

Signs of Love

1 John 4:12-16 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. ¹³ By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. ¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. ¹⁶ And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

On July 2, 1937, Amelia Earhart vanished somewhere in the South Pacific, while attempting a round-the-world flight in a Lockheed aircraft. In her last radio contact with a US naval vessel, she transmitted this message: "Position doubtful... position doubtful" This was fatal to Earhart, and "position doubtful" has been fatal to many people's eternal souls. They have not really known if they were saved or not, and because they did not use the Bible's signs of assurance of salvation, they went into a place of eternal death.

Amongst people who claim to be Christians, we seem to have two extremes when it comes to assurance. You have the kind of people who are so completely sure they are saved, that they are bewildered that you would even raise the question. "Of course I'm saved! I accepted Jesus as Saviour in 1992, and that's that!" They are utterly convinced that they are Christians, because since their decision they have been in churches, and done ministry, and even seen what appears to be God using them. Their confidence is based on how involved they've been in Christianity. They are utterly convinced, and nothing can persuade them otherwise.

To these people, we might want to quote the following verses:

"Matthew 7:21-23 " Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. ²² "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' ²³ "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"

When it comes to our souls, having a cocksure attitude is certainly dangerous.

*"1 Corinthians 10:12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. :
2 Corinthians 13:5 Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith.*

I am always concerned about the professing Christian who never runs any tests on his heart. I am concerned about a confidence about personal conversion that seems to be, as Rogers & Hammerstein put it, "confidence in confidence alone". The Bible does not tell you to trust in your trust, to have faith in your faith.

But on the other end of the spectrum we find some bruised reeds and smoking flaxes; people who believe assurance of salvation is an ever-retreating mirage. They think that no one can ever know, and they spend years in soul-agony, searching themselves, scouring their own minds for their motives, putting their own emotions and thoughts and actions under a microscope of intense scrutiny, looking for some secret root of faith that will reveal them to be saved. And the more they do this, the more lost they seem to become in the recesses of their own heart, forever chasing down their own heart, and finding it more confusing and deceitful than they'd ever imagined. Very often, such people appear in church with a surface smile, but a volcano of despair lies underneath.

And to such people, I John 4:16 is light in a pitch-black tunnel: "we have come to know and believe

the love God has for us.” It is possible to know. It is possible to experience conversion, and know with a humble certainty, that you are saved. I John 5:13 backs this up.

1 John 5:13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life,”

Here in 1 John 4:12-16, John is giving us, once again the true basis of assurance of salvation. He is giving us some of the ways we know that we are in a loving relationship with God. This is what the cock-sure person, who is trusting in his association with Christianity, needs to read. Don't trust in your ministry, your commitments, your associations – look for these things in these verses. This is what the fearful person who is never assured needs to read: Don't keep looking into your own thoughts and motives – look for these things in these verses.

So as John deals with this matter of assurance, we see something very strange, and yet wonderful. Verse 12 and verse 16 stand as almost opposites. Verse 12 tells us – no man has seen God at any time. God is invisible. We are dealing with what is unseen, intangible, and non-physical. And yet verse 16 says – we have come to know and believe the love that God has for us.

How do you go from dealing with an invisible God to knowing with certainty that God is your Father and you are a special recipient of His love? That's what he wants us to know in this section, as he does through the rest of the epistle.

John is going to give us three ways we can know that we are loved by God and in His family. The amazing thing about these three is that each of them is a thing outside of us, which ends up inside of us. Each of these things is something external – and its presence can be checked by history, or mere observation - but that external thing yet ends up inside us. And it is the presence of these things within us that assure us that we are in the family of God.

It is just like God to give us assurance which is both external and internal. John is not leaving us to pure subjectivism. He is not leaving us to chase our tails in an endless cycle of examining our own motives. Rather, he combines objective and subjective, external and internal to show us – these things are not just in your minds. They exist apart from you, but if you are saved, they are within you.

As we examine this passage, we'll see three proofs of eternal life within a person, three proofs from which assurance is biblically warranted. We'll see the proof of loving God's Body, the proof of possessing God's Spirit and the proof of receiving God's Son.

I. The Proof of Loving God's Body

1 John 4:12 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.

John starts by saying that no one has seen God at any time. No one has ever seen God in His essence. No man can see the true essence of God and live. God dwells in light unapproachable. He is immortal, invisible.

