

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor
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1 John 4:13-16a (read v.12 also) “Assurances of God’s Love”

Intro. In this fourth chapter of 1 John, the apostle tells us much about God’s love. Twice, in vv. 8 & 16, he tells us plainly that God is love. This concept of a loving God was new to the ancient world, and I am sure there were some in John’s day who would question that claim about God. In that day the average man on the street did not believe that the gods loved them. Instead, they believed the deities were mostly indifferent to man, or even hostile to man. And according to natural appearances, we can understand why people did not believe in the love of God. There was so much sin and suffering, especially in the pre-Christian world, that many would not even *imagine* that there is a Supreme being who loves us. They had no problem believing in the wrath of the gods, but certainly did not believe in the love of God.

Even in our day, when so many are eager to believe that God is love, some question or reject that truth. There are two main times when people doubt the love of God for them. The first is when tragedy strikes. We say, “God, if you love me, why did you let this happen?” In the movie, “The Hiding Place,” there were some who questioned how God could be love and yet allow Corrie Ten Boom and others go through the suffering of a concentration camp. Secondly, people may doubt God’s love when they think of their own unworthiness. We may say, “How could God love me when I have sinned so many times?”

So in spite of how we may feel, and in spite of appearances to the contrary, John affirms the fact of God’s love for us. And not only that, but he also gives us some evidences of God’s love. As we see in v.12, we cannot see God. How then do we know He loves us? Well, John gives a subjective assurance of God’s love, and then he gives an objective assurance of God’s love. We are going to see that God has not only declared that He loves us, but He has also proven it to us. I hope you will remember this teaching the next time you or someone you know doubts God’s love.

So let’s look into this passage of Scripture and see how God assures us that He does indeed love each of us. The first assurance of His love that we see from our text of Scripture is:

I. THE ABIDING PRESENCE OF THE SPIRIT

Look again at vv.12-13, “No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.” In v.13 John gives us 2 basic truths that assure us of God’s love:

A. God Abides in Us – Notice in v.13 that John says, “we abide in Him, and He in us.” Likewise, he says in the last of v.15, “God abides in him, and he in God.” The words translated “abide” (*meno*) means “to abide with, to stay with.” Do you realize that God actually lives within us? Col. 1:27 says, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Stephen said that God does not dwell in temples made with human hands. Instead, he dwells in His people, as 1 Cor. 6 teaches. Imagine the wonder and the privilege of having God abide in you! He does not leave us or forsake us. We see this in the tenses used here. The words “has given” in the last of v.13 are in the perfect tense,

which implies that John is speaking of a permanent abiding. Also, “abides” in v.13 is in the present tense, which refers to the fact of the continual and ongoing presence of the Spirit in our lives. Furthermore, John 14:16 says, “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever.” Before going back to heaven, Jesus said to His disciples, “lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Mt. 28:20).

John again and again tells us that God abides in and with us. Why does he mention this? One way a person proves that he loves someone is by staying with that person and spending time with that person. God assures us of His love by His abiding presence through the Holy Spirit.

When I fell in love with Cheryl, I wanted to be with her. And yet, as we were dating, I always had to say goodbye and go home. We both wanted to be with each other all the time, so I asked her to marry me. Then she said “Yes” over 40 years ago. We really liked being together, just the two of us, for our 40th anniversary vacation. Yes, when you love someone, you want to be with that person, and God shows His love by abiding with us by His Spirit.

But how do we know that God dwells in us? John tells us in the last of v.13, “because He has given us of His Spirit.” The presence of the Spirit of God gives us the assurance we need. Rom. 5:5 says, “...the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” But how do we know that the Holy *Spirit* indwells our lives? Notice carefully how John states the last of v.13, “because He has given us of His Spirit.” John does not simply say that God has given His Spirit to us. Instead, notice how John puts it. We know God dwells in us, because He has given us “of” (*ek*) His Spirit. “Of” the Spirit we receive certain blessings when we are indwelt by the Spirit, such as:

1. The Fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) - Jesus taught that we know a tree by its fruit. Do you bear the fruit of the Spirit in your life? Do you have joy? Do you have peace? And in Paul’s list of the fruit of the Spirit, what heads the list? Love. The last of v.12 indicates that love is the crowning evidence of the believer’s living union with God, and of being indwelt by the Spirit of God.

