

## **“The Savior of the World” (An Exposition of 1 John 4:13-16)<sup>1</sup>**

### ***Introduction***

As we have seen a number of times throughout our study through John's first epistle, his primary concern and purpose in writing this letter to the churches is *that we who believe in Christ might have assurance of our salvation* – that we might *know* that we are saved. He tells us this plainly in 1 John 5:13, where he writes, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, *that you may know that you have eternal life.*” (Italics added)

*But why was this letter necessary?* Why was it necessary for John to write a letter like this one in order to help believers (both then and now) come to have a strong and certain assurance of our salvation in Christ? If you have been a believer for any length of time, you already know the answer to that question, don't you? Who among us *hasn't* struggled with doubt at times?

It is probably a very rare (even if blessed) case to find a Christian who has *never* struggled with doubt or a lack of assurance at one time or another in their lives. For any number of reasons many genuine and sincere believers in Christ at times find themselves struggling with doubts as to whether or not they are truly born again and reconciled to God.

*Why is that?* Why does this happen to us from time to time? There are many possible reasons for this. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* notes a number of them for us:

“True believers may have the assurance of their salvation *divers<sup>2</sup> ways shaken, diminished, and intermitted*; as, by negligence in preserving of it; by falling into some special sin, which woundeth the conscience, and grieveth the Spirit; by some sudden or vehement temptation; by God's withdrawing the light of his countenance, and suffering even such as fear him to walk in darkness, and to have no light: yet are they never utterly destitute of that seed of God, and life of faith, that love of Christ and the brethren, that sincerity of heart and conscience of duty, *out of which, by the operation of the Spirit, this assurance may in due time be revived, and by the which, in the mean time, they are supported from utter despair.*” (18.4, Italics added)

There is yet *another* cause - which is the primary one that John is dealing with in this letter - and that is *the awful influence of false teaching*. False doctrine and heresy are *harmful to the purity and peace of the church*, and that is because they are *harmful to the purity and peace of individual Christians*. It is not without reason (as we saw last Lord's day) that the Apostle Peter speaks of false teachers secretly bringing in “*destructive heresies*” (2 Peter 2:1, italics added).

False teaching seeks to undermine the purity of our *faith (what we believe)* as well as the purity of our *lives (how we live)*, and those two things are very closely-related. That is why the Apostle Paul speaks of the importance of “doctrine which is according to godliness” (1 Timothy 6:3, KJV).

We hope to see at least three (3) things from our text today. *First*, we know that we have peace and fellowship with God *because He gave us of His Holy Spirit*; *second*, we subsequently know that God gave us of His Holy Spirit *because we confess that Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of the world*; and *third*, we also know that God has given us of His Spirit *because we abide in His love*.

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> i.e. *various*

## *The Gift of the Holy Spirit (v.13)*

First things first, John tells us that God's gift of His Holy Spirit to us is the *evidence or proof* that we truly have fellowship with God through faith in Christ. In v.13 John writes:

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

In many ways this is *the primary proof* of our abiding in God and He in us – that God has given us of His Holy Spirit. This is much the same thing that John said back in the 1 John 3:24, where he tells us, “And by this we know that he [i.e. God] abides in us, *by the Spirit whom he has given us.*”

The Apostle Paul says something very similar in Romans 8:9, where he writes:

“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.*” (Italics added)

Everyone who belongs to Christ by faith has the Holy Spirit dwelling within them. If we have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit, then we abide in fellowship with God. If we do *not* have the Spirit of Christ, we are *not* His. It is that simple. In his book, *Old Paths*, J.C. Ryle (1816-1900) writes:

“The indwelling of God the Holy Spirit is the common mark of all true believers in Christ. It is the Shepherd's mark on the flock of the Lord Jesus, distinguishing them from the rest of the world. It is the goldsmith's stamp on the genuine sons of God, which separates them from the dross of false professors. It is the King's own seal on those who are his peculiar people, proving them to be his own property. It is 'the earnest' which the Redeemer gives to his believing disciples while they are in the body, as a pledge of the full and complete 'redemption' yet to come in the resurrection morning (Eph. 1:14). This is the case of all believers. They all have the Spirit.” (p.275)

And then (in case that were not clear enough), he adds:

“Let it be distinctly understood that he who has not the Spirit has not Christ. He who has not Christ has no pardon of his sins – no well-grounded hope of being saved.” (Ibid)

*The gift of the Holy Spirit and His work within us are in some ways the primary evidence or proof of our salvation.* It is by the work of the Holy Spirit that we are *born again* and made alive in Christ. In John 3:7–8, our Lord Jesus says,

“Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be *born again.*’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is *born of the Spirit.*” (Italics added)

Here Jesus clearly teaches us that to be “born again” is to be “born of the Spirit.”

It is the Holy Spirit who *works faith in us* so that we believe the gospel of Christ and are saved. It is the Holy Spirit who *sanctifies us*, so that we are more and more conformed to the likeness of Christ. It is the Holy Spirit who *seals us for the day of redemption* (Ephesians 4:30), and is Himself the seal and guarantee of our inheritance in Christ (Ephesians 1:13-14). And He “bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” through faith in Christ (Romans 8:16).

## ***The Evidence of the Holy Spirit's Work in Us: Confessing Christ (v.14-15)***

So far so good. The possession of the Holy Spirit as the gift of God is evidence that we have fellowship with God. *But how are we to know whether or not God has given us of His Holy Spirit?* Some claim that we are to know whether or not we have the gift of God's Spirit by means of *mystical or emotional experiences*, or so-called *sign gifts*, such as speaking in tongues.

