

**Reading:** 1 John 3:11-24

**Theme:** Present in God's Presence.

In the digression John made in v19-24, I hope we have seen the encouragements he gave to all who read his 1<sup>st</sup> letter. His aim was to encourage his 1<sup>st</sup> readers and us to see the grace evidences provided by the series of tests and to enable believers to know assurance of heart even in God's presence and to have confidence in prayer. This assurance of heart in God's presence, having confidence in prayer are for those who obey His command to believe in Jesus Christ and to love one another. These were the favourable conditions we noted for answered prayer and not the causes.

Obedying God's commands and doing that which pleases Him shows we are not self-centred and selfish in our prayer lives and desires. John moved quickly on to mention another area in v24. The tests John presents are not theoretical and isolated from life as it is, but are necessary for life in the real world, as we go about the nitty-gritty of real-life, with all its ups and downs, joys and sorrows, pleasures and heartaches, successes and failures. John has been showing us this already in a variety of ways in this letter. He reminded his readers of who they are and what they have - they are in fellowship with God and walking with Him; they are children of God and John wanted to encourage them to recognise the practical proofs of such. He was not content with just fine sounding words, but wanted them to have practical, visible, tangible and observable proofs, to grant us assurance of heart and confidence in prayer and life. These tests were to evidence such - obedience by keeping God's commands; social by loving brothers and sisters; theological by true belief in Christ.

Then almost as an aside, John speaks of an additional proof of being a Christian here in v24 - it is God's presence in us and us in Him. John uses the words "*live*" & "*live*" (NIV); "*dwelleth*" & "*abideth*" (AV) or "*abides*" & "*abides*" (in other versions) These words are both the same verb and same tense in the original and are used of us

in God and God in us! This is the area of our consideration this evening - Presence: our presence with God and more importantly His Presence with us. John uses this word abide, dwell or live many times in his writings. It is a word he learned from his time with the Lord Jesus and it remained with him. He uses it 34 times in his gospel and 18 times in this letter - to abide in God and Christ and They in and with us are glorious themes to develop, but we will only touch upon them here this evening. I want us to look at this verse and note 2 main things:

### **1. What a Christian Is.**

John gives a radical definition of what a Christian is. If we were to ask people what a Christian is, they may say something about going to church, born in UK, or C of E, believe in God, are religious, do good, or are good and nice people. John shatters these ideas and definitions and leaves them in pieces on the ground as he launches this rocket, this flare to show what a Christian really is. A Christian is someone who lives, abides in God and God in them! This is a new angle and a revolutionary approach! John has been and will continue to develop this theme, this gloriously high view of what a Christian is. Now the themes of John has already touched upon - of fellowship and sonship are put in the context, in the position of us dwelling in God and God in us. John mentions this concept of mutual abiding for the 1<sup>st</sup> time here in this letter and mentions God dwelling in us in 4:12b *“God lives in us and His love is made complete in us.”*

This may seem a strange picture, a huge concept to us, but John is simply repeating what he remembered Jesus saying. We are to remember these 1<sup>st</sup> readers were probably recipients of John’s Gospel, knew it and so John is reminding them of things they knew as fundamentals and basics. John, in his lovely gospel, records the teaching of the Lord Jesus and especially the close personal relationship that a believer has with not only Him, but with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit - especially in chapters 14-17.

In **chapter 15** Jesus is the vine and we are the branches and we need to abide in Him for life and fruitfulness. The moment we believe in the Lord Jesus as our Saviour we are in a life-giving union with Him that cannot be broken. We may not be as fruitful as we could or should be, but this union is always in place. We have the duty and privilege to live our lives so as to let His life be seen in us. This involves living a life in obedience to Christ as God and as we do so, we are aware of this incredible relationship and are to bear fruit.