Now what's that got to do with this topic? Why would he say this? Because we all admit that this Christian life is one of faith. It is one of treating the invisible as visible, and treating the future as present, treating the heavenly as the true reality, treating the promises of God as things to be trusted now. But the problem is this life of invisible faith brings a lot of false claims. People say they love

God, and because God isn't here, how do you verify that?

John tells us: If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.

Here's how you know if you really love God and if God really loves you: if you love one another. This is amazing. The Bible is saying that the way you know that God loves you and that you are in a saving relationship with Him is when you love other believers.

How could that be? Well, look again at that verse. No man has seen God at any time? Do you remember another time John used those exact words?

Look in the Gospel of John, chapter 1:18.

John 1:18 No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

Back in the Gospel, John says – no one has seen God at any time, but the only begotten Son, He has declared Him, or revealed Him. So let's put this together. If Jesus exegeted the Father when on earth, who exegetes Him now? Answer: the body of Christ does.

To love God's people is to love God. To love God is, partly, to love His people. There is such an organic relationship between God and His people that when you love God's people, you are loving the clearest manifestation of God in this life.

Think for a moment about the illustration that we are Christ's body and Christ's bride. Look at what Scripture says.

Ephesians 5:25-32 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷ that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. ²⁸ So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. ³⁰ For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. ³¹ "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." ³² This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Husbands are to love their wives like their own selves, because they are in such a union with their wives. To hate your wife is to hate yourself, because you are bound together.

Now watch the parallel – we, the church, are members of His body, of His flesh, and His bones. The church is to Christ as a wife is to her husband. A husband who loves his wife loves himself, a husband who hates his wife hates himself, and he spites himself. If the church is the body of Christ, what is it to hate His body? It is to hate Him. What is it to love His body? It is to love Him. No one has seen God at any time, but when we love His body, we are loving Him. To love the body of Christ is to love flesh of His flesh, bone of His bones.

There is a kind of theoretical Christianity which thinks it can love God apart from the now imperfect form of Christ's body. Some of the mystics fell into this trap. Get away from people and love God directly. God has chosen to be present in this world, through His Spirit, through the lips and feet and hair and warts and toes and blood and sweat and teeth of His imperfect people. And

yes, it is His goal to “sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.” But it is not there yet. Oh, the meekness of God, in manifesting Himself to the world through blemished vessels, allowing His body to seem so ungainly, before its bridal day of beauty.

So people who claim to be dealing directly with God whom they have not seen, while bypassing or ignoring God's people whom they have seen are, in John's words, lying. The true evidence of knowing and loving God, and therefore being loved by him is that you love what He loves.

1 John 4:20-21 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? ²¹ And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

1 John 4:16 God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

“I love God, it’s those Christians I can't stand.” “I love the doctrines of the Word, but I can't stand what people are like in churches.” “I love to pray, but those prayer meetings are not for me.” No, then you are loving a phantom – some vapour of your imagination. God is in the world today, and He’s in the world through His Spirit in His people.

What is true of us if we love one another? Two things: God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. Those are two ways of saying – you are truly saved. You have eternal life within you. Abiding is really John's ultimate way of saying: you have the genuine article. If God is in you, and you are in God, you have the life. You are saved.

Notice through this passage John speaks of it:

*1 John 4:12-13 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. ¹³ By this we know that **we abide in Him, and He in us**, because He has given us of His Spirit. ..1 John 4:15-16 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, **God abides in him, and he in God.** ¹⁶ And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love **abides in God, and God in him.***

Abiding is the mark of assurance. God has you, and you have God. I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine. There is this reciprocal relationship which proves it is genuine. The iron is in the fire, but there is also fire in the iron. The bottle is in the water, and there is water in the bottle. The balloon is in the air and air is in the balloon.

So abiding says this – God is in you and you are in God. I am in Him, I live in His sphere, I dwell in His name, wear His righteousness. I am hidden with Christ in God. But He is in me. His life is in my life. His nature is my nature. His desires are being infused into mine. This reciprocal abiding is the way God does this external internal dynamic. Something external to you is true of you – you are already seated in the heavens. You are regarded as holy. But something internal has happened too, He lives within you.

If we love one another, God abides in us, and secondly, His love is perfected in us.

What is meant by His love is perfected in us? It means that God's love is accomplished; it reaches its goal through us. It is His love which has been perfected in us. God's love works through us, flows through us. Where does this love come from ? V19. We love, because he first loved us.

