

Gift of the Spirit

1 John 4:13-21

Introduction

"Jesus, He loves me. He is for me."

At times we may feel that almost sounds too good to be true.

Identity. Value. Purpose. There is a universal human hunger for these.

That's exactly what the apostle John is probing and explaining in his first epistle.

What Christianity is. Who Christians are. How we can know for sure.

13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. **14** And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. **15** Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. **16** 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. **17** 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. **18** 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. **19** We love because he first loved us. **20** 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. ²¹ And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

1. Assurance (13)
2. Faith (14-15)
3. Love (16, 19-21)
4. Confidence (17-18)

1. Assurance (13)

¹³ By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

By this we know—recurring theme. John is no agnostic; nor does he elevate theoretical, philosophical knowledge as do the Gnostics. This knowledge is not just knowing a list of facts, but knowing in the sense of experiencing. Assurance that we are in God and God is in us—because His love is at work in us in our loving one another.

Because He has given us His Spirit—our lifestyle of love has a divine reason for its existence. The power to live in love comes from a person—the Person of the Holy Spirit of God whom God has given us.

He abides in us, changing and empowering us to be what we are so that we can do what we do and live how we live.

John frequently uses the language of abiding to describe the effective Christian life. He got it from Jesus Himself.

John 15:4-5

⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ 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.

You hear Christ's words echoing in what John has already taught us in this epistle:

1 John 2:6

Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

1 John 2:24

Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father.

John's words regarding the Holy Spirit also echo what Jesus taught:

John 14:15-17

15 If you love me, you will keep my commandments. **16** And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, **17** even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

1 John 3:24

Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

Romans 8:9-10

9 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. **10** But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

Romans 8:14-16

14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. **15** For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" **16** The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

Christianity is not fundamentally what you do for God, but what God does in you. He does it personally through the gift of the Holy Spirit. That's why Christianity works. That's why false religions don't.

What evidence do you see of the Holy Spirit's presence in you?

Our text will develop this further by pointing to what the Spirit does in our lives.

2. Faith (14-15)

¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

We have seen

Same word John uses in John 1:14 when he says "we beheld—closely observed—his glory"; used in 1 John 1:1 and translated "looked upon"

and testify

Firsthand testimony—word we get martyr from—so convinced of the truth of what they testified regarding Jesus that they were willing to die for it. Same word used in 1 John 1:2 "We bear witness."

John is reiterating what he said as he started this letter. He and the other apostles were declaring what they had personally seen and heard and touched when they declared Jesus

Christ to be the Son of God who gives eternal life to those who believe.

You remember that he declared that their purpose was so that his readers could share in the same experience—have fellowship with them, the apostles—AND have fellowship with God the Father and with God the Son.

Now he gives insight into how those of us who have not personally seen Jesus in the flesh as did the apostles could come to the conviction that what they testified about Jesus is actually reliable and true.

1 John 4:15

Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

The Spirit of God produces this conviction. According 1 John 4:2-3a

² By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.

What John is teaching matches what Jesus taught about the Holy Spirit:

John 15:26

But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth,

who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.

John 16:14-15

¹⁴ He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵ All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

God's gift of the Holy Spirit illuminates our hearts and minds, convincing us that the good news of Jesus Christ rooted in who He is and what He has done is true and therefore trustworthy.

1 Corinthians 2:12, 14

¹² Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. . . . ¹⁴ The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

Do you believe the testimony of the apostles? The prophets? Christ Himself?

Their testimony is recorded in the best preserved ancient documents in the world by far. If you don't believe, it's not an intellectual problem. It's a spiritual problem. A will problem. The Holy Spirit convinces us that the testimony regarding Jesus Christ is true.

3. Love (16, 19-21)

16 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.

19 We love because he first loved us.

We have come to know and to believe the love God has for us. God is love—it is His intrinsic character.

Whoever—no exceptions—abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him

“We love because He first loved us.” We did not make the first move. He did.

*Who am I, that the Lord of all the earth
Would care to know my name
Would care to feel my hurt?
Who am I, that the bright and morning star
Would choose to light the way
For my ever wandering heart?*

*Who am I, that the eyes that see my sin
Would look on me with love
And watch me rise again?
Who am I, that the voice that calmed the sea
Would call out through the rain
And calm the storm in me?*

*Not because of who I am
But because of what You've done
Not because of what I've done
But because of who You are
I am a flower quickly fading
Here today and gone tomorrow
A wave tossed in the ocean
A vapor in the wind
Still You hear me when I'm calling
Lord, You catch me when I'm falling
You've told me who I am
I am Yours*

Casting Crowns

The Holy Spirit has convinced us that God did, in fact, make that first move. There is a tight connection between believing God sent His Son to save us because of His love for us and God's love abiding in us so that we love one another.

His love was an initiating kind of love. It came from who He is, not in response to what we are. That tells us, then, that the love we have for one another is not just "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours." It's not just payback. *If our love bears the same character as God's, we are glad to initiate love toward persons whether or not we think they deserve it in some way.* We love them in tangible ways in answer to their need not merely their merits.