2. The Gifts of the Spirit - Paul and Peter wrote about the gifts of the Spirit. We find that every believer has a spiritual gift, a Holy Spirit given enablement. Some have the gift of teaching. Some have the gift of preaching. Some are gifted at exhorting. Some have the gift of service, or showing mercy, or giving. Do you have a spiritual gift? I’m not talking about a talent that you were born with. I’m talking about a Holy Spirit enablement that you received after you were born again. If so, that is a positive sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life.

3. The Leading of the Spirit - Rom. 8:14 says, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” Do you know what it is to be led of the Spirit? Have you experienced that inner prompting? Has the Spirit led you by bringing a Scripture to mind?

We certainly know that the spirit of God is with us when we experience:

4. The Filling of the Spirit - This is spoken of in Ephesians 5:18 and we have several examples in the book of Acts. This is when the Holy Spirit fully controls and empowers your life. This is a clear sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Then in vv.19-21 he gives other signs of being filled with the Holy Spirit. We will sing in our hearts in worship to the Lord on an ongoing basis. We will give thanks even in difficult circumstances. We will have a submissive attitude rather than a rebellious attitude.

So if you are a Christian, you know that God loves you because of the fact that His Spirit continues to live within you.

Not only does God abide in us by His Spirit, but also:

B. We Abide in God – John says in v.13, “we abide in Him, and He in us...” Likewise, he says of the believer in the last of v.15, “God abides in him, and he in God.” We also should realize that our life is not only on earth, but that we belong essentially to another order. Our life is “in God.” In Col. 3:3 Paul wrote, “For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”

To illustrate, put a sponge in the water, and soon the water will get in the sponge. Even so God is in us, and we are in God. There is a mutual abiding that takes places between the believer and God.

Now this reality is both a privilege and a responsibility. First, it is a:

1. Privilege - What a privilege to be “in Christ.” Why is this a privilege? Being in Christ gives us security. We share in His life and righteousness. Furthermore, the more and the longer we abide in the presence of Christ, the more we become like Him.

Dr. Jerry Vines tells the story of a man in his church who always had such a nice smell about him. Dr. Vines asked him why. He said that he worked in a wholesale florist. He worked with flowers all the time and being in the building with so many flowers made him smell so good. And you know, your atmosphere has a great deal to do with what you are. The closer you get to the God of love and the more you live in the atmosphere of the love of God, the more of the fragrance of love you will show to those around you. One reason I know God is love is because He changes His people into loving people by this mutual abiding.

John states that fact that we abide in Him. But this is also a:

2. Responsibility – Christ commanded us in Jn. 15:4 to abide in Him. To abide in Christ means to remain in spiritual oneness with Him, so that no sin comes between us. This includes maintaining a devotional life. Because we are “born of God,” we have union with Christ; but it is only as we trust Him and obey His commandments that we have communion with Him.

Another assurance of God’s love is based on the:

II. EYEWITNESS TESTIMONY OF THE APOSTLES

Now we need more than an inward evidence of the love of God. Subjective evidences are not always completely reliable. You may have heartburn and say that God is speaking to you. Rather, it is just a reaction you are having to something you ate!

So John begins v.14 by indicating that he and others (note emphatic “we”) were eyewitnesses of certain facts that prove that God loves us. He says, “And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.” “Have seen” in v.14 is from a Greek word (*theaomai*) which means to examine visually. It is much more than a passing glance. Also, it is a perfect tense, which means that their vision of Christ had produced lasting results in their lives. John was one of the apostles that spent three years watching and listening to Jesus. The apostolic faith was based on firsthand information. That is why John says in v.16, “And we have known and believed the love that God has for us...” Vv.14-15 states why John reached that conclusion.

A. That God Sent His Son – John says in v.14, “And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son” John affirms that he and others have seen the Son of God. They had seen enough evidence to be convinced that Jesus is the Son of God. They saw His miracles. They saw His acts of compassion and love.

It was enough for God to show His love in that Jesus simply came to this earth and became a man like us. John 1:14 tells us that Jesus, the living Word of God, was made flesh, and dwelt among us. Php. 2:8 says, “And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself...” What a loving act of condescension!

