

He has given us His Spirit

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 January 2000

Preacher: Prof D.M.Macdonald

[0:00] I'm sorry, we'll read from chapter 3 verse 16. 1 John 3 from verse 16 through to the end of chapter 4. This is how we know what love is.

Jesus Christ laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need, but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?

He said, Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue, but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence, whenever our hearts condemn us.

For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God, and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.

And this is his command to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them.

[1:10] And this is how we know that he lives in us. We know it by the Spirit he gave us. Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God. Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. But every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God.

This is the Spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard is coming, and even now is already in the world. You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.

They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us, and whoever is not from God does not listen to us.

This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the Spirit of falsehood. Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

[2:16] Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us. He sent his one and only Son into the world, that we might live through him.

This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sends his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is made complete in us. We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

And we have seen and testified that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.

And so we know and rely on the love God has had for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in him.

[3:17] In this way, love is made complete among us, so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment.

The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, I love God, yet hates his brother, he is a liar.

For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command, whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Now then, may God bless to us this reading of his holy word. To his name be all the praise and the glory. Now, please turn now to 1 John chapter 4.

1 John chapter 4, and we read again verse 13. We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his spirit.

[4 : 24] We know. Again and again, John in his first epistle writes these words. We know. We know that we love him.

We know that he loves us. We know that we are in him. We know that he is in us. John knew very well that many believers are troubled by the question of assurance.

Am I really a child of God or not? Am I really a believer or not? And it would seem that he set out in this epistle to show that yes, we can know, that we must know, that we are the children of God.

Assurance is still a problem for many people. And yet, the Bible leads us to believe that the lack of assurance is not the normal state for a believer.

The normal and the right and the desirable state for a believer is that he or she knows, that he or she is saved, is a child of God. Now, with the help of this verse and the surrounding verses, because we mustn't take any verse out of its context, let us see what John, by the leading of the Holy Spirit, tells us about how we know that we are saved, that we are believers, that we are God's children, that he lives in us and we live in him.

[5 : 45] Now, first of all, let us notice how John expresses the nature of being a Christian here.

What he says here is, we know that we live in him and he in us. And this points, I think, to the most essential thing about being a Christian. And that is, being a Christian consists really of a relationship, a relationship between God and the believer.

It's not primarily believing a certain set of doctrines. It's not primarily keeping a certain set of moral code or a certain set of commands or avoiding a certain list of things which are forbidden.

These things, no doubt, have their own place and their importance. But the essence of being a Christian is to have a relationship with God in Christ. And that relationship is described here as God being in us and us being or living or abiding in God.

And that shows how close a relationship it is. Relationship, then, is the essence of being a Christian. And John says it's not only possible to know, but it is desirable, it is essential.

[7 : 01] We ought to know that God is in us and we are in him. Now, if you look at the authorised version here, you notice that verse 13 begins with a word, hereby, translating literally from the Greek, by this.

I don't know why the NIV left it out. I think it's a pity they left it out because it's important. By this we know that we live in him and he in us because he has given us of his spirit.

The rest of the verse is an excellent translation, but they've left out this word. Now, this is a linking word showing that this verse is closely connected with the previous verses. It's also, of course, connected with the following verses, which we shall notice in a moment.

But notice, first of all, the connection with the previous verses. By this, meaning what he's just been talking about, by this we know that we live in him and he in us. What he's referring to is what he was talking about earlier in the chapter, about loving one another.

When we love one another, that's evidence that God lives in us and we live in him. Showing then that one aspect of our assurance is looking at the evidence in our lives.

[8 : 16] We'll look at that in detail in a moment or two because I want to go on, to begin with, really to look at the basis for the personal relationship, first of all, before we look at the evidence for it.

There is evidence of this personal relationship which we should look for, which we should find, and John mentions that. But what I would like to do, first of all, is to look at the basis of this relationship. And we find that from the following verses. By this we know that we live in him and he in us because he has given us of his spirit. And we have seen and testified that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. The basis of this relationship is, of course, faith.

Faith in Jesus Christ. And that faith is based, first of all, on the fact about Jesus Christ. In verse 14, John says, We, and I think he's speaking there about the apostles, we, myself, John, and the other apostles, we have seen and we testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.

[9 : 33] I'm sure what was in his mind there was when at the baptism of John and on the Mount of Transfiguration, John heard with his own ears a voice from heaven, This is my beloved Son.

Hear them. This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. You see, faith is a matter of believing the evidence. Faith is a matter of receiving God's Word as it is, the Word of God. John testifies here, we saw with our eyes, we saw, as he said earlier in his epistle, we saw our hands handled, the Word of Life.