Here is the assurance: when you love God's body, it is God loving Himself through you. It is the Bridegroom loving the bride as Himself. And that means you are a channel, and you are His. He abides in you, and you in Him, and His love for His body flows through you on to others.

If God really abides in you and you in God – when you are brought into proximity to God's body, God's love for His own body flows through you towards them. God's Spirit within you is a magnet and God's people are iron. God's presence within you is bees, and God's people are honey. God within you is air and God's people are a vacuum. And that very yearning to love God's people, is the love of God accomplishing its goal through you.

It's a sign of assurance. Do you see how God gives us assurance through taking something external and making it internal? God's people are external to us. We can see them and hear them. But it is if they are in our heart, if we love them, if we have internalised them, that we know that God loves us and that we are His.

I love God's body. Rewind ten, twenty, thirty years, you would not have been caught dead with these people, you say. You probably would have made fun of them, and criticised them. So what is it that has made the difference? God abides in you, and you in God. By this you have come to know and believe the love God has for you.

John has a second proof for us. Again, something external that becomes something internal.

II. The Proof of Possessing God's Spirit

1 John 4:13 By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

We know, with certainty that we abide in Him and He in us because He has given us of His Spirit. We know that we are saved, that we have this union with God because He has given us His Spirit.

What does it mean – He has given us of His Spirit? Well, it doesn't mean He has given us part of His Spirit because the Spirit cannot be parcelled up. It means He has given us from Himself, He has given us His own Spirit to come and dwell within us permanently. We have a privilege which Old Testament saints did not enjoy: the Spirit of God takes up residence within the body of a believer and remains there forever. So how does this become part of my assurance?

Romans 8 – another major chapter on assurance has the answer:

Romans 8:9 ¶ But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. ¹⁰ And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. ¹² ¶ Therefore, brethren, we are debtors -- not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." ¹⁶ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs -- heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

The Spirit's presence within us assures us in several ways. Firstly, verse 9 tells us if you don't have the Spirit, you are not Christ's. Second, verses 10-14 tell us His activity of sanctifying us is noticeable. We have to notice that there is a new principle within us, leading us away from the

things of death, mortifying those things which are evil, and being led towards more love for God, and being like Him.

You see, we talk about demon-possessed people, we see some of them in Scripture, and what we mean is that a spirit, an evil spirit – a fallen angelic spirit – has so taken over a person's mind and body, that he or she completely changes his behaviour and appearance.

When the Holy Spirit possess you it is the same and yet different. The Holy Spirit is not violent and destructive. You become aware, gently, that it is as if another person now lives with you. And yet, almost as if that Person is not wholly distinct from you, so that you aren't always sure if it is another person, or your own spirit and conscience that is changing - and it is both because the Spirit dwelling within you is like a metal being poured into another metal to make a new alloy. The Spirit is infused with your spirit, granting you a new nature, new desires. It's as if one person so enters your mind, that you begin to think like they think, love what they love, speak like they speak. God leaves His fingerprints on your mind. You begin to speak with God's accent. This is what happens when God gives you His Spirit.

Third, and in this context of sanctifying, v15-16 He makes our connection to God intuitive. Once the Spirit is in us, and changing us, He turns our heart to the Father like a baby turns to its mother.

How does that child know that Mama is Mama? How do they know to call out for Mommy and Daddy during times of stress? How is it that you find it so natural to call God 'Father'? Why is it that in times of deep pain or distress or worry or crisis, you cry out to God and address Him as 'Father'? This is the evidence of the Spirit dwelling within you.

So once again, there is something external – the Spirit of God – who dwells from eternity past with the Father and the Son, and now He comes to dwell within us. By this we have come to know and believe the love God has for us – because His Spirit dwells within us.

III. The Proof of Receiving God's Son

1 John 4:14-15 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. ¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

The second sign is something we possess – the Spirit. But this third sign is something we confess – that Jesus is the Son of God. And that internal act of confessing Jesus is based on an external event recorded in verse 14.

John, speaking as an apostle, says we have seen in the past, and now testify. We are eyewitnesses, and we give our eyewitness testimony of what we have seen and heard. What does that remind you of? 1:1-3:

1 John 1:1-3 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life -- ² the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us -- ³ that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

What did they see? What do they testify of? They saw that the Father had sent His Son, and that He came to save the world. They didn't know that at first. But after three years with Jesus, after the miracles, and after the resurrection and ascension, they understood that God the Father had sent

God the Son, to be atonement for whoever would believe (cf. John 1:14). This is a succinct Gospel message, like John 3:16, like I John 4:9-10.

