

**1<sup>st</sup> John 3: 18-24; “The Spirit Abiding in Us”, A sermon delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall, for those gathered at the Premier Estates Nursing Home on May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018,**

Our verse says that “we know that He abides in us because of the Spirit whom He has given us.” Let’s think together this afternoon about this truth. There is a real experience that every Christian has of Christ abiding in him, because each Christian has been given the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit within the Christian is Christ’s way of manifesting Himself to us. In what ways does the Holy Spirit represent Christ abiding in the life of the Christian?

**Well, 1<sup>st</sup> of all, Christ, by His Holy Spirit, helps us to learn the way of righteousness is keeping His commandments.**

In verses 20-23 John speaks about our having confidence before God in prayer. He says that we can have confidence before God in prayer, as Christians, if our heart does not condemn us. Our heart (that is, our mind, and our affections, and our conscience) will condemn us as a Christian, if we are regarding iniquity in our hearts. However, we should also understand that because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross for our sins, God will not condemn us to hell, if we are trusting in Him, because we are justified, (we have been declared righteous by God through faith in Christ’s finished work of perfect obedience and sufferings on the cross for our sins). And we are sanctified; that is, God has changed our heart in regeneration by the Holy Spirit, and He has broken the dominion and power of sin over us. Further, the Father and the Son will impart sanctifying grace to us day by day by the Holy Spirit so that we will be progressively changed and transformed into His image and likeness over time. So, every Christian knows the reality of God’s working in their heart and life; fitting their hearts for heaven and perfect holiness.

As we go about to attempt to live our lives to the glory of God, we very much need to receive this blessed truth of 1<sup>st</sup> John 3: 20, that God is greater than our heart and knows all things. He knows when our conscience is fulfilling its office, and the duty for which He placed it in our being, and He knows that we will not have a clear conscience if we are regarding sin, or tolerating its residence in our hearts. We find this truth plainly declared by the Psalmist in Psalm 66: 18 – “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear.” “But certainly the Lord has heard me; He has attended to the voice of my prayer.” “Blessed be God, Who has not turned away my prayer, nor His mercy from me!”

Our prayers, therefore, should often be made in relation to our being able to keep God’s commandments. We are keeping His commandments if we are trusting in Christ, having believed in Him for our salvation, and when we are continuing to ask for God’s help, by grace, to keep all of the moral commandments of God’s holy law. Our commandment keeping is not legal, we are not trying to justify ourselves in the sight of God through our obedience. Our obedience is flawed and incomplete in so many ways. But our obedience, and our good works are wrought (they are done) “in Christ” and they are seen by God through the lens of God’s looking at Christ, while He is also looking after us, to build our faith, and to lead us in the path of righteousness, in order that we might make progress in keeping His commandments.

Our righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees because it is a righteousness not our own, but a righteousness founded in Christ, proceeding from Christ, and covered by Christ’s blood. We strive to be found in Him, as the Apostle Paul says, “not

having my own righteousness which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformable to His death.” This is the reality of what it means to keep His commandments.

It was Christ who has fulfilled God’s holy law, not us. We are sinners by nature, but by faith in Him, He makes us acceptable in the sight of His Father and ours. We are becoming the righteousness of God in Him. A great part of our becoming righteous in this way is our learning to love one another. Romans 13: 8 says, “Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.” “For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not bear false witness, You shall not covet,’ and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” “Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.” Keeping these commandments means that we are abiding in Christ. And abiding in Christ means that we will bear much fruit to the glory of God, because He is at work in our lives; He is abiding in us.

**2<sup>nd</sup> – The Spirit Who is given to us is Christ’s personal representative coming to help us to live the Christian life.**

Being a Christian is not something that you can do apart from Christ. I think that we can see this clearly if we look at John chapter 13. So many things became clear for the disciples of Christ on the night on which the Lord Jesus was betrayed; the night before His crucifixion, in terms of what it would mean for them to live the Christian life. In verse 31 the Lord Jesus Himself speaks of what He will do in going to the cross in this way. “Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in Him.” “If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately.” I want you to see from Jesus’ words here that sometimes the issues related to our whole life and everything that we believe and stand for, can sometimes come to fruition suddenly. And we cannot escape them. Jesus could not escape them. Indeed He had come into the world to face them for our salvation’s sake.

He used this time with His disciples, before He went to the cross, as the opportunity to do the Father’s will, in order to teach His disciples that the way of righteousness. The way of righteousness, He knew that this would best be demonstrated by showing His disciples that they could not take their stand for truth and righteousness with Him without His grace. He was going to demonstrate this to them at the very time when His own disciples did not understand why He must suffer and go to the cross. He was going to go to the cross to die for the sins of all of God’s elect people; not just those disciples of that day, but also for all of the disciples in all generations of history. And as He was undertaking this great work, the one instruction that He gave to those disciples there on that day, was the instruction found in verse 34. “A new commandment I give to you, that you also love one another.” “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” This is also the commandment of our text in 1<sup>st</sup> John 3: 23, and it applies to all of us who would be disciples today. Why is this commandment so important? It is important because of the things that we do not know, and cannot understand, that will come to us in the Christian life suddenly.