We bear testimony to the character, to the work, to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. And then he goes on to say, If anyone acknowledges, if anyone confesses, if anyone professes that Jesus is the Son of God, that the Son of God has come in the flesh, then he is a believer. God lives in him, and he is in God. He has entered that relationship, that new saving relationship with God. So you see then, that the basis for this relationship is faith.

[10:47] In other words, accepting what God says as the truth. Accepting what God says about you and me. That we are sinners, that we are rebels, that we are far off from him. And that the only way we can be brought into a new and a close relationship with him is by trusting in his Son, who has been made flesh, who has suffered and died in our place, and who has risen again.

It is belief, first of all, in the facts about the Lord Jesus Christ. But that is not enough. Faith, in the Bible sense, is not just believing those facts, because many people believe these things. Many people will say, oh yes, I believe that Jesus is the Son of God. I believe that he died for sin. I believe he rose again. But it makes no personal difference in their lives. Faith also involves and demands a personal commitment.

Faith is not just believing certain doctrines about Christ, certain facts about him. It is believing that he has died for me. with a consequent commitment to him.

Because once we see the wonder of God's love in Christ, that he has died for us and risen again, then we commit ourselves to him. We repent of our sin. We hate sin. And we commit ourselves to him.

[11:59] We trust him. We follow him. We obey him. Yes, faith is more than just intellectual assent to certain facts. That is important. It is essential. But it always leads to a personal commitment.

And involved in that personal commitment is an open confession, an open profession. You see, John says, we have seen and we testify.

We know the facts. We have testified. But we acknowledge, we openly acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God. We testify to that fact. And we also testify to the fact that we are now his, that we have committed ourselves to him.

We identify ourselves with him. We are called by his name. We are called Christians. And we are, we are, we rejoice to be known by that name. Not because it means that there's anything good in us, but because Christ is in us.

We are in Christ. We rejoice in that we are now joined to him. The basis for that relationship then is trusting, believing, committing oneself to Christ.

[13:01] And, I believe most, almost most importantly, openly professing that faith. If we refuse to profess that faith, we miss out on a great deal of blessing.

But I believe that the actual profession or confession of faith brings its own assurance with it. If you shall believe, if you shall confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you shall be saved.

that is the word of God. There is believing in the heart, and that's of the utmost importance, that believing, that commitment, personal commitment, but there is also the open confession, profession, open identification with Christ, taking one's stand for Christ.

Not in any self-confidence, but confident in him that he is able to keep us. And this faith, this trusting in Christ, leads them to this close relationship.

It's what theologians call union with Christ. We are united to him, as the Catechism says, united to him in our effectual calling. When the call of the gospel comes to us and is made effective to us by the Spirit, then we are joined to Christ.

[14:21] Joined to him and never to be separated. Joined to him in such a way that he lives in us, we live in him. And notice how this relationship involves all the members of the Trinity.

There are three mentioned in these two verses. He, that is God, has given us of his Spirit, we have seen and testified that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.

how wonderful it is. God, the triune God, mysterious God, the God whom we by our own efforts could never dream up, such a God. The God whose ways are far above our finding out, whose ways are sovereign and mysterious and all-powerful.

He, and every person of his triune being is involved in our salvation. God the Father has set his love upon us. God the Father has sent his Son to be the one who would reconcile us to himself. God the Father and God the Son has sent the Holy Spirit to apply the Word, to apply that call of the Gospel to us, to convict us, to convert us, to give us new life, to bring us into union with Christ, to give us the grace, to profess him, to believe him, to obey him, to follow him.

[15 : 35] and we are joined to God in all his nature, in all of his three persons. See the wonder of our salvation?

But it doesn't depend on us. It doesn't depend on the faith that we work up for ourselves. It doesn't depend on our efforts, however good they may be. It depends on the sovereign, triune God. Each of the three persons are active on our behalf in our salvation and we are joined to him. He dwells in us by the Spirit and we dwell in him.

But let us now return to look at the first point that we mentioned, the evidence for this relationship. By this we know, not just we think, or perhaps, or we hope, perhaps, that perhaps we will be saved, but we know that we are now actually joined to Christ by faith and that he dwells in us and we dwell in him.

How do we know? Now let's look earlier in the chapter where we see there that we have to love one another because love comes from God.

[16 : 53] Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. When we are born again by his Spirit, when we are brought to faith in him and to union with him, then his love is shed abroad in our hearts.

We recognize his love. Surely it's the love of God that moves us to faith in him when we recognize his great love for us. And once that love is shed abroad in our hearts, then we love him in return. And we want to obey him. We hate sin because of what sin has done to us, what sin does to God's honor, what sin did to the Lord Jesus Christ. We hate it. And we love God.

We love his word. We love his standards, his righteousness, his righteous standards. And we love all those who love him. We love him because he first loved us.

We love others because they love him and God loves them. God is love. And if God lives in us, then his love is shed abroad in our hearts.