But that external historical fact doesn't mean anything until it becomes internal within the person. So verse 15 says, whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in Him and he in God. You are saved, you can have assurance that the life dwells within you if you confess Jesus is the Son of God.

Now immediately we might object and say – there are plenty of people under Roman Catholicism and Greek Orthodox and even nominal Protestant systems, who would agree that Jesus is the Son of God. Are they truly saved for recognising the identity of Jesus Christ?

- 1) This is not all John wants us to confess regarding Christ. We are also to confess that He came as a man (4:2). We are also to confess that He is the Christ (5:1)
- 2) If you really understand what it means for Jesus to be the Son of God, then you must embrace the gospel. The only reason why we know that God the Father and God the Son are distinct persons within the one essence of God, is because of the gospel. The Father sent, the Son came. The Father did not die on the cross. The Son did not send. These distinctions in person and office have only become clear to us because of the mission of the Son of God to save sinners. To acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God in the biblical sense is to acknowledge that He was sent by the Father, and is the way back to the Father. To truly believe that Jesus is the Son of God is to believe He is the way, truth and the life, the one who reconciles us to the Father.

It is not enough to simply say Jesus is God's Son, and acknowledge some kind of Trinitarian relationship. That's not believing, that's just classifying. To say that God is Father, Son and Spirit is not believing, it is just describing your view of the Christian God. When you believe Jesus is the Son of God is when you embrace Him as the way to become a child of God.

Remember John 1:11-12?

John 1:11-12 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. ¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

Scripture teaches that only those who belong to God confess the truth about Jesus. If you confess that Jesus is the only way to God, and have trusted in Him, then God abides in you and you in God. You can know that God loves you.

You might remember back in the book of Judges, a war broke out in Israel between the tribes. And one group, the Gileadites cornered another tribe – the Ephraimites. And when an Ephraimite wanted to cross the river, they would ask, “Are you an Ephraimite?” And if the man said, “No”, they would say, “Say, ‘Shibboleth’”. And the Ephraimites apparently couldn't say *Shibboleth*, they pronounced it *Sibboleth*. And so they identified themselves by their speech, and they were caught.

And God has a Shibboleth to the world. God might say to every human being wanting to cross over into heaven, “Do you love Me?”

And the answer might be, “Yes.”

And then God's Shibboleth would be this: “Who is Jesus Christ?”

And the only right answer is “He is Your Son, and the only way to You.” And only those who are truly His, can say it.

1 Corinthians 12:3 Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

The person who says that identifies himself or herself as belonging to the family of God. God is in you and you are in God, and you cannot deny Him, because you cannot deny yourself. He cannot deny you, because He cannot deny Himself. You will confess what is true – he is the Son of God, whom I have received.

Simon Peter answered and said, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

¹⁷ Jesus answered and said to him, *"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."*

Have you confessed that Jesus is the only way to the Father, and that none of your works qualify you to be right with God? Have you agreed with God that you are without hope as far as pleasing Him goes, and only the Son of God can make you pleasing to God? Have you confessed this truth to the Lord?

Romans 10:9-10 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. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

If you have confessed in the past with a continuance in the present that Jesus is the way to God, Jesus is the Son of God - then you can know you have eternal life. You have come to know and believe the love that God has for you. This is why verse 16 caps it off. We have known this and we have believed it. We believe it by faith, because it is external, but we know it by experience because it is internal.

Other believers are external to us, and we believe we must love them, but we have also known internally a deep love for them, which is God Himself loving them through us.

The Spirit of God is invisible and unseen and comes from above, and we believe by faith God has given Him to us. But we also know by experience His presence in our lives, which is God Himself assuring us that He loves us and abides in us.

The atonement of Jesus, the gospel itself is an external historical fact that occurred in A.D. 33. We believe this by faith. But we have come to experience a full internal confession that Jesus is the Son of God, my Lord and Saviour.

Your position need not be doubtful, for God has given us three proofs of eternal life. They are not confidence in confidence. It is not confidence in my ministry. Nor are they impossibly self-defeating tinkering with my own motives and mind. They are external and internal, subjective and objective. Do you love the body of Christ? Do you possess the Spirit of Christ? And have you confessed Jesus as the only way to God? Then you can say with John, I have come to know and believe the love God has for me.