

The Abiding Life Leads to Assurance

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Date: 05 August 2018

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[0:00] Good morning. As we begin this morning, I'd like for you to imagine with me a sad situation.! Imagine that within the past year, a group of people have left Maranatha.

! Because of growing tension over some theological views that they had come to believe. You see, as they had begun to consider Jesus, they began to ask questions like, Is Jesus really God's Son? Is Jesus really the Messiah?

Is Jesus God? Is Jesus man? As their thinking on these theological issues began to unfold and tension within the church began to build, they decided that they would leave and go elsewhere. That in and of itself would be a sad situation, but it gets worse. Not only has this group left, but they've continued to be in contact with the people at Maranatha.

They continue to try to influence those that are still here to consider their new enlightened form of Christianity, to question their beliefs.

[1:20] Well, that in itself would also be sad, but it gets worse from there. You find out that this group that's left has targeted some of your dearest friends.

They've begun to talk with them and try to persuade them that they've missed it, that they haven't really believed the truth, that they've been deceived, and they need to consider these things about Jesus.

Is he truly all that we make him out to be? And to try to influence them, they are constantly telling them, we must be right. Look at how blessed we are in our lives.

God's given us all these material things. Well, your friends are beginning to question, are they really right?

Do they really have a relationship with Jesus? Is their theology correct? Do what they think about Jesus, is it true? Is what they've thought was going on in their life and their relationship with God, is it true?

[2:23] And as you find out your friends are struggling with these questions, you're greatly concerned. And so you sit down and begin to write a letter out to them, to challenge them about what they truly believe, to encourage them to see God's work in their life and how he has worked faithfully in their lives in the past.

And it's important for us to have this picture in our mind because that's exactly what is happening as John writes this letter to the church at Ephesus. That's the background.

And John, as we have seen again and again as we've worked through the book of 1 John, John is writing to challenge them to say, this is true religion.

This is what it truly means to walk with Jesus. And this is how God has been faithful in your life. Don't overlook these things. Don't be dissuaded. Don't be discouraged.

Don't be led astray. And this morning, the passage we come to is no different than that. But before we begin, would you join me in prayer?

[3:33] Father, we do come before you. And we ask that your spirit would be at work in our lives. Father, we come with various situations in our lives, in our home, our families.

We come with different struggles, with grief and loss, with struggling and suffering. And we come before you now and before your word. We ask that you would encourage us.

That you would strengthen us. That you would convict us and change us. That you would move each one of us closer to Jesus today through your word.

And it's in Jesus' name we ask these things and for his glory. Amen. This morning, we come to 1 John 4, verses 13 through 21.

1 John 4, verses 13 through 21. And it reads, And to believe the love that God has for us.

[5:15] God is love. And whoever abides in love abides in God. And God abides in them. 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. 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. We love because he first loved us.

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.

And this is the commandment we have from him. Whoever loves God must also love his brother. So this morning as we come to this section, this passage of scripture, the thing I'd like for us to see is that John is writing this to help the church at Ephesus know, know without a doubt, be sure that they are abiding in God.

[6:35] And that God is abiding in them. Be sure of their abiding relationship with God. And you may recognize verse 13 in a sense where it says, By this we know we abide in him and he in us because he has given us of his spirit.

It sounds very similar to what we see in 1 John chapter 3, verses 23 and 24, where it says, And this is his commandment that we believe in the name of his son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as he commanded us.

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. And chapter 4, verse 13, and chapter 3, verse 24 have a lot of similarities, but I want to point out to you the subtle yet important difference.

In chapter 3, John tells them that we know this is true because he's given us his spirit. But in chapter 4, John says, We can know this is true because he has given us of his spirit.

It's very little difference, but it's an important difference. It's not talking about the fact that here we have some assurance because we've gotten a part of the spirit.

[7:56] Like we could subdivide the Holy Spirit into pieces. It's not that we've gotten a part of the spirit, but it's about the product of the spirit in our lives.

And so I think we'll see in this passage here, John trying to show us we can have assurance of our abiding relationship with God because of the work of the Holy Spirit, what the Holy Spirit is doing in our lives.

