

Encountered by Love

a sermon in the series
Life in the Son

A sermon delivered Sunday Morning, October 21, 2012
at Oak Grove Baptist Church, Paducah, Ky.
by S. Michael Durham
© 2012 Real Truth Matters

I John 4:13-16

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.

In the preceding verse the apostle writes,

“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.” (1 John 4:12)

John’s message is if we love one another, as we ought, then the invisible God becomes visible to us and the world. When Christ left the world He did not leave the world without putting in place a visible representation of Himself. That representation is you and me.

When we love, we are demonstrating Jesus’ love. Meaning when you sacrifice time from your busy schedule to help a brother or sister, Jesus is coming into focus. When you take money from your grocery account and give to a brother or sister, Jesus becomes viewable. When you forgive a brother or sister who has terribly mistreated you and you look on them with compassion and not anger or hatred, Jesus is seen. When you make the phone call to that hurting soul and have no clue what you’re going to say past hello, Jesus is now visible.

Jesus is not illustrated in our actions, He is *in* our loving action. The Apostle John is saying God becomes completely manifested before our eyes in the love of His people. That’s why this is so important to John and it must be important to us.

I am thoroughly persuaded that if the people outside the four walls of this church would see the love of God demonstrated in your life at the workplace, in the school, in the neighborhood, they would at least be interested to find out what is so different. I know that for this reason: the world is starving for love. Not what we normally define as love, a you-scratch-my-back-and-I’ll-scratch-your-back kind of love, no. That is not genuine God-like love. I believe there are people who don’t profess faith in God, who may even be agnostic in their understanding of religion,

who hope against all possibility that Christians are true and right because if they are there is still some hope. The hope of this nation, the hope of this world is that God would become visible in you and me. That's how important this is. When they see you and I genuinely loving one another there will be an attraction to the church, that's the way we were made. We were made to want that kind of love and we need it.

Since God's love is manifested primarily through you and me as we love one another a question needs to be asked. Is God's love manifested to us solely through our love for one another? John says no. God first loving us generates our love for one another. It's not that we first loved God, but that He first loved us. Our love is a reflex and reaction to God loving us. If you can't love this sacrificial way as Christ did for us it's because you've never experienced the love of God. But don't despair, because you can this very hour experience that same dynamic, life-transforming, completely life-changing love. The presence of God is not necessarily something you feel, it is a living encounter with God. I pray and I'm asking Christians to pray with me that everyone who does not understand this will before they leave by having this same encounter with the love of God.

God's love is manifested to us by gifts. The first gift I want to discuss from the text and the Bible is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

I. THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IS EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIANITY

There are a lot of people in this generation who do not believe in the existence of God and believe Christianity is just another one of the world's religions. There is an answer to that and it is not just philosophical, although intellectually I can argue the case for Christianity. Christianity is so unique and different because of the reality of the power of God manifested in His love. One of the manifestations of His love is He gives us His own Spirit in a literal, tangible, and life-changing way.

“By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.”

Every person that submits his life to the Lord Jesus Christ and trusts and treasures Him, God's places His Spirit within him so that he can literally see, feel, and relate to God as Father. “Abba Father” is the intercessory cry of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit, the very Spirit of God is placed within these earthly, physical bodies at salvation. I can't explain how but I know the reality of it because I've experienced Him and so has every true Christian.

Evidences of the Holy Spirit Received

Let me give you some evidences by which you know you have received the Holy Spirit.

I. A Hatred of Sin

This is the beginning of the evidence of the Holy Spirit in you and loving you. God will love you to the point that you will begin to adopt His affections and desires. Since God hates sin and cannot abide by it, neither can the Christian. Where there is God there is the thirst and longing for holiness. Why would a woman knowing it was embarrassing still yet confess her sin to us today? Here is somebody who said, "I was really ugly yesterday," and that alone would lead us to some conclusions about her, but she shared with us because there is in her a violent disgust for her very own sin which is why she is so thankful God overcomes that sin and grants her victory. Her joy in her Savior's victory over her sin causes her to rejoice publically, even at the risk of embarrassment. That, my friend, is real. It's not just something philosophical; it is a real life example of a hatred of sin.

There are many who claim to be Christians but don't hate their sin. They excuse it, they play with it, they court it, they hide it, they rationalize it, they protect it, but they will not disown it and turn from it. They do not have the Spirit of God in them.

