him. Rather, "**confesses**" carries the idea of committing one's life. To confess Christ is to surrender everything in your life to Him. As 1 John 3:18 says it is to love Him not just "**in word or in tongue**" but "**in deed and in truth**."

5. "**Confesses**" also carries the idea of speaking about Christ. The one who abides in the love of the Lord can't help but be a witness for Him. They talk about Him.

How many grandmothers here today have pictures of their grandchildren with them? How many of you have already said something this morning about your grandkids? *You can't help but talk about what you love*. When a guy falls in love with a girl, he can't help but talk to her. Girls talk for hours on the phone with and about their boyfriends! When you love golf, hunting, fishing or whatever you will talk, talk, talk about it. *You can't help but talk about what you love*.

6. The reason many people don't talk about Jesus is because they don't abide in Him. We are not walking in His love and therefore we don't have love for others who need Him.

#### C. The Visible Outworking of the Love of God (v.16).

**“And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.”**

1. In v.12, John has already stated that **"if we love one another"** two things are true. First, **"God abides in us"** and second, **"His love has been perfected [fulfilled, completed] in us."** Here in v.16, John writes, **"He who abides in love abides in God and God in him."** In other words, the believer who is in fellowship with God abides in love and that is an assurance that God is abiding in Him.
2. John also says at the beginning of the verse, **"We have known and believed [have come to believe and rely on] the love that God has for us."** We are certain that God loves us, but if we love God we will love others.
3. In 1 Cor.11, Paul takes the Corinthian congregation to task because of their lack of love. They came to the Lord's Table to celebrate their love for Him without loving each other. Paul told them that it is dangerous to celebrate communion with God under false pretences. They were not to come to the Lord's Supper to fellowship with Him until they could fellowship with each other.
4. Paul said in v.26, **"For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes."** They were to remember **"the Lord's death."** Why? Because His death is the ultimate symbol of His love. He said in John 15:13, **"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends"** (cf. Rom.5:8).
5. If you are abiding in Christ, you hear the voice of the Holy Spirit and you speak about Jesus, and you live like Jesus in your love.
6. If someone has only a little love, it is because he only has a little fellowship with God. On the other hand, when you see some mature believer who constantly acts in love, you know that His fellowship with the Lord is strong.

## **II. Three Attributes of Abiding Love (vv.17-21).**

### **A. Boldness instead of Shame (v.17).**

**“Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.”**

1. John says that if **"love has been perfected [completed, fulfilled],"** that is if we are mature in our walk with Christ, we will have **"boldness in the day of judgment."**
2. **"Boldness"** comes from a word that means "outspokenness, bluntness." John taught in 2:28 that we could have **"confidence"** at Christ's coming if we abide in Him. In 3:21-22, he taught that we can have **"confidence"** in prayer if we abide in Him. Now he teaches us that we can have that same **"boldness"** (*parrhesia*) at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

3. If we abide in Jesus, the He is working through us to accomplish His purposes. Therefore to judge us is to judge Himself! Have you ever had a test when you were fully prepared? You are excited to show how much you have learned. You know you will ace it!
4. Underline the last phrase in v.17. God made this so real to me this week, "**As He is, so are we in this world.**" We are the body of Christ in the world. What He was in His physical body we now are!
5. In His earthly ministry, Jesus' identity was the Son of God in the flesh. Our identity is that of the sons and daughters of God in the flesh. His mission was to do the will of God and finish His work. Our mission is to do the will of God and finish His work. His calling was to demonstrate the love of God. Our calling is to demonstrate the love of God to a watching world.
6. Tony Evans said, "**We are the continuation of the incarnation. The incarnation was God become man so man could see God. We are people indwelt with the abiding love of God so people can still see God.**" John says, "**As He is, so are we in this world.**" We are not deity but deity resides within us so that we can do the things Jesus did!
7. If you had to stand before Jesus today in "**judgment**," would you have "**boldness**" or shame? The secret is abiding!

**B. Faith instead of Fear (v.18).**

**"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love."**

1. John says "**Perfect** [mature] **love casts out fear.**" Because we abide in Jesus, we don't have to fear.

5-year old Johnny was in the kitchen as his mother made supper. She asked him to go into the pantry and get her a can of tomato soup, but he didn't want to go in alone. "**It's dark in there and I'm scared.**" She asked again, and he persisted. Finally she said, "**It's OK. Jesus will be in there with you.**" Johnny walked hesitantly to the door and slowly opened it. He peeked inside, saw it was dark, and started to leave when all at once an idea came, and he said, "**Jesus, if you're in there, would you hand me that can of tomato soup?**"

2. John says, "**There is no fear in love.**" The only reason we live in fear is because we do not understand love. I've known many Christians who are paralyzed by fear.
3. Fear is a result of the Fall. In Eden, Adam had no fear. He lived in face to face fellowship with God. God provided everything he needed, even a wife. Because of God's love, Adam didn't know the emotion of fear. However, when he sinned, fear came crashing down upon Him.