And there's two main areas we're going to look at. But in doing this, I want us to try to make it practical and accomplish the same thing John is trying to do here.

I hope for us to be encouraged this morning as we look at this, to be assured of our abiding relationship with God. And in order to do that practically, we're going to stop seven times throughout this sermon and ask some questions for reflection.

Some things for you to just take a moment and ponder about your own life, hopefully so that we will be able to say with confidence at the end of the message today that we are assured that we are abiding in God.

[9:10] The first area we want to look at as far as the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives is that the Holy Spirit gives us true faith. The Holy Spirit gives us true faith.

And we notice, starting in verse 14, that the Holy Spirit gives us faith in God's Word. It says, And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent His Son to be the Savior of the world.

Now, John, again, is here referring back to himself and the other apostles, the first-hand witnesses about the work of Christ, even as he did at the beginning of 1 John.

And he's saying, We bear testimony to these things, the testimony of the apostles. And I think what we can see in this is that the Holy Spirit gives us faith in the Word of God and makes it meaningful to us.

Now, I want you to stop and consider for a second. Consider how amazing it is that the Word of God is meaningful to you. Okay?

[10:20] Now, this is a book that's thousands of years old. Thousands of years old. And it's full of miracles that many find unbelievable, including the creation of everything, a worldwide flood with a giant boat, the sun standing still in the sky, a man swallowed alive by a big fish, innumerable acts of a supreme being that truly are awesome, in the fullness of the word awesome, numerous prophecies, a virgin birth, a God that dies, as resurrections, a man that flies away into the clouds.

Now, most books that you would read with material like that, you would easily just sort of classify as, well, that's entertaining, or that's mythological, or that's nice.

But let's not stop there. Think about this. Not only does the Bible contain all of these miraculous stories, but the Bible is full of horrible stories. I mean, it's full of stories of murders, and rapes, incest, things that constantly are showing us again and again how wicked humanity is. I mean, honestly, as we look at it, we see even the majority of the heroes that we see in the Bible are capable again and again of the worst possible things.

Basically, Scripture leaves no question about the fact that there's no disgusting or gross act that's beyond us. We're completely broken with no way to fix ourselves.

[11:54] We're dead with no way to heal ourselves. I mean, it's the opposite of a self-help book, isn't it? Right? Time and time again, as you read the Word, it cuts to the very core of who we are as people and says, there is no one that's good.

Now, if you read any other book full of these kind of miracles, full of this kind of harsh truth about humanity, you would easily set it aside.

But yet, through the work of the Holy Spirit in your life, the Bible is meaningful to you. Let's stop and consider these first set of reflective questions, okay?

Do you believe the Bible is God's Word? Do you accept it as the very words of God? Do you believe it is completely trustworthy and reliable?

Do you desire for the Bible to be the supreme authority in your life? If those things are true, if that's true in any measure in your life, you need to understand that is the work of the Holy Spirit in your life, that is an evidence that you are in an abiding relationship with God.

[13:20] If it was not for the faith given you by the Holy Spirit, the Bible would be no more meaningful to you than any other book. But wait, not only does the Holy Spirit make the Bible meaningful to us, but it makes it precious to us, right?

It's not just a book, it's not just that we intellectually agree this is important or this is true, but it's precious to us. We long for it, we desire it, we find comfort in it, we find hope in it, we love it, we would be willing to die for it.

That's the work of the Holy Spirit. Consider these questions. Reflection number two, do you cherish God's Word? Do you long for it?

Do you savor it? Are you hiding it in your heart? Are you meditating on it with your mind? That's the work of the Holy Spirit in your life.

It's an evidence that you are in an abiding relationship with God. Now, let me give you a little disclaimer here. I'm not asking or even implying that you never have dry times or there are never times that you feel more indifferent to or more distant from or too busy or neglect the Word of God.

[14:44] That's not my point at all. But as you look at your life and the direction of your life, looking back to where you've come from, looking forward to where you're going, do you see in your life a growth in your desire for God's Word, your love for God's Word, your hunger for God's Word?