Paul the Apostle makes it absolutely clear if you live according to the flesh—which means to do whatever feels good—you will surely die. But if he, by the Spirit, does mortify and put to death the deeds of the body you will live. Why would I want to do that? Is it forcing morality? Is it legalism? Is it a religious exercise trying to live up to some code or standard? Absolutely not! That was the problem with the religious people of Jesus' day. They had a code they were trying to live up to and they couldn't do it. I want to mortify the deeds of the flesh because I am in Christ Jesus and He is in me and there is a power within that causes me to hate my sin and desire to turn from it.

2. A Desire for Fellowship With God

There is a hunger and thirst for God Himself. There is a desire that goes beyond things of everyday life, things we possess, and live to possess that says *God, You are more satisfying than all of these things*. Some of you may not be able to relate to that statement because you haven't had a whole lot of material things in your life, and there is always the question in the back of your mind, *you know, if I could accumulate a little bit more I would have more comfort and ease in my life and therefore be a little happier*. But even the poorest of all can relate to what I'm about to say. Have you ever longed for something and finally acquired it? What happened to your happiness level once you obtained it? Almost immediately the thing turns sour in your mouth. It was more pleasant dreaming and longing for it than it was to possess it. But God is completely different. When He comes into your heart and you accept and love Him and submit your life to Him something literally changes from the inside out. There is nothing more miserable to a true Christian than to be absent of the fellowship of God. To go days and days without feeling, sensing, interacting with God Himself. There is nothing more devastating. Because when you encounter God for the first time there is a desire for the continual fellowship of God. The Spirit of God is in you creating that longing.

3. The Desire for Prayer

A person who has the Spirit of God will pray. The Spirit Himself is called the Spirit of intercession in Romans 8. We don't always know how we ought to pray because of our weaknesses, our problems, but the Spirit makes intercession for us, says the Apostle Paul. He is the Spirit of prayer and if He is in you there will be prayers offered to God. You say, *Pastor, now I'm nervous. I had the first two but now I'm starting to feel a little uneasy. I don't pray as I ought to.* Why do you think you do not pray as you ought to? Because there is something in you driving and fueling prayer that causes you to recognize you don't pray as you should. What is that? Or should I say *who* is that? It's the Holy Spirit. There is a desire for fellowship and prayer there. And, by the way, all Christians do pray. They may not pray on their knees or formally for an hour, but we pray. I even believe the sighs and longings of the heart that are not spoken are received by God and seen as prayer.

4. Understanding

I'm going to talk about this a little bit later, but something happens when a person receives Christ and the Spirit of God comes in. The Holy Spirit brings with Him the understanding of God, for you have the mind of Christ, says the apostle. Does that mean you know everything? No. It simply means you can now understand God. He's more understandable than He ever has been in your life. You can perceive Him and know if God is working or not working.

5. Love for Others

This has been the trajectory of John from chapter two until now. The evidence that God is in you is you do what He does. What does He do? He loves. It's His nature. Something about your nature has changed since becoming a Christian and now you are able to love, even when you are mistreated. That is the evidence of the Holy Spirit.

Union With God

To receive the gift of the Holy Spirit means nothing more than union with God. Look at what He says here,

"... we abide in Him, and He in us ..." (1 John 4:13)

When you become a Christian you are more than just a forgiven person. In fact, I never liked that bumper sticker. I don't like most bumper stickers because they're not long enough. They condense too much and oversimplify. *"I'm not perfect, just forgiven."* There is truth to that, but that's not all the truth of a Christian. When you meet a true Christian you're not just meeting someone who has been forgiven, you're meeting somebody who is literally one with God Almighty. There is a union that develops between the Christian and God the moment that sinner puts his or her faith and life in His hands so that God would say, *I'm in you and you're in Me.* That's terminology to illustrate union, fellowship, and oneness. This was a term Jesus loved to use and often He did use it. "I and the Father are one." "If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father."