We find a practical example of this in Peter. Perhaps no one of the disciples wanted to do and to live for the Lord Jesus as much as Peter did. And yet no one failed Him more, on this critical night, than Peter. Peter was thinking that night, that love to Christ meant that he must do something dramatic in order to help His Lord out; to protect Him, and to

stand with Him, in His hour of need. He says to Jesus, “Lord, where are You going?” in verse 36. Usually, as disciples, we want to help and to serve Christ. We see how greatly He and His cause need us. Peter said to Jesus in verse 37, “Lord, why cannot I follow you now?” “I will lay down my life for your sake.” This was a very noble thing for Peter to say, but the Lord knew that it would take His precious grace, working in Peter’s heart, before he would be able to truly follow Him in the way that Peter wanted to follow Him, and suffer for Him.

You and I need to see the same thing. In fact we, like Peter, will become miserable failures if we try to live the Christian life without this precious and powerful grace. In verse 38, Jesus says to him, “Will you lay down your life for My sake?” “Most assuredly I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times.” Now, I want you to see that Jesus understood that this statement of His really troubled Peter, and that was why He followed it up with this famous statement which is usually quoted at funerals, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.” In the context it was given to show the disciples the way to serve the Lord Jesus. This is the other command of John’s in verse 23 of 1<sup>st</sup> John 3; to believe in Jesus. This is where the Christian life begins, and this is where it continues; and it never ends until our death.

What Jesus is showing us is that Peter needed His constant help. But Jesus was going to go to the Father to prepare a place for His disciples. And He plainly told them in Chapter 13, verse 36, “Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you shall follow me afterward.” So how are we as Christians to live the Christian life? We are to live it by faith in Christ, and by love for Jesus Christ. We live remembering for all that He does for us, and in us, by His precious grace, and we obey His commandments in the conscious dependence upon His imparted grace. In Chapter 14, verse 15, it says, “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever – The Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor know Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. “I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.”

This is very significant. Christ will not leave his disciples as orphans. We have believed in Jesus, that He died for us, so that we might live spiritually. We love Jesus because He first loved us. If we love Him we will keep His commandments. As we are keeping His commandments we will receive more of the Holy Spirit. This was the promise of Christ to His disciples, that they would receive this promise as a part of the intercession of Christ. He would “pray the Father, and He would give them another Helper”. This was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost when the Spirit was given to the Church. He now abides with all believers forever. He is the One who will really and actually aid our hearts and minds in keeping God’s commandments. He really will give the power, He really will help our minds to comprehend the Truth of the Word. He really will move in our minds to convince us where we are sinning, and what we should be doing in righteousness.

We have the Word, but we must also have the Spirit to keep the Word. This is what Christ meant when He said that He would come to His believing disciples. When He speaks of the Spirit’s coming, He speaks of it as “His not leaving them as orphans”. He would come to them. An orphan is one whose parents have abandoned him, or they have died. He cannot care for Himself, or provide for himself. He has no one to lead him or teach him. He cannot make his way through this world without help. So it is with the Christian. A Christian would never be able to live this Christian life, or make their way

through this world without the Spirit's help. But Christ will not leave the believing disciple as an orphan.

**3<sup>rd</sup> – The Spirit is given to us after we believe.**

It is very true that the Spirit is at work in us before we believe in Christ. He is the One who is at work in the New Birth which precedes our faith, and His working in our heart is the cause of our faith. But our real and lasting sense of the Spirit's working in us does not come until after we have exercised that faith and we have believed in Christ, and we have received Him to be our Savior. Ephesians 1: 13 says, "In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory." This is something that each believer, to one degree or another realizes experientially. John 14: 21 says, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me." "And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." It was stated as a fact there in Ephesians 1, by the apostle, but the reality of His being with us is meant to become the basis of our fellowship with Christ. He is "Christ in us, the hope of glory".

He "testifies of Christ" to our souls. (John 15: 26) Christ is being manifested to the believer as the Spirit influences their heart and mind to consider what Christ has done for them, and what He would have them to do in their obedience to God's commandments, which are His commandments. The Spirit being given to us shows us the tangible love of Christ and the Father to our souls. Listen to John 14: 23. "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him and We will come to him and make Our home with him." The Father and the Son do this in the gift of the Spirit. Then when He has been given to us, after we have believed the gospel, He comes, as it says in Romans 8: 26, to help us to pray. "Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses." "For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." Then it goes on to say that "Christ who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God." This is how we know that Christ abides in us, by His Spirit Whom He has given to us.