If you do, that is the work of the Holy Spirit in your life and an evidence that you are in an abiding relationship with God. So He gives us, the Holy Spirit gives us faith in God's Word.

But He also gives us faith that Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is the Son of God. In 1 John 4, 15, it says, whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in Him and He in God.

Now, the Holy Spirit not only makes God's Word meaningful to us, but the Holy Spirit makes Jesus meaningful to us. Again, stop and consider how amazing it is that Jesus is meaningful to you.

According to the Internet, which knows everything, there are 4,300 religions in the world. 4,300 religions in the world.

[16:04] And in each of those religions, there are people that started it, there are prophets, there are leaders, there are teachers, there are messiahs. And out of all of them, you don't believe in Muhammad or Buddha.

You don't believe in Joseph Smith or Charles Russell. You don't believe in Mary Eddie Baker, Mary Baker Eddie or in L. Ron Hubbard.

You believe in Jesus. You see, He has become meaningful to you. And notice, even in these verses, here we see Matthew chapter 24, verses 23 and 24.

Jesus Himself warning us, He says, Then if anyone says to you, Look, here is the Christ, or there He is, do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

Peter says it in 2 Peter chapter 2, verses 1 and 2. But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction, and many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.

[17:32] And even John, as we read earlier, 1 John chapter 4, verse 1, where He said, Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

You see, our world is in no want for Messiahs. There's tons of them, thousands of them, throughout history. They come again and again and again, and yet, amongst all of those, Jesus, has been made meaningful to you.

It's the work of the Holy Spirit. But again, as we also see, oh wait, I gotta pause for reflection number three. Reflection number three. Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God?

Do you believe that Jesus is 100% God and 100% man? Do you believe that Jesus lived a perfect, sinless, God-centered life?

Do you believe that Jesus died to take the wrath of God that you justly deserve? Do you believe that Jesus rose again? Do you believe that Jesus will return?

[18:50] Do you believe those things? That is the work of the Holy Spirit in your life, bearing testimony that you are in an abiding relationship with God. But not only has the Holy Spirit made Jesus meaningful to us, but again, He's made Jesus precious to us, right?

We love Jesus. We long for Jesus. We have a desire to be near Him, to be like Him. Our hearts are turned towards Him. As we read of His life, our hearts are stirred.

As we read of His love, we're emotionally moved. We don't just intellectually acknowledge He was a great teacher, but our hearts are moved with love and passion towards Him.

That is the work of the Holy Spirit. Reflection number four. Do you find yourself emotionally moved at the thought of Jesus? Can you honestly say that you love Him?

Do you desire to grow in intimacy with Him? Do you speak to Him often? Do you find yourself desiring to be with Him and to be like Him?

[20:01] Are you overwhelmed with His glory? Again, if those things are true in your life, they are the work of the Holy Spirit.

And it gives testimony, assurance, that you are in an abiding relationship with God. Now, again, I'll give you the same disclaimer. We're not saying that there aren't times when you are distant or there aren't times when you feel more disconnected or times when you don't feel as passionate about Christ, but looking at your life from where you were to where you're going, do you see growth?

Are you growing in your faith in Christ? Are you growing in your love for Christ? Are you growing in your intimacy with Christ? If so, that's the work of the Holy Spirit in your life.

So we see the Holy Spirit gives us faith in God's Word. It gives us faith to believe Jesus is the Son of God. It also gives us faith to accept God's love for us.

Verse 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.

[21:24] Now, not only does the Holy Spirit give us faith in his Word and faith that Jesus is the Son of God, but it's the very source of our faith that allows us to accept the fact that God loves us.

Now, I don't know about you, but I know personally, this is the area that's hardest for me. Being convinced of the fact that the Bible is God's Word, seeing in that all of his great glory, seeing in that my own sin, being convinced that Jesus is God's Son, looking at his life, how he walked in intimacy with the Father, how he was willing to give his life sacrificially for us, and then I look at me and I see how often I struggle, how often I'm still rebellious, how indifferent I can be to God, how much there is within me that pulls against the very things God longs for, and I think God's love for me truly is incomprehensible.

It doesn't make sense. I don't understand grace. And truthfully, it is only through the work of the Holy Spirit that I could have faith to believe that God could love me.