4. **"Fear involves torment,"** John says. Literally it reads, **"Fear has punishment"** not **"fear has to do with punishment."** The word for **"torment"** or **"punishment"** comes from a root that means "to limit or restrain." Fear limits us. Fear boxes us in. Fear imprisons us.

*"Fear can hold you prisoner. Hope can set you free."* That tag line from the 1994 film, *The Shawshank Redemption*, fairly sums up the New Testament view of fear. In that film, one of the characters, Brooks Hatlen, has spent most of his life wasting away in prison because of a reckless act of violence he committed as a teenager. At one point in the film, after some 40 years of incarceration, Brooks finally receives his release to enjoy the freedom for which he's longed. There's just one problem. He's forgotten how to be free. He's become institutionalized. His new life on the outside scares him to death every day. He'd grown accustomed to the structure behind bars, and now without it, he lives in fear. He thinks about ways to violate his parole so he can go back to the safety of prison. Eventually he takes his own life because he just can't handle the uncertainty and vulnerability of life on the outside. In a letter back his former cellmates he says, "It is a terrible thing to live in fear." It is indeed.

5. Anxieties and worries imprison us. Some Christians barely leave their homes because of fear. Others will never speak a word about Jesus or their faith because they are afraid of how someone will react. That's living in prison!

6. If fear is a result of the Fall, faith is a result of salvation. Faith that **"casts out fear"** comes from abiding in God's love. In Christ, I am restored to Eden. As I abide in Him, I begin to grasp His love, concern, compassion and provision for me.

7. Sometimes I fear for my family. I worry over my kids' safety and my wife's health. However, as I seek to abide in Christ, I realize that He loves me and them; and He will take care of us.

### C. Possibility instead of Impossibility (vv.19-21).

**"We love Him because He first loved us. If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also."**

1. In v.19, John says, **"We love Him because He first loved us."** Probably a more literal rendering is **"We love because He first loved us."** We *can* love because He first loved us! His love for us makes our love for others possible.

2. John now tackles the guy who says, **"I love God"** while hating a fellow believer. John says this person is **"a liar."** If you don't love your brother you don't love God. That's why 1 Pet.3:7 says that if we don't love our wives, our prayers will be **"hindered."**

3. We have a **"commandment"** from God that says, **"He who loves God must love His brother also."**

Max Lucado tells a wonderful story about a young girl named Christina who grew weary of growing up in her poor neighborhood. Christina's mother, Maria, loved her with all of her heart, but her love was not enough to keep Christina satisfied. Longing to leave her poor Brazilian neighborhood, Christina wanted to see the world. Discontent with a home having only a pallet on the floor, a washbasin, and a wood-burning stove, she dreamed of a better life in the city. One morning she slipped away, breaking her mother's heart. Knowing what life on the streets would be like for her young, attractive daughter, Maria hurriedly packed to go find her. On her way to the bus stop she entered a drugstore to get one last thing. Pictures. She sat in the photograph booth, closed the curtain, and spent all she could on pictures of herself. With her purse full of small black-and-white photos, she boarded the next bus to Rio de Janeiro. Maria knew Christina had no way of earning money. She also knew that her daughter was too stubborn to give up. When pride meets hunger, a human will do things that were before unthinkable. Knowing this, Maria began her search. Bars, hotels, nightclubs, any place with the reputation for street walkers or prostitutes. She went to them all. And at each place she left her picture--taped on a bathroom mirror, tacked to a hotel bulletin board, fastened to a corner phone booth. And on the back of each photo she wrote a note. It wasn't too long before both the money and the pictures ran out, and Maria had to go home. The weary mother wept as the bus began its long journey back to her small village.

It was a few weeks later that young Christina descended the hotel stairs. Her young face was tired. Her brown eyes no longer danced with youth but spoke of pain and fear. Her laughter was broken. Her dream had become a nightmare. A thousand times over she had longed to trade these countless beds for her secure pallet. Yet the little village was, in too many ways, too far away. As she reached the bottom of the stairs, her eyes noticed a familiar face. She looked again, and there on the lobby mirror was a small picture of her mother. Christina's eyes burned and her throat tightened as she walked across the room and removed the small photo. Written on the back was this compelling invitation. "Whatever you have done, whatever you have become, it doesn't matter. Please come home." She did. (Max Lucado, *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*, Multnomah Press, 1986, pp. 158-9.)

Just as Christina's heart had ventured far away from home, many of us have ventured far away from our Heavenly Father. This morning we may be wondering if we have traveled so far that we are now outside of His arms of grace. My friend, there is no place that you or I could ever travel that would extend beyond our Father's compassionate reach. He says to you this morning, "Come home."

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