[17 : 58] And that his love is made complete in us. Isn't that an amazing statement in verse 12? There's nothing incomplete about God's love, of course, but what it means is this, that his love is perfected in us.

His love is brought to its full completion. In other words, his love, which is set upon us, enables us to grow in grace towards perfection.

We're never perfect in this life, but one day we will be. In that day when he will come again or when we meet him face to face, then his love will be perfect throughout us, throughout our whole nature. And that process is going on now. And that love should be seen most of all, I believe, and he stresses it again and again in his epistle, it should be seen in our love for one another as Christian believers.

There's no time to go into the nature of love. But the nature of God's love is this, that he loves the unworthy. He loves the rebels and he set his love upon them to change them. Our love should be a love along these lines, imitating along the lines of God's love.

[19 : 08] Human love is all too easy. It's all too easy for us to set our love on that which is attractive to us, that which is in our eyes worthy. But we are called upon to love regardless of what people's attitude is to us.

We are to love the unlovely. We are to love those who despitely use us as Christ says, to pray for them, to show love toward them.

Now that's a tall order, isn't it? And perhaps you say, well how does that help my students? Because if I look at my life, I can't really say that I have that kind of love. But if we find that, then let's ask God to make his love complete, to perfect his love in us.

Now, we know of course that we can't produce that kind of love by ourselves. But the Spirit can. And the Spirit has been shed abroad in our hearts. He has given us all his Spirit.

Now, that means, given us all his Spirit means that yes, the Holy Spirit lives in us, but I think what it means is that he has given us the Spirit to work within us, to work his work within us.

[20 : 19] He has given us all his Spirit. In other words, he has given us the power of his Spirit, the work of his Spirit in our lives. And we know what that work is. We find that in Galatians chapter 6

where we read about the fruit of the Spirit.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, etc. Now, as we examine ourselves and see is there evidence that I am really joined to Christ, that I am really trusting in Christ, is there some evidence that we have produced some love, some joy, not perfect love, perfect joy, perfect peace, because that's impossible in this world.

What kind of love is there in our lives? Do we love that which is good? Do we hate that which is evil? Are we comfortable with all the violence, the hatred, the immorality around us?

If it doesn't bother us, then obviously there's no love in our hearts. But if it distresses us, and if it distresses us in such a way that we care for such people, that we long that they should be saved and changed, if it distresses us in such a way that we think of it as an affront to God and to his holiness, if it distresses us in such a way that we long to be free of such sins ourselves, that we love to be holy, then that's evidence that we are God's children, that God's love is shared abroad in our hearts.

But if all these evil things and sins around us and even in our own lives, if it doesn't bother us at all, then there's very little evidence of God's love. Yes, it's the Holy Spirit that produces the fruit, that fruit of love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, self-control and that's the kind of evidence that we look for.

[22 : 07] Now, Paul says in Romans chapter 8 that the Spirit witnesses with our spirit that we are the children of God. That's one of the important functions of the Holy Spirit to give us assurance.

Now, the Holy Spirit uses the evidence of these things that we've been talking about, the love and the other fruits of the Spirit. he shows us that we are producing these things, however, imperfectly and he applies that evidence to us, witnesses to our spirit and in our spirit that we are the children of God.

Now, as I say, many people are troubled by assurance or by lack of assurance rather and perhaps they're seeking for a sort of feeling or seeking for an immediate impression or some wonderful shining light or some wonderful voice that will tell them that they're children of God.

Now, many people might well gain that experience because God is a sovereign God but usually the way of assurance is to trust in Christ, to trust in his bare word. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you shall be saved and faith says, yes, I believe although I might not feel any different in my heart but the feelings will come as we trust him, as we rely upon him, as we confess him, as we profess that, yes, I believe in Christ and I'm going to stand for him.

And as we go on we look back and we can look at our lives and say, well, yes, there is a change.

There are things which I used to love doing and there are things which didn't used to bother me and now it's entirely different.

[23 : 39] There are things I hate. There are things I love. There are people I love. I like to be with certain people now. I don't like to be in such company as I was before or if I am there then I have a different attitude and my attitude is one of concern for them that they be changed.

Now, the Holy Spirit takes that evidence and says, look, you are different now. I am producing that fruit in your lives. You are different. Oh, sometimes you might not feel very different. Sometimes you might feel as if you have gone back, as if you have gone off the rails.

But I am still with you. And he applies that evidence and assures you that you are a child of God. The evidence then for this relationship is there.

And we should look for it and we should ask and plead with God that we would be assured of his love. It is not the normal situation to be lacking in assurance. It is the desirable and the normal.

Now, as I say, many people are troubled and even Christians of long-standing may lose their assurance for various reasons. But God also has a purpose in that and he will restore that assurance as we seek his face.