Reflection number five. Do you believe God really loves you? that he loves you in spite of all the reasons he shouldn't?

Do you abide in that love, reminding yourself regularly of the truths of the gospel? Do you find your heart overflowing with thanksgiving because of God's love for you?

[23:15] Do you find God's love for you overflowing into the lives of others? If you do, that's the work of the Holy Spirit in your life.

That's the evidence that you are in an abiding relationship with God. So we see the Holy Spirit giving us true faith, but I think we also see the Holy Spirit giving us true love.

The Holy Spirit giving us true love. He gives us love as God's children. love as God's children. And that true love as God's children changes both our relationship to God and our reaction to God. And let's look at the relationship with God. Romans chapter 8 verses 15 through 17 says this, 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.

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

[24:43] Or Galatians chapter 4, verses 4 through 7, where Paul writes, But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

And because you are sons, God has sent the spirit of his son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father, so you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

You see, the Holy Spirit giving us true love as God's children changes our relationship with God. We're no longer enemies of God. We come into his presence as his children, and because of that, it also changes our reaction to God.

Our reaction to God. And we see here in 1 John 4, 17 and 18, that we no longer need to fear death, judgment, and eternity because we have been given this love as his children.

It says, 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.

[26:05] 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.

So, because of the love that we've received as God's children, we no longer have to fear death. We no longer have to fear judgment to come. We no longer have to be fearful of eternity.

We don't come before him as his enemies, facing his wrath, but we come into his presence as his children. We can run into his arms lovingly, seeking to be in the presence of our father that we've longed to be near.

But I also think that this love as God's children enables us to handle the challenges that come every day, even now, without fear.

I don't know if you're like me, but when things are hard, when I'm struggling, when I'm facing suffering or challenges, things seem to be falling apart, something seems to be broken or I'm grieving, somewhere in the back of my mind, there's always this thought, well, here it is, finally, God is going to give me what I deserve.

[27:22] After all this time, I know I haven't been doing what I should be doing, and this is it. Finally, God's going to give it to me. But that's not what Scripture tells us. In Hebrews chapter 12, verses 7 through 11, it says this, it is for discipline that you have to endure.

God is treating you as sons, for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us, and we respected them. shall we not much more be subject to the father of spirits and live?

For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he, he disciplines us for our good that we may share in his holiness.

For the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

[28:39] So the Holy Spirit pouring out this true love into our lives as God's children changes how we can react to everything we're going through, especially when we face trials, when things are struggling in our lives, when we are suffering, when we're facing pain or brokenness.

We don't have to see it as God's wrath. even if we are guilty of sin, which of course we are, but even if we are, we are told here as his children, his discipline is not in anger but in love.

He's at work in us to change us, to give us the gift of holiness. And so we no longer need to respond in fear, even when we face these crises, these pains, these struggles in this life.

So reflection number six. Are you living in love as God's child? Are you living in love as God's child? Do you delight in running to him with every need, challenge, struggle? Do you find comfort in knowing that you can boldly approach the throne?

[29:56] Do you find comfort in knowing that any trial, struggle, suffering that you face now is still an expression of his love for you? Are you looking forward to eternity with him?

Again, if these things are true in your life, it's the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. It's the assurance you are in an abiding relationship with God.

But not only does the Holy Spirit give us true love as God's children, but he gives us true love for God's children.

Look at 1 John 4, 19-21. It says, we love because he first loved us. 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. And this is the commandment we have from him. Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

[31:06] And we've seen time and time and time again as we've gone through the book of 1 John. John's saying this. You can tell that religion is true. The love that those people have for the children of God.

We can see their faith is real because of the love they have for God's children. We can see that they really are walking with God because they will love those whom God loves.

He says it again and again and again and again and there's still more to come. But it's not really surprising because John's only saying what he's heard Jesus say.

You know Matthew chapter 22 36 through 40 where Jesus is being questioned about the greatest commandments. He says teacher which is the greatest commandment in the law?

And Jesus says to him you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment and the second is like it.

[32:06] You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets. Or in John 15 where he's speaking to his disciples he says this is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you.