According to the Apostle John you and I can say, if we are rightly related to God, “If you’ve seen me you’ve seen Christ.” Let me warn you that is not blasphemy, but New Testament truth. Again, if you try to determine what Christianity is by what the world tells us, well then you would understand why that would sound blasphemous. But to the person whom God has granted understanding by the same Holy Spirit, you know this is what the Bible is teaching us—that Christ has come that He might live within us. Christianity is not an imitation of Jesus; it is the very life of Jesus in you. If Christianity is a bunch of religious people trying to act good enough imitating Christ, then we’re all lost, damned, and on our way to hell because the standard of goodness in which God will measure us is not our goodness but His. He’s already written the epitaph of man and his goodness: *there is none good, no not one.*

Christianity is not an imitation of Jesus, it’s the life of Christ in you so now you can live according to God’s standards of goodness, love, and truth. Corrie ten Boom, survivor of the Holocaust gave an illustration of a glove. If I had a glove here on the pulpit and laid it down it could do nothing. It could not grasp anything, it could not pick up anything, it could not do work, it couldn’t even lift itself up and wave at you. But if I was to slip that glove on my hand, it could do everything the hand can now do.

Do you not realize, my friend, you’ve been inhabited, indwelt by the person of God Himself and whatever God can do, you can also? “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Does that mean you’re omnipotent? Of course not! But it does mean you can do everything you need to in order to fulfill the will of God for your life. What Christ is offering you this morning is the ability to live your life to the absolute fullest. If I could add more adjectives and superlatives I would. He is offering you to live your life with the utmost, greatest feeling of satisfaction possible and the only way that can happen is if you allow God control and let Him come in. He will fill your life and will guide you in the path He has made, constructed and designed you for.

Every one of you is designed for specific purposes. I’m fulfilling one of my purposes right now, but each one of you have just as much a God-called purpose as I do and only by the Spirit of God in you can you fulfill it. If you are not fulfilling the purpose for which you were created you are going to be miserable. You’ll be miserable because you were designed for a specific purpose and you aren’t doing it. That is why Jesus can say, “I have come that they may have life and life more abundantly.”

The gift of the Holy Spirit is evidence of God’s love for His children. If we should need evidence that God loves us, here it is. He put His own Spirit in you. The gift of the Holy Spirit is not just the proof of God’s love for us but also what the Holy Spirit does in us. It is an act of love to give someone a gift. But it’s an even higher act of love if the gift is relevant and useful to the person receiving it.

We’re coming upon the Christmas holidays and gifts will be exchanged. If you’ve ever been in the situation where the present you received wasn’t practical, you’ll understand this. Perhaps it was a tie in which you had nothing to go with or another kitchen utensil you already have a half a

dozen of, but the gesture was an act of love and kindness. How much more love is it when that gift given is something you want and need and benefit from? Dear friend, what you and I need is not more theology, what we need is the God of theology to inhabit us and fill us. How can we ever hope to live the Christian life in our own strength? It is impossible. I hope I'm making clear to you today that we're not offering you a life of drudgery and unhappiness, destining you to be miserable the rest of your life as you try to be something you're not. No, I'm telling you that God is offering you His very own life and through Him God can live, strengthen, and empower you. He's given you His own Spirit of power.

II. THE GIFT OF CHRIST IS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CHRISTIANITY

Let me direct your attention to a second gift in our text. The gift of Christ. Christianity came into existence because God the Father gave us His Son.

Verse fourteen,

“And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.”

Think with me just for a moment. If a chief executive of a state or nation commutes the sentence of a man on death row from execution to a life sentence in prison you will not hear criticisms of why he didn't do the same for everyone else on death row. For example, if the governor comes to Eddyville on Monday and walks down death row and arbitrarily looks at one cell and the inmate in it and says, “I'm commuting your sentence right now.” The newspapers on Tuesday aren't going to say, “Why didn't he do that for everyone else?” No, the criticism will be, “Why did he spare the life of the convicted criminal guilty of murder and mayhem?” The criticism will complain that such an act of mercy doesn't bring justice to the victim or the victim's family; they will argue that it sends the wrong message to the criminal element in society, if you get caught committing capital crimes you will not have to pay the ultimate price. And yet regardless of the public condemnation the governor has acted within the authority and the privilege of his position.

If we would bring a charge against a man in high office what do we say about the moral Governor of the universe when He pardons a sinner? You see, the Lord doesn't just commute the sinner's death sentence; He actually pardons the sinner and brings him into His family. The earthly governor's act was truly an act of mercy on the undeserving, but what could we say about the act of God to forgive the sinner and then declare him justified? This is what God offers us. To say of him or her that they are not guilty when they are and treat them as if they were perfect in His sight. That is the love of God. That's why I am very excited about Christianity and the Gospel.