She was fifteen, and he was seventeen when they met. They dated through high school and no one was surprised when they decided to marry after her graduation. But four years later, she found herself standing in the kitchen with a mound of dishes in the sink, two small children at her feet, and a pile of dirty diapers in the corner! Tears were streaming down her face. In what may well be viewed as a rash decision, she took off her apron, grabbed her coat, and walked out! When she called that night, her husband answered the phone. He was angry and worried. He tried not to let it show in his voice when he asked, “Where are you?” She seemed to ignore the question when she asked, “How are the children?” “Well, if you mean have they been fed, they have! I’ve just put them to bed and I’m wondering where you are and what you’re doing.” She hung up the phone, but it wasn’t the last of her calls. She called once a week for the next four months, and each time, her husband would plead with her to come home. He would tell her the kids loved her and missed her and needed her, and wanted her to come home to be with them! But each time the conversation turned to her whereabouts, she hung up!

Finally, the young husband could stand it no longer! He took their savings and hired a private detective to find his wife. It didn’t take long for the professional to track her down to a third-rate motel on the sleazy side of Des Moines, Iowa. The young man borrowed money from his in-laws, bought a plane ticket, and flew to Des Moines. He flagged down a cab and drove to the motel. He climbed the stairs to his wife’s room on the third floor. With his hands trembling, doubt in his eyes, and sweat pouring down his face, he knocked on her door. When his wife came out, he forgot the speech he had prepared and simply said, “We love you so much! Won’t you please come home?” She fell into his arms and the two went home together that very night.

A week later, the dishes were done, the children were in bed, and husband and wife sat in the living room by the fire. He finally mustered the courage to ask her what had haunted him for so long. “Why didn’t you come home when we told you, over and over again, we loved you? And what made you change your mind?” He needed to know. She answered, “Because when we spoke on the phone...those were only words. But then you came for me!”

Long ago, the human race turned our backs on our Creator and “walked out” to try life on our own! We took off as prodigal sons and daughters. Since that day God has tried to win us back, to bring us home, by giving His law and religious rituals. He even threatened us through angry prophets ... but it just wasn’t working! He wasn’t getting through to us! So this God who loved us so went beyond words to action! He came to us! He sacrificed the joys and glories of heaven and came here to us...to this earth...as one of us! He was even willing to be born in a stable for animals, and laid in a feeding trough. And if this doesn’t tell you something profound about God, nothing will! God wouldn’t anything keep Him from reaching out to us. God would stop at nothing to bring us home! He came for us!¹

But God did far more than simply send His Son. “Sent” is actually a perfect tense, which not only indicates that the coming of Christ was a historical fact, but that there was an abiding mission involved. And so notice furthermore:

B. His Mission: To Save the World – Again, v.14 says, “And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.” That was clearly an act of great love.

1 Told by David Jeremiah. Also, from Chad West at SermonCentral.com [Illus.#C-1672].

The word translated “sent” (*apostello*) means to send on a mission. Likewise, John said in John 3:17, “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” Now the phrase “Savior of the World” has an important background in the times of Jesus. That title was not original to the New Testament authors. The title “Savior” was used of many deities, especially of Zeus. Also, the Roman emperors claimed that title and even claimed to be gods. One reason they claimed that title was because the Roman Empire brought peace to the world by the power of the Roman army. The emperors reminded the people of other earthly benefits that they had brought, such as safe travel and a degree of prosperity to many. Ah, but what a petty salvation compared to the salvation brought to mankind by the true Savior of the World!

Now the fact the Jesus is the Savior “of the World” means at least 2 things:

1. He Came to Save All People in the World – He is not just the Savior of the Jews or any other select group. I think it is significant that the only other place this exact title is found is from the lips of the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4:42. 1 Tim. 4:10 says of Jesus that He is “the Savior of all men...” This does not mean, of course, that all men will be saved, but it does imply that God has provided a Savior for all people, regardless of their national or ethnic origin.

Furthermore, notice in v.15 that John says, “whoever.” And as the old song says, “Whosoever, surely meaneth me.” This verse shows that Christ, who is potentially the Savior of the World, wants to be the Savior of each individual. He wants to be your Savior. 1 Tim. 2:4 says that God wills that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Is Jesus your Savior?

A certain Mr. Kline, discouraged, defeated, and convinced that life just wasn’t worth living because no one cared for him, walked past a church one Sunday evening when services were in progress. As the congregation sang, he caught the strains of an old hymn: “Saved by grace alone, this is all my plea. Jesus died for all mankind, and Jesus died for me.” His hearing however, was not very good, so when the congregation sang the words, “Jesus died for all mankind,” he thought they sang, “Jesus died for ol’ man Kline.” “Why”, he said, “that’s me!” Stopping in his tracks, he turned and entered the small auditorium. There he heard the simple message of the Gospel as the minister presented the good news that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Mr. Kline believed and was saved. [Told by Richard De Haan, son of M. R. De Haan].