But John says *nothing* about such things, does he? In fact, in our text John gives us least two (2) interrelated answers to the question of how we may know whether or not God has given us of His Holy Spirit. Simply put, *we are to look for the evidence of the Holy Spirit's work within us*, and the evidence pointed to in our text is at least two-fold. (These are *not* the only two things that John mentions.)<sup>3</sup>

The *first* evidence of the Spirit's work in us that we must look for is that *we confess Christ*. In v.14-15 John writes:

“And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. *Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God*, God abides in him, and he in God.”

This is no mere assent or acknowledgment of bare historical facts, although it certainly includes the affirmation and acceptance of the truths of the gospel. To confess these things is to *confess one's faith in Christ* – that *we believe* in Him as the very Son of God!

John tells us that he and the other apostles had *seen* with their own eyes and *testified* of the gospel of Christ, which he summarizes as being “that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.” *John Stott* writes, “Much Christian truth is contained in the straightforward affirmation of verse 14. Here is the essence of the gospel.”<sup>4</sup>

In fact, there is so much Christian truth or doctrine contained and condensed within v.13-15 that we cannot possibly touch on all of it in one sermon. (We certainly cannot hope to do it all justice.) But just so that we do *not* mistakenly think that the Apostle John is here giving us a kind of minimalist creed, consider just a few things that are taught in these verses:

First and foremost, in v.13-15 John explicitly teaches *the fundamental article of the Christian faith – the doctrine of the Trinity*. In v.13 he speaks of God having *given us of His Holy Spirit*; then in v.14 he speaks of *the Father sending His Son* to be the Savior of the world. And then, as if that were not enough, in v.15 he tells that that *everyone* who truly believes and abides in God “confesses that *Jesus is the Son of God*.”

And so here we see both the doctrine of *the Trinity* as well as the doctrine of *the incarnation of Christ* being clearly taught and affirmed by John. The Gnostics, of course, *denied* these truths, and in so doing placed themselves outside of the Christian faith altogether. *Jesus is the very Son of God!*

In addition to the Trinity and the incarnation of Christ, we also see implied the doctrines of *sin* and of *the atonement of Christ*, as Christ is said to have been sent “to be the Savior of the world” (v.14). That He is the Savior means there is *a need for us to be saved* – from our sin, and by His cross! Here also we see *the exclusivity of the gospel*, as Christ is the only Savior! When John testifies and tells

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3 In addition to this, back in 1 John 2:29 John also tells us that “*everyone who practices righteousness* has been born of him [i.e. God].” (Italics added)

4 *The Letters of John* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries), p.169

us that “the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior *of the world*,” He is telling us (as *F.F. Bruce* puts it), “the widest scope of the saving purposes of God.”<sup>5</sup> The Lord Jesus came “to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10), and not among the Jews only, but among the Gentiles as well.

The gospel of Christ is “the power of God for salvation to *everyone* who believes, *to the Jew first and also to the Greek*.” (Romans 1:16) That is why the gospel is to be preached *to the very ends of the earth* (Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8). And what will the result of all this be? In Revelation 7:9–10 John writes:

“After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

The Bible does *not* teach *universalism* – all people do *not* go to heaven when they die. All roads do not lead to the same place, and there are not many ways to heaven. But the Lord Jesus is “the Savior of the World.” He *has* saved, *is* saving, and *will* save such a great multitude of sinners that no one will be able to count them all, and they will be “from *every* nation, from *all* tribes and peoples and languages.”

That Jesus Christ is “the Savior of the world” also means that He is the *only* Savior. Acts 4:12 tells us:

“And there is salvation in *no one else*, for there is *no other name* under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

God the Father did *not* send His only-begotten Son to humble Himself even to the point of death on the cross in order to make Him one savior among many. Christ did *not* take the wrath of God for our sins upon Himself on the cross merely so that we could all come to God on our own terms.

The name of Jesus is the *only* name given under heaven by which we must be saved! And *everyone* born of the Spirit of God *believes* in Him alone for salvation from sin, and “*confesses* that Jesus is the Son of God” and “the Savior of the world.”

### ***The Evidence of the Holy Spirit's Work in Us: Abiding in Love (v.16)***

The *second* evidence or proof of the Holy Spirit's work in us that John gives us in our text is that *we abide in the love of God*. In v.16 he writes:

“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.”

The Apostle John repeats what he said about God back in v.8, that “God is love.” And his argument is much the same here as it was there – that *because* God *is* love, whoever truly has fellowship with Him and abides with Him by faith in Christ and by the work of the Holy Spirit, will necessarily abide in that love. Abiding in the love of God is evidence of the Spirit's work in us, and of our being born of God.

Simply put, it is *impossible* for someone to be born of God, and to abide in Him and have God abide in them, without also abiding in the love of God – both love for God and love for the brethren – being

evident in your life. *John Calvin* sums up John's statement this way:

“ . . .for from faith to love he reasons in this way: By faith God dwells in us, and God is love; then, wherever God abides, love ought to be there. Hence it follows that love is necessarily connected with faith.<sup>6</sup>

Do you *love the brethren* – your fellow believers in Christ, your family in the Lord? Do you love the Lord because in Christ He has first loved you? Do you *confess your faith* that Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of the world?

If these things are true of you, then you have good cause to see this as *evidence of God having given you of His Holy Spirit*, and of your truly being in the estate of salvation. You then have (in the words of *J.C. Ryle* that we saw earlier) “the common mark of all true believers in Christ” and “the Shepherd's mark on the flock of the Lord Jesus, distinguishing [you] from the rest of the world.”

And by this you may *know* that you have eternal life in Christ, and may be *assured* of your salvation in Him. To God be all the glory. - Amen

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6 *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), p.244