God looks at me though guilty and declares me not guilty. We can say nothing else except this is great love. So great is it that it's quite unbelievable without the help of the Holy Spirit to give us faith to believe it. We would find it difficult if a president or governor commuted just one prisoner, but God has done so to many and it sounds so unbelievably good that it takes the Holy Spirit to believe it. God needs to give you understanding and that is also a gift that the Holy Spirit

will give when He comes.

Let's talk about this great love of God just for a few more moments and then we'll be done. How great is the love of God? Well, you might as well try to scoop the oceans a thimble at a time and drain them dry than try to give a thorough explanation of the love of God. But let me try the impossible just for a few moments.

1. His Love is Amazing.

I watch a mother with her baby and I can understand to a degree a mother's love. But I have an advantage because I've two grown sons and I know that mother will face in the days and years to come. I know that child will cause grief and sadness and sleepless nights and tears of intercession to God on their behalf. And yet, it's quite logical to me to understand that mother will still love her wayward child.

We can also see and understand the love of a husband for a wife even if she crushes his heart being unfaithful. This love can seem a little more difficult to comprehend than the love of a mother for a wayward child but still not unbelievable. We've seen it happen. If man never rebelled against God and never sinned against Him I can understand God loving man in that case. But we know that mankind has not always loved God nor served Him perfectly and obediently. No, we have rebelled against Him and He still loves us. That is amazing!

Amazing love, how can it be that Thou my God should die for me?

After a quarter of a century experiencing His love I still don't get why He would love me. Now that I'm His, all I have done is proven why He should never have loved me in the first place. It is simply amazing. No metaphor used by any speaker can truly illustrate how amazing the love of God is that He would give us His Son.

I should apologize for even using this as an illustration because we've all heard it and we've all said it. But who of us could literally sacrifice our child's life on behalf of a criminal who had harmed our own family? Who of us would, after a man came into our home and murdered one of our sons, offer the other son to rescue the murderer? Of course not, it's ludicrous and I apologize for even making up such a ridiculous scenario. But there you have the love of God, crude as it may be. That is what He has done for us. He took His only Son and murdered Him so that He could love us. It's amazing.

2. His love is giving.

He doesn't just give us His Son, He gives Himself and He gives everything we need in this life. I want to be clear, because there is a lot of people on television and radio who make a lot of absurd claims and offers in the name of God. They say crazy things like, if you just become a Christian everything will be wonderful in your life; you'll never have problems again. That's not true

at all. But let me ask you who are not Christians, how is life without Jesus right now? Not too good either, is it? One thing God has promised is that He will be with you and will never leave you nor forsake you. In all of the hours of your difficulties God, the God who cannot lie, pledges Himself, "I will not depart, I will not leave you, I will not isolate you, I will not forsake or desert you when you need Me the most, I will always be there and I will give you what you need to get you through the hour of difficulty so you will not be defeated by it." He is a God of amazing love that gives and gives and gives. "My God shall meet all your needs according to His riches in glory."

3. His love is fulfilling.

I said a few moments ago there is nothing more satisfying for a believer than to experience the fellowship of God. When I was younger I loved to do what I'm doing now more than I loved fellowshiping with God in prayer. Today I should be truthful and tell you I'd rather be in a prayer closet right now than preaching to you. I know that doesn't make sense to you but God is becoming more real to me and more treasurable, valuable and sensible. I'm standing here with a great deal of weight on my shoulders, I have people listening—some of you—who don't know Christ. I feel the weight of that on me. I am compelled by that weight to share with you something that will be used by the Spirit of God to give you understanding and open your eyes. That is a terrible responsibility to labor under. The rest of you, I have this feeling and sense that I've got to encourage you. I want you to experience the love of God afresh and anew. *God, how are You going to do this through this preacher? How are You going to touch everybody hurt this morning? God, let me run away and get alone with You and just bask in Your presence.* That's how fulfilling His presence is.

So, what do I do right now? I remember His promise that He is right here in this pulpit with me. I remember right now that His presence has not forsaken me nor fled from me but that He is right here, He's in me, I'm but a glove, He's the hand. I'm just an instrument, He's the power. I'm just a tool, but He's the Master. That's what I remember right now and I claim and cling to it and I have a measure of peace. That's how fulfilling God is to me. That's what He wants to be for all of us. That's how wonderful His love is, it fulfills you, friend.

