

“HOW DO WE KNOW?”

I JOHN 4:13-16a

Pastor Keith E. Gephart

INTRODUCTION

In this passage, John ties together the ethical command to love one another—which is the evidence that God abides in us and we in Him (v. 12)—and the theological focus on Christ and the need for faith in Him. Two of the key ethical tests of life John gives in this book are righteousness—keeping God’s commandments—and love—loving one another. These ethical tests do not stand alone but depend also on the theological test—knowledge of and belief in Jesus Christ.

John has been speaking about the mutual indwelling of God in us and we in God (see 3:24 and 4:12). What an amazing truth and a phenomenal privilege. God dwelling in me! I dwelling in God—in close fellowship! But, how can I know? John helps explain how we can know in these verses.

YOU MUST KNOW THAT YOU ABIDE IN CHRIST, AND THAT CHRIST ABIDES IN YOU.

- I. WE HAVE COME TO KNOW AND HAVE BELIEVED (v. 16a).
 - A. Christians have gained experiential knowledge about God’s love to/in us in Jesus Christ.
 1. John shows that believers have come to know that the God who is love is also dwelling in them and is loving others through them. Intelligent Christian knowledge recognizes and rejoices in the active operation of God’s love in the redeemed community and in the interactions of its individual members.
 2. Christians know the message of 4:9-10—they came to know it and still know it.
 - B. Christians believe that message—trust in God and His Son and the truth of salvation.
 1. When we abide in love we also abide in God, and God abides in us.
 2. We have believed and continue to believe and *be confident*.
 - C. Which comes first—knowledge or belief? Either! (Jn. 6:69—different order)
Love is not “blind.” Our faith is built on knowledge, and faith promotes additional knowledge.
- II. FAITH IS IN THE APOSTOLIC MESSAGE—THE GOSPEL, GOOD NEWS (14).
 - A. The Emphatic “we” here refers to John and the apostles, as in 4:6 and in 1:1-3.
 - B. “Have seen” is “beheld carefully”—cf. v. 12 and see 1:1—“looked upon.”
 - The perfect tense implies that the vision is still before their eyes.
 - C. “Bear witness” is present tense—continuous activity (cf. Jn. 15:26); see John 19:35—seen witness, that you also may believe.
 - D. The message is “the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.”
 1. “Sent”—on an official mission; perfect tense—the mission is still actively carried on
 2. The “Son”—His “only begotten” (v. 9)—God himself come into flesh.
 3. “Savior”—one who delivers from sin, death, and Hell. (Cf. the secular uses of “savior.”)
 4. “Of the world”—the earth’s inhabitants lost in sin and in need of deliverance (cf. 2:2).
 - The atonement is not limited in the purpose of God.
 - The atonement is limited by those who refuse to trust in Christ.
- III. HEARING THE MESSAGE MUST BE FOLLOWED BY A CONFESSION OF JESUS CHRIST (15).

- A. "Whoever confesses"
 1. Anyone who does so.
 2. The confession is at a point in time—an act of faith.
 3. The confession is of the doctrinal truth of the Gospel—"Jesus is the Son of God."
 - Jesus—the man, God come in flesh.
 - Jesus is the Son of God.
 - Jesus has propitiated God's wrath—4:10.
 - Jesus brought "life" to us who believe in Him (4:9; 4:16)
- B. The Confession both brings the result of the indwelling, and is the proof of the indwelling.
 1. God abides in him.
 2. He *abides* in God.

IV. SALVATION INCLUDES THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT (13).

- A. The Spirit indwells at the moment of salvation.
 1. The gift of the Spirit is permanent—perfect tense.
 2. All believers receive the gift at the time of conversion (cf. v. 15); the gift of the Spirit does not follow conversion as some *extra* or *higher* experience.
 3. Some maintain that John thinks of charismatic gifts which provide proof of the Spirit's indwelling. But John does not give any clue as to such a reference, and it is more likely that he speaks simply of the presence of the Spirit Himself as in Rom. 8:15-16 who bears witness inwardly of His presence and therefore of the fact that God dwells in us and we in Him.
 4. The gift is from the Father, and from the Son.
 5. "Of His Spirit shows that no believer has the "full measure" like Jesus, who received the Spirit "without measure." The gift of the Spirit is not exhausted when given to each believer.
 6. The Spirit gave us understanding of the Gospel message (14).
 7. The Spirit brought about our confession of faith in Jesus (15).
 8. The Spirit manifests righteousness and love in and through us (3:24; 4:12).
- B. The Spirit assures us that God abides in us, and that we abide in Him.

CONCLUSION

John presents the mutual abiding of the believer and God in various ways and with various terms:

- 1) God's love abides in him (3:17) and he abides in love (4:16).
- 2) Eternal life abides in him (3:15) and this life is in the Son of God (5:11).
- 3) The truth is in him (cf. 1:8 with 2:4) and he walks in the truth (II Jn. 3).
- 4) God's word is and abides in him (1:10; 2:14; cf. 2:24) and he abides in the word (Jn. 8:31).
- 5) He is and abides in the light (2:9, 10).
- 6) God's anointing abides in him (2:27) and guides him into truth. (W. p. 155).
- 7) God's Spirit (the anointing) abides in Him—v. 13, 3:24.

What a heritage we have in Christ!

- We have come to know Him and have believed (16).
- When we heard the apostolic message—the Gospel—we understood it and believed it (14).
- We made a confession of faith in Jesus Christ (15).
- We have assurance of the indwelling of God and us in Him by the Holy Spirit God has given us (13).

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