

Reading: 1 John 4:7-5:1

Theme: God Abides in Us!

Recently as we have looked at the passage we read, we have seen that God's essential nature is love and His love has been revealed in this world, especially in and through the cross of Christ (v9-10). John moves on from those sublime truths to what seems the ridiculous, the mundane in v11 & 12 as he moves from the pleasant to the practical and shows how the way such truth is to affect our lives; he showed how it is our duty and privilege to love other believers, then how it is worked out as we need to consider self and others – who we are before God and how God's love has been lavished on us and let that love affect how we see and deal with others. God's love is to be both the reason we love others and the resource we draw such love from, constantly drawing of and from that love of God in Jesus. In this way we are able to be audio-visual, interactive displays of His love – we are to be living personifications of His love in and to the world and places we find ourselves.

In many ways v11 is a straightforward enough verse, with its real and important implications laid on all believers. Then John, being John, goes and puts in a verse that is a real humdinger of a verse. Many commentators say this is a most difficult verse, even one saying it is the most difficult of all looked so far in this letter! What a lovely way to encourage preachers in their preparation! It is a difficult verse from the standpoint of its precise interpretation in its position and context here in this chapter.

John suddenly writes this typically John - type verse, but why? Commentators remind us of John's circular thinking and writing - he has already mentioned that loving other believers shows that we are born of God and know God (v7) and if we do not love in this way we do not know God (v8) - for God is love and then he develops thoughts around that and then in v12 returns to knowing God again "*No one has ever seen God...*". Note that v12 is connected to knowing God, His love and the commandment, the duty and privilege of all believers, to love one another. John ties up in this verse all those things and links them to the very being of God with believers. Matthew Henry entitles this verse "*The Christian's love is an assurance of the divine inhabitation.*"

John has written amazing and glorious things, things that could appear mystical, but he grounded them in reality and practice in v11. Here in v12 he will go on to show the benefits, the blessings that such love, demonstrated in and through us, is to us as individuals and a fellowship of God's people. It is important that we love other Christians from the standpoint of our own assurance - which is a theme he touched on in v7. Although we have broken these verses down into bits and looked at them in detail, we are not to lose the overall intimate connection between these verses, nor their overall impact as they are to come over us as tsunami. Let's see 3 things in this verse:

1. The Invisible God.

God is love, God is light (holiness), God is Spirit. We know God is not visible, He is unseen spirit, He has no body. Yes, the Bible uses pictures and descriptions of God as if He had a

body and we call these *anthropomorphisms* - attributing human traits, abilities and functions to God to help us understand things. God is invisible to the human eye and has no tangible shape or form. In OT God did take human form and was seen. Usually it is thought that these are appearances of God the Son before He took real humanity permanently to Himself and we call these *theophanies* (God appearances).

We can trace these throughout the OT - as the Lord appeared to Abraham at his tent and told him the birth of his son Isaac and of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, or to Joshua as captain of the Lord of hosts, or to Elijah as the angel of the Lord in 1 Kings 19; to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace. Moses wanted to see God's glory, but he was told "*you cannot see my face, no one may see me and live*" (Exodus 33:20). Yet God allowed Moses to glimpse and to see the back of His glory (Exodus 34). The NT also emphasises this fact that God is invisible (1 Timothy 1:17, 6:16). Yet as we move over into the NT we encounter:

2. The Incarnate God.

John himself writes in his gospel (1:18) that "*No one has ever seen God*", but he wrote there in the context of God the invisible appearing in the life and person of the Lord Jesus - i.e. the incarnation, where, as Wesley wrote in a hymn, "*God the invisible appears*" and in His life, in His teaching, in His death, resurrection and ascension this God is seen, is revealed, is made manifest, especially that God is love and that love is shown, manifest among us. We need to see, recognise and know this invisible God in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is made visible and tangible in Jesus and when we have trusted Him as our Saviour, this God is known personally.

When John used this similar phrase in his gospel, it was to declare that God was known and shown as the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us - the incarnate God. Now look at how John uses the phrase here as he ties it into our loving one another, to our love and lives! This should cause us to sit up and see the seriousness of the responsibility we have laid on us - we are to be living embodiments of God and His love in the world. We are to be more than representatives, we are to incarnate God in our love and actions and embody Him in the flesh as we show His love in this world. Don't get me wrong, I am not saying we become divine in any way shape or form, but we show the love of God in a tangible way as we show love to one another. We are to know and show the love of God, that God is love, that God so loved us that we show it by our love to one another. Francis Schaeffer calls such love *"the ultimate apologetic"*. The Lord Jesus showed us this in John 13:35 *"By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another."*

People are to see and recognise that there is a God by the way we live our lives, by the way we interact and love one another as believers, even showing that love to those who oppose or even resent and persecute us. We are to represent and embody God in His love in our lives and put flesh on the God we know. We are not to encourage people to look for the vision of God, for God is invisible, nor are we to hanker after such for ourselves as believers. We are to pray God would be seen

and revealed in and through our lives, especially our love for other believers.