I've used this illustration before and I apologize for the overuse, but I am so thankful for the wife I have. We've been married 31 years and I look for the next 20 or more being with her if the Lord wills. I so look forward to Mondays because I leave everything and get to spend the whole day with her and that is awesome. Sometimes the way she will look at me will lift my spirits. This morning she was walking from the bedroom to the kitchen and I was sitting in my chair reading the Scriptures and she stopped and smiled that smile and winked at me and I felt like, *Man, this is going to be a good day!* I apologize again for the crude illustration because the love of God far surpasses the love of a woman in infinite degrees.

I need to conclude but there is one last point I want to make.

The Truth Upon Which Christianity Is Built

Verse fifteen,

“Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.”

This does not mean that if you simply say with your mouth as some tradition or religious ritual, “Jesus is the Son of God,” that you’re now a Christian. Some of you were baptized as children and that’s what you were told you were saying, “Jesus is the Son of God and I believe in Him.” Others of you have professed faith, you prayed and asked Jesus to come into your heart and somebody told you that’s all it takes and you said, “Okay, I’m a Christian because I believe Jesus is the Son of God.” That is not what this apostle is saying to you.

Look at what John calls Him here—*Jesus*. The name *Jesus* was given to Him by the angel Gabriel to Joseph in a dream when he was thinking about putting away Mary. They were engaged and he found out she was pregnant. He hadn’t had sexual relations with her; he thought she had been unfaithful to him. I mean, how else do you explain it? But God appeared to him through an angel in a dream and said, “that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins.” So God, the Son of God eternally, became a man. Saying “Jesus is the Son of God,” says you believe in the incarnation that God was born and made a man and not only that He is the Son of Man but He is also the Son of God. You believe His deity. Thus, you believe He is both man and God.

Let me show you the truth of Christianity. Every religion claims to be true, but none leave themselves open for attack. Logically, when men invent a new religious belief they do so with the intention of creating something believable. However, Christianity is unique. It presents a mystery that cannot be explained and leaves itself open for disbelief. It asserts there are things that require the power of God and unexplainable miracles such as the incarnation, the birth of Christ. If a man conceived a religion he never would have conceived of one that would have stated a virgin conceiving a child. It’s really a hard argument. How can a woman who has never been with a man have a child and that child be an eternal being who always existed and yet have the limited capabilities of a man? It defies human comprehension. It doesn’t make sense. But God can do it. An infinite being can and He did.

John is saying to confess Jesus to be the Son of God does not require you to suspend logic but to trust in a God that is omnipotent, meaning all powerful. If God is, He would have to be all-powerful. He has demonstrated in His coming to this earth He demonstrates His omnipotence. Christianity is not just a miracle to be taken by faith but is also a historical fact. Historians at the time of Christ, who were not Christians, spoke of this Jesus. They spoke of Pilate, they spoke of Jesus’ death on the cross and they even wrote that His disciples reported Jesus’ resurrection. These historical writings are not biblical but extra-biblical documents of the time.

An atheist in 19th century England, Gilbert West, a most famous attorney, set out to disprove the resurrection using legal arguments. In the midst of trying to find the legal arguments to disprove it, he became a believer because the facts were irrefutable. You’ve 500 witnesses who saw the

resurrected Jesus at one time. That is airtight case. Why, if you had five who told you the same thing, you'd have a case. So if there is a logical, factual case for the historicity of Christianity then what do you do this morning with those facts? What do you do with them? John says if you will believe them not just with your head but also with your life and allow Christ Jesus to become one with Him, then your confession is real when you profess faith. It's just not a mental argument that you agree to, it's something that has changed you so that you have encountered the living God.

That's all that is required this morning. Encounter God. Let God tear down the walls that you have built between your Creator and you and listen to what He has to say. I know those of you who regularly listen to me will be given a great reward in heaven for enduring this. That's not humility or even an attempt of such, I'm being factual with you, you endure a lot. But I can say in humility that I labor in prayer to bring you these messages and when I get up here I believe I have the word of the Lord so that when I am speaking it's as if God was speaking. So I'm telling you sir, God has talked to you for the last 45 minutes and He has said, *There is a case for Me, what will you do with it? I want you to experience My life, I don't want you to know about it with your head, I want you to know about it with your heart. I can transform your life. What you're looking for I am, what you're longing for I can satisfy. I can come in and I will transform you from the inside out and you will never again be the same and you will know amazing love how can it be that Thou my God would die for me and it will be real. Amen.*