[24 : 46] By this, we know that we live in him and he in us because he has given us of his spirit. We have seen then the basis for this relationship, this close relationship, this union with Christ, union indeed with God and all of his Godhead.

the basis for it, faith, trusting in Christ. We have seen that the evidence for this relationship is there and the Holy Spirit applies that evidence.

The Holy Spirit witnesses in our spirits that we are the children of God and we should seek for that kind of assurance. It is God's will for us that we do seek that assurance and we gain that assurance because that assurance helps us, strengthens our faith, strengthens our witness.

Now that assurance is not any self-centered one. And sometimes our tendency is to seek that kind of assurance for selfish reasons but it should always be sought so that God will be glorified so that our lives will be more effective for him.

True assurance doesn't lead to pride, it leads to humility. It leads to effective Christian witness and service. Now finally, I would like to say a few words about what I would call the essence of this relationship.

[26 : 06] I've said that the basis for it is faith and that it is really a union with Christ and the essence of that relationship is of course love. Again and again, John, the apostle of love, mentions this.

We love him because he first loved us. His love is made complete in us. His love is shed abroad in our hearts and that is the essence of our relationship with God and that's important. They mentioned that one of the evidences for believing that we are children of God is that we show love to one another.

No one has ever seen God but if we love one another God lives in us. As if John is saying well people round about are saying where is your God? But if they see the love that we have for one another they will see a reflection of God there.

Essence of this relationship is love. Love for God which then will permeate our whole beings and will lead us to love one another and this I believe is the greatest witness that we can have in this world.

The love of Christians for one another. That's what the early church was noted for. See how these Christians love one another they say. And that should be the hallmark of our lives too.

[27 : 27] Love then should be at the center of this relationship. By nature of course we don't love God do we? We love ourselves we love this world we love the things of this world. But once the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts it's different.

All these other loves are pushed out or put into their proper perspective and the dominant love in our lives should be love for God because we recognize His great love.

We recognize it that His love is an eternal love a sovereign and electing love a powerful love which changes our lives we recognize it in the life and death and resurrection of Christ we respond to that love.

Faith is the response of love isn't it? Trusting trusting in the love of God that He has loved us and given Himself for us. We recognize the love we respond to it we abide in that love and that love abides in us and that love of course leads to and indeed consists of obedience.

Love in the eyes of the world is merely an emotion but love in the Bible is not merely an emotion it involves that of course but love consists really of obedience. If you love me keep my commandments.

[28 : 45] How do we know we love God? We know we love God when we keep His commandments. Love always issues in obedience. It consists in obedience it is the driving force for obedience.

As we examine ourselves before the communion season next weekend let us look for marks of love in our lives and if we find that we are short on it let's ask God to quicken our love let's meditate let's think upon His great love for us that will stimulate love for Him let us think the needs of others and how we ought to love one another let us repent of any lack of love we find in our hearts and if we examine ourselves and find well as yet I can't say I love God I can't say I yet believe on Him then recognize that great love of His tonight God so loved the world that He gave His Son and His Son is still without stretched arms asking you to respond to His love to trust Him and commit yourself to Him and when we respond to that love then His love shall broaden our hearts and what do we read later on in this chapter love casts out fear fear has to do with punishment when we're serious about a relationship with God before we become a believer we're often filled with fear aren't we fear of the future fear of eternity fear of judgment because we know we can't please God we know we've fallen far short of His standard fear has to do with judgment but that's not the kind of fear that God wants God wants a reverent fear born of love and that's what the Bible means when it says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom it is this reverent fear before God which responds to His love and that kind of love once we bow before Him and acknowledge Him as our Lord and receive His forgiveness then that love drives out fear of judgment drives it out entirely drives away all doubt because when we respond to God's love then we are certain that His love will never change He'll never take His love away from us He doesn't change His mind He doesn't say oh well I've loved you in the past because you've been doing alright but now you're not doing so well take away my love

and I'll punish you not at all once He sets His love upon us we are received as His children oh yes He may chasten us He may discipline us as we were noticing a few weeks ago but that is done in love for the purposes of salvation for the purposes of perfecting us and perfecting our love we do not need to fear punishment we do not need to fear judgment again assurance of God's love leads to boldness how often does Paul use does John use this word in his epistles we have boldness or confidence as the NIV says the authorised version says boldness and the NIV says confidence both good translations assurance we could also say the word was originally used as someone who would stand up and confidently speak in public that was the original use of the word in Greek and John is saying here once we know that God loves us and we love Him then we have boldness fear of that slavish fear of God is removed fear of man is removed and we are given boldness confidence into access to God boldness before others to witness and to testify to His saving grace may the Lord grant each one of us a blessing of assurance of His love as we prepare ourselves for the communion season next weekend