Church life should look that way. Our love can't be just a reward for service well done or for faithful involvement. *We want to embrace and serve those who are new to us, those who are struggling, those who are on the edges, those who may have no expectation that we would even notice they exist.* Especially persons like that.

Abiding in love is the hallmark of our abiding in God and God's abiding in us. He does this through the Person of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Romans 5:5b

God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

20 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. **21** And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

It is possible to only imagine you love God—or people, for that matter. The test is how you treat the people you actually know and with whom you interact. Love is a spiritual quality generated by the Holy Spirit in us. But it makes itself known in tangible ways. It is intensely practical.

People sometimes think that spirituality is very other worldly and mystical. Actually, paganism is that way—because the gods of paganism are idols—no-gods—imaginary.

If you and I don't love the people we can see and hear and touch, there's no way we love God, who is spirit and invisible. We are lying to ourselves and to others.

God has shown us love in tangible, practical ways. We walk on His earth. We breath His air. We gaze on the beauty He created. We eat food from Him. The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. Jesus came in human flesh. He poured out physical lifeblood. He rose physically from the tomb. His disciples touched His wounded hands and side. He physically ate food in their presence.

So when we truly love the God who loves us this way, we love others the way He loved us. In very practical, down-to-earth ways that meet real needs.

Who are the individuals to whom you have the most opportunity to show love? Mom. Dad. Brother. Sister. Wife. Husband. Co-worker. Neighbor. Classmate.

In what practical ways can you love them?
Meditate on this before you start the week

and each day in it so that you can live each day intentionally taking advantage of the opportunities you have to show the love of God in you toward others. *Don't just dream about showing love someday to people you don't know. Start where you are with the people you know and the opportunities you have.*

Take a moment now to think this through. If you are born again, you have God's Spirit in you as a gift from God. You can and you must live this way.

4. Confidence (17-18)

¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ 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.

"Perfect love casts out fear" is perhaps one of the most quoted sentences from this letter. But before we repeat it like some kind of quick fix, let's make sure we know what John means. The context helps us understand.

Remember what he said in 1 John 4:12
No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

That is, His love shown to us through Christ, achieves its goal or purpose when we live out the same kind of love toward one another.

“By this love is perfected in us” is repeating that concept. Love reaches its goal, its maturity, its purpose when we are loving one another as our way of life.

It is this practical, loving lifestyle which we now know is generated by the Holy Spirit in us, that gives us confidence or boldness when we think ahead to the day of judgment. We are in the world the way Jesus was in the world. But we are not of the world, just as Jesus was not of the world.

John 15:17-19

17 These things I command you, so that you will love one another. **18** If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. **19** If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

We are not going to have to suffer the judgment God brings on the world because we are not of the world. We are in Christ and Christ is in us.

1 John 4:18

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.

The fear here is fear of God's punishment both now and in the final judgment.

The love is the love He has put in us through the Holy Spirit.

Perfect love does not mean that we love perfectly, but that God's love has reached its intended goal by producing a loving lifestyle toward one another. This is the meaning as John has been using it. "Perfected."

Whoever fears (punishment from God, in particular on judgment day) has not been perfected in love.

Why is that? Because if I am living a life characterized by mutual love among those around me, I have the mark of the God's life in me, the Holy Spirit. I belong to Christ. I've been born again. I've been granted eternal life. There is therefore no condemnation for me any longer.

Romans 8:1-4

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law

of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

1 John 2:28

And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.

Those who abide in God and in whom God abides demonstrate it by their lifestyle of love. The Spirit has convinced them to rely on Jesus as God's Son sent to save them. The Spirit has filled them with love. They have assurance, and they have confidence. They are safe forever.

Are you abiding in God? Is God abiding you?

Let your confidence be in the God who loves you and sent His Son to save you, the God who gave you His Spirit to convince you and to empower your love. You and I don't need religion—we need God. The God who really is and has proven who He is with real action.

Conclusion

What a gift God has given us! He has given us Himself. Through the gift of His Spirit we find—

1. Assurance (13)
2. Faith (14-15)
3. Love (16, 19-21)
4. Confidence (17-18)

Closing Song: Holy Spirit, Living Breath of God

Discussion Questions

1. Christianity is rooted in revelation from God given through firsthand witnesses—the prophets, God the Son, Christ’s apostles, the Holy Spirit. What does this fact expose about taking an agnostic (we just can’t know for sure) view of God and the gospel?
2. Why is the Christian life impossible apart from the indwelling Holy Spirit?
3. Why is it impossible to believe that God sent His Son to be our Savior apart from the Holy Spirit convincing us (illumination)?
4. What is the relationship between being convinced God has shown His love for us by sending His Son to save us and our showing love to one another?
5. Who are the people (their names) you have regular opportunity to treat with

practical love, and what are some tangible, practical ways you can show love to these people?

6. Everyone in the church congregation needs brothers and sisters to love him/her. Who are the ones most likely to be overlooked, and how can you personally fix that?
7. What does the context of 1 John 4:12-18 reveal about the true meaning of "perfect love" (v. 18)? Hint: connect "perfect love" with "love perfected" (reaching it's God-designed goal).
8. What does a lifestyle of practical love toward one another reveal about us, and why does that revelation free us from the fear of being condemned on the day of judgment?