Greater love has no one than this that someone lay down his life for his friends. Paul talks about it in Romans 12 10. Love one another with brotherly affection.

Outdo one another in showing honor. Galatians 5 13-15 where he says for you are called to freedom brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh but through love serve one another.

For the whole law is fulfilled in one word. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour one another watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

love for God's children but love for God's children. So reflection seven.

[33:10] Ask yourself these questions. Do you find yourself growing in love for God's children? When you act in unloving ways are you saddened and do you actively seek forgiveness and commit to change in those areas?

Are you actively evolved in the life of the church in order to love, serve, encourage, and care for your brothers and sisters in Christ? Are you seeking to actively outdo one another in showing honor?

Intentionally looking for ways to show love, care, and concern to those in the church? Are you sacrificing of your time, your money, your rights, in order to show God's love to his children? If those things are true in your life, guess what? It's the work of the Holy Spirit. It's evidence that you are in an abiding relationship with God.

Now, it's interesting, I got to this point and I realized, really, we're just talking about the gospel, aren't we? I mean, think about it. The Holy Spirit giving us faith to believe and cherish God's word, seeing in it God's great glory in our own sin, the Holy Spirit giving us faith to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior of the world, giving us faith to believe that God loves us in spite of our sinfulness, and that he's made us his own children through the work of Christ on the cross, and that from that everything in our lives change, right?

[34:45] Our relationship to God changes, our reaction to God changes, and our relationship and how we deal with each other changes, especially those who are our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Really, once again, we just have the gospel presented here. So, here we are. I hope by this point, everyone here is at one of two places.

I hope the majority of you are able to look at how the Holy Spirit is at work in your life, how he's given you true faith in God's word, true faith in who Jesus is, and in God's love for you.

I hope that you can see his true love at work in your life as you come to realize his love for you as his children, and as your love is growing for the other children of God, and that as you see the Holy Spirit doing that, that you can be encouraged, that today you can be assured, you can know for sure that you are in an abiding relationship with God.

You are abiding in God, and God is abiding in you now. If any of you are like me, I know, for me, it's much easier to look at what's not done than at what the Holy Spirit has already done.

[36:08] And so for you, I want to leave you with this quote, or maybe I should say for us, by John Newton. John Newton says, I am not what I ought to be.

I am not what I want to be. I am not what I hope to be in another world, but still, I am not what I once used to be.

And by the grace of God, I am what I am. And I hope that you can take time today and rejoice in the Holy Spirit's work in your life, and rejoice in God's faithfulness to you, be able to rejoice in the assurance that you are in an abiding relationship with God, and thank him, and rejoice over that.

But now maybe some of you here have heard all these questions, and it creates some doubt for you. Maybe even it's clear to you that you are not in an abiding relationship with God.

you look at all of these things and you realize that you are not able to have some assurance that the Holy Spirit is at work in your life.

[37:30] If by chance you fall into that category, let me challenge you even today to cry out to Jesus for mercy, for grace, to change, because the truth is the condition of your eternal soul is at stake.

So this morning, if you have questions, if you have doubts, if you are even sure that you don't have a relationship with God, let me encourage you.

We're going to have a prayer, and it's going to be up on the screen, and you can follow along, but I'll pray it. You just pray silently, and I would beg you, start a relationship with God today.

Let's pray. Oh, merciful God, I realize even now that I don't see in my life the evidence of your abiding presence, or the fruit of the Holy Spirit at work in me.

Instead, I see a faith in myself, and a self-centered life, and I realize that I cannot change without you working in me. so even now, I humbly ask that you would save me, that by your Spirit you

would open my eyes to clearly see the beauty of your word, the glory of your Son Jesus, and the love that you offer me because of his death in my place.

[38:59] Please give me a clean heart and a spirit that is willing to turn away from self-centered living and live a Christ-centered life of true love for you, and for your children.

Fill me with joy and peace as I come to accept the love that you offer me. From this day on, I will never consider myself to be my own, but to be yours and to surrender my life to Jesus as my Savior and my King.

And for his glory and in his name, I ask these things. Amen. Amen.