Yet in **14:23** Jesus says even more! Living, abiding in Him will cause us, be the motive for our obedience to His teaching. As we do that we have the Father's love - in a particular sense in our lives, as He loves us as His children in Christ, and here it speaks of an intensity of pleasure and love - He and the Son of God will make their abode in such a life. I don't know about you, but that verse and its implications are of circuit blowing proportions. I cannot fully understand or grasp it, let alone even begin to explain it, but I want to know its truth as a felt reality in my life and in your lives also. Then in **14:16** Jesus spoke of us being given another Counsellor (Comforter AV) - another of the same sort as Himself, and He will be with us for ever. This Counsellor is the Holy Spirit and Jesus speaks of His presence in and with believers.

It is incredible that as a believer we are in a living union with God - in His presence, in union with Him and the new eternal life He gives us. We are not just saved and get on with life on our own, but He is with us, for He lives in union with us and we draw our strength, life, power, graces and fruitfulness from Him and He wants it so. In this relationship we are to continually keep His commands. In the verses we read in 1 John 3, John draws together, the various strands of teaching he has been giving in the 1<sup>st</sup> 3 chapters as he shows that knowing God and His presence is not some super spiritual state or mystical experience, but it has to be actively worked out - belief in

Christ, obedience to His commands and love for all who believe in Him.

John gives a very practical definition of what a Christian is. Yet it is also a gloriously exalted position. Perhaps we have never considered that a Christian is one who abides in God and God in them. Like many, we may have wrong ideas of what a Christian is and even how to become a Christian. Perhaps we are a Christian and yet we have low views of our position as a believer, for we look at how we feel, what we do, say and think for our comfort and assurance and it has proved hollow and left us full of fears and worries. We are to look up to God and what He has done, is doing and will do for us. We are to realise our exalted position and, from grateful loving hearts, live out His commands - not to appease Him, or gain His approval, but we do so in sheer delight, being confident He loves us. These things should transform our opinions of ourselves of other believers and transform the way we live. That is something of what a Christian is, now see:

## **2. Knowing This.**

You may feel I've prattled on and may be thinking "*So what? You can't fully understand it, certainly not adequately explain it, so how am I to know it?*" John gives us the answer in the last part of v24. Our knowledge, our personal, experiential knowledge of being in God and He in us, is mediated to, brought to bear in our lives by God the Holy Spirit who has been given us by God. John does not say that it is all based on how we feel, or even how the Holy Spirit makes us feel. John's been speaking of grace evidences - real and objective things that can be seen, noted, tested (*as he develops again in 4:1-6*). There is an objective element to the work of the Spirit of God and there is a subjective one too.

Often in our confused Christian scene, we could dismiss, or at least ignore the person, presence and work of the Holy Spirit as an

overreaction to the extremes and unbiblical nonsense some claim of Him. Yet He and His work are part of God's plan and outworking of salvation in His people. To some people they pretend that Acts 2 (*the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in all His fullness*), never happened at all. While others only stay there!

At Pentecost the Spirit came upon the Church in a way He could never have done before. It was a turning point in the life of the people of God. It is the cumulation of a series of events in the glorious panorama of the outworking of the plan of salvation that God has accomplished. We can go back to Creation and the Fall and God's announcement of the Seed of the woman, through the Flood, to the calling of Abraham, the people of Israel in Egypt, their deliverance from there through Moses, being brought into the Promised Land and settling there; the times of the Judges, the establishment of the kingdom, especially David; their obedience and rebellion and going into Babylonian exile and restoration; the 400 years of inter-testamental history and then we see the Son of God incarnate, born of Mary, laid in a manger in Bethlehem, living a perfect life, carrying out a wondrous ministry that was to climax in His laying down His life on the cross of Calvary to save us. Yes, we see the wonder of His resurrection and then His ascension into heaven. All these are facts of biblical redemptive history, but there was more, for it includes the coming of the Holy Spirit, for even this event is part of the glorious plan of salvation.

The coming of the Holy Spirit is the final proof of who Jesus is - Peter argues this in Acts 2:32-35 - the Holy Spirit poured out by Jesus to prove He is the Christ, the Saviour of the world. The Holy Spirit is given as a gift to the Church also shows Jesus' work was sufficient and it was not 'just' proved by the resurrection, but also by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in His fullness. The Lord Jesus had promised another Comforter - one like Him to make the things of salvation real to the apostles and to all who believe in Him. The

Holy Spirit takes and applies the work of Christ to us today and we are no losers for not seeing Jesus in the flesh. Yet the Holy Spirit's outpouring also underlines the reliability and truth of the Scripture - as Peter also pointed all to that in Acts 2:16ff.