In fact, John says God's love is perfected, made complete in us! This is a big thought and concept. It does not mean that God's love lacks anything, nor is it deficient without us. God's love comes from His essential character and being as love, He has no lack, no weakness, His love does not ebb or flow, come and go, but is ever toward us and His love is best enjoyed from personal experience. Yet where His love is proclaimed in His word, proved at the cross, it is also perfected in the lives of believers. As incredible as it seems, God's love is not made perfect, complete to the world's understanding around in and through angels, but in sinners like us who have been saved by grace. Yes, we are still saved sinners, with many failures and shortcomings, but we are to let the love of God be known and shown in and through our lives as we are living displays that there is a God and He can be known as we embody God's love, making it real to those around us. Furthermore, John tells us of:

3. The Indwelling God.

It may seem incredible that God is to be embodied in us by our loving one another, so completing, fulfilling His love known and shown in this world, but John says something even more awesome - God dwells in, lives in, abides in us. John likes the word translated here "*live or dwell or abide*". He uses it 5 times in v12-16, let alone the many uses in this book and his gospel. John says that if we are able to love one another, then it shows us that God lives, dwells, abides in us! This is an awesome subject and one we will come across

much in the next verses. All I want to do now is to give a brief taste of its scope, but we are to realise we are dealing with precious truths here concerning the intimate relationship of God with us and us with God. Even though it will stretch our minds, I pray it will more and more affect our hearts.

This God who is love, who is almighty, eternal, that no man has seen, says He dwells, lives, abides in us! We are not to try and picture this in a material way and imagine that God lives in some spiritual niche in our bodies. We are to remember God is spirit and cannot be seen, measured or quantified. Yet in a mysterious way He dwells, lives, abides in us.

Throughout the Bible we see a progression of God's dwelling place with mankind. In the Garden of Eden, we read God visited the garden in the cool of the evening and that Adam and Eve had immediate and intimate fellowship with Him. This was broken when they sinned. As we go on into Genesis we learn of those who walked with God - Enoch, Noah and Abraham. As we move over into the book of Exodus we find God chose to live or dwell among His people - the Tabernacle and God moved into it in a glorious way and dwelt in the camp, in its midst. The people sinned and God's glory departed and yet under Solomon the temple was built and again God's glory came upon the temple as God dwelt among His people. Sadly, again due to the people's sin, the glory departed, as we see in some of the visions Ezekiel had.

Then remarkably the glory and God returned - now in an amazing way as God was incarnate (John 1:14) and God was with us (Emmanuel) and He was walking, talking, moving,

preaching, teaching and doing miracles. Mankind saw such, some marvelled, others had Him crucified, but He rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, from where the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit to dwell, to live in and abide in all who trust the Saviour.

The glory of God now dwells, lives in us. The Lord Jesus promised He will abide with us for ever (John 14:16). It is incredible that He takes up His abode in us - the eternal God, by God the Holy Spirit, enters our lives as believers, moves in our lives, deals with our lives, organises and reorganises our lives, and reveals Himself in our lives. The mechanics of it, the whys and wherefores we cannot understand, but it is a truth, a reality when we become a believer and John writes more of this in v13.

We do not often or clearly think and chew over this glorious truth, but this truth is part and parcel of what it means to be a Christian - God lives in us by God the Holy Spirit and we live in Him. I quoted Matthew Henry's words earlier "*The Christians love is an assurance of the divine habitation.*" If we find we are praying for an unloving person, praying for someone who has been persecuting us, annoying us, irritating us, clashing with us, if we find we would help and give to that one and desire their true good without too much grumbling murmuring, then we are to take comfort and encouragement that God's love is working out in and through us. That then means we are indwelt by Him and are making manifest His love.

This love of God being known and shown to one another, declares to us that we are God's - it gives us an assurance. Yes, that love may be weak, faint, burn low at times, it may need to grow and develop, but we see it as an evidence of us being God's child and He is living in us, else we could never do what we are doing by loving those who to us would naturally be unlovely.

Loving our brethren and sisters in Christ is a source, an unmistakable source of assurance - we could never love them unless God was living in us and His love was stirring us to love as we should and as He has enabled us to do so. This little verse is packed with amazing truths, but truths that are to be worked out in the arena of practical day by day living, and then they will become more and more a comfort and assurance to us as we do.