2. He Came to Save the World Cursed by Sin - Jesus came, not only to save the souls of this world, but to save the world itself. Someday He will come again, and bring peace and justice to this world. He will lift the curse that is upon the earth (Rev. 22:3). Romans 8:21 says, “...the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.” He is indeed the Savior of the whole World!

So the apostolic witness was not a mere recital of facts (14a), but of facts with their interpretation (14b).

C. John’s Conclusion – Based on what he declared in v.14, John states his conclusion in v.16, “And we have known and believed the love that God has for us...” John is saying, “I have seen Jesus. I have heard Him speak words of love and forgiveness. I saw Him die on the cross. I saw Him after He had risen from the dead. I saw Him ascend into heaven with words of love for the world on His lips. I am totally convinced of the love of God.” But actually, he says “we”

emphatically. Regardless of the claims of others, John and the other apostles knew with absolute assurance that God is love!

I want you to note something else. We are not merely students reading a book, or spectators watching a deeply moving event. We are participants in the great drama of God's love! When John talks about the love God has "for us," that little phrase should actually read "in (*en*) us" or "among us." God manifests His love in and among us! We have felt His love, haven't we? We are under its power. God is not satisfied simply to tell us that He loves us, or even show us that He loves us. God's love will be *experienced* in us and then will be expressed through us to others.

D. What Is Your Response? Do you affirm what John has said? Do you know with such assurance the love of God for you? Look again at v.16, "And we have known and believed the love that God has for us..." We have "known and believed," and in that order. We must learn about God, and His love for us in the person of Jesus Christ, and then we can believe. I hope that you have learned a little more about Jesus, and God's love for you. So once you have heard and learned about the gospel, you have a decision to make. So I want to encourage you to make sure you have made the following responses:

1. We Must Believe - Note "believed" in v.16. Also, I get this from the true meaning of the word "confess" (v.15). It means "to agree with." This will involve first a belief and faith. Also, notice *what* we must believe. Several truths are brought out in our text.

a) "That Jesus is the Son of God" (v.15) - This confession of the deity of Jesus Christ implies surrender and obedience to His Lordship, not mere lip service.

b) That He is the "Savior of the world" (v.14) – Do you believe that Jesus Christ came to save us from our sin, by dying on the cross?

To own Christ as a great Teacher does not save; to acknowledge Him as the greatest among the sons of men does not bring deliverance; but to own Him as Son of God, to put one's trust in Him as the Savior God sent, this alone brings salvation.

c) That God Loves Us (v.16) – In light of the fact that God sent His Son into the world, and even gave Him up to die on the Cross to save us, surely He loves us! Do you believe this?

We must not only believe these truths, but also:

2. We Must Confess – Again, v.15 says, "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God." True faith will issue forth in confession. "Confesses" may be in the aorist tense to point to a single and decisive public confession. In that day in time only a true believer would publicly confess Christ and follow Him in baptism. The reason is that in that society, it often cost you to do that. You may be disowned by your family if you were the first from your family to confess Christ. Confession of Christ separated you from the nation of the Jews or it separated you from the social life of paganism. So I believe that confession of faith in Christ is a very important evidence of true faith.

Conclusion: I have reminded you of the overwhelming evidence of the love of God. Have you responded with your own personal faith commitment? Have you publicly confessed Christ as your Savior? Rom. 10:9 says, "that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." Will you confess Him today? How can you turn away from such love? Trust in Him; confess Him as Savior today!

Sources: Guy H. King, *The Fellowship: An Expositional Study of 1 John* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1954); H.A. Ironside, *Epistles of John & Jude* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers 1931); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); A.T. Robertson, *New Testament Word Pictures, Vol. VI* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931); Charles H. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon's Expository Encyclopedia, Vol. 6* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), 42-43; Curtis Vaughan, *A Study Guide Commentary: 1,2,3 John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970); Jerry Vines, *Family Fellowship: An Expository Experience in 1 John* (Dallas: Crescendo Publications, 1976); B.F. Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1883, 1966 edition); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Real: 1 John* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1972); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament, Vol. 2, 1 John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1954). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). Barnes read, not used. Nothing available from Maclaren.

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