The reality of the Holy Spirit is a fact, an objective and glorious fact of divine biblical revelation and real history. He is still with the Church, this church, us as individual believers. This real Holy Spirit manifests, shows, reveals Himself and His work in observable ways in our lives - the tests John gives point us to the grace evidences of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives.

As believers we have all received the gift of the Holy Spirit personally. We are in God and God in us and this is primarily known through the work of the Holy Spirit. A Christian is someone who has been born-again of the Holy Spirit - He gives us new life, regenerates us. No one can be a Christian without the Holy Spirit. We do not believe and then at a later date receive the Spirit. It is He, the Person of the Holy Spirit who works in us to give us life, enables us to believe (*faith is a gift from God by His grace*) and He makes us partners of the divine nature and we are in union with God, and He is in union with us for ever. With the Holy Spirit abiding, living in and with us, our lives are to evidence the outworked proofs of these tests, the grace of God in our lives and we are to be looking for such in the lives of all who profess to be believers, as well as in our own lives.

Yet there are also subjective, internal evidences of the presence and work of the Holy Spirit that are to be noted and recognised in conjunction with and alongside the observable grace evidences. It is an encouragement to note both together. The NT shows us that if the Holy Spirit has come to a person's life then certain discernible, but internal things occur in a person before, in and after conversion:

- we may be aware of power dealing with and in us. Something is happening with our lives and its normal course. We are pulled up short and faced with thoughts of God and eternity. It may be suddenly or gradually; through a meeting or event, or a series of events and thoughts. Perhaps before we did not think about God etc. but now we find we are disturbed and our minds want to know answers to questions.
- Then we find not just questions and disturbances, but we come to have an interest in the things of God, for we need to know answers and the Bible, even sermons are no longer dull, but catch our interest and give us answers to questions we want answered. Why do these things happen? It is the Holy Spirit who is at work and He the Spirit of truth is leading and guiding us into the truth.
- This newfound interest in God etc. starts to give us hope, but the same time we also begin to feel hopeless - even feel useless, unworthy, we feel something of our sin and wrong before God. We don't like this realisation and revelation of our lives, but more and more we realise it is true. It is God the Holy Spirit convicting us of sin, judgement and righteousness.
- As these things are happening, we come to see Jesus as the only Saviour and only way to God. We may realise this in stages or over a period of time, but it becomes clear and we call on God to receive us, even with all our faults, failings and we own we don't like them, even hate them and we turn from them to God through Jesus. We usually use one word to describe this process - repentance.
- Only the Holy Spirit's work can enable us to truly do this and as we do so, the same Holy Spirit causes us to know - in some people perhaps suddenly and at once; or in others it happens over a period of time - that God has received us and we are His child.
- The Holy Spirit enables us to grow as a Christian, to live out our Christian life; to bear the fruit of the Spirit. It is He who grants us a love for our brothers and sisters in Christ and to live more obediently to Him. Yes, He will let us know we're still imperfect,

that He has to keep on cleaning out our life, but even that is in evidence of Him living within us.

- He will witness to our Spirit and heart that we are God's child (Romans 8:15-16 *"For you did not receive a Spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by Him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself testifies with our Spirit that we are God's children."*) The Holy Spirit will always lead us in the ways of holiness and never into the ways of sin.

These are some of the subjective, internal proofs of the Spirit of God in you and me. John speaks here of the Holy Spirit's presence and He will go on to speak of His work as a witness in 4:1-6 and of His authenticating work in 5:6-8 - but they are for future sermons.

Our God is so loving and gentle. He has not left us on our own, but sent the Holy Spirit down to be such a help and comfort to us concerning His presence in us and we in Him. I pray we may know His presence and work in a felt and recognisable way in our lives, in the life of the church and we all will delight in being in union with Him.