

Throughout the Scriptures we find a diversity of imagery in describing what a Christian is—a Christian is a person who has been born again, converted, raised from the dead, called out of darkness into light, delivered from bondage—he is one who has heard the voice of the Son of God, repented from his sins, believed upon Christ, fled to Christ for refuge, and placed His hope in God—these are but a sampling of the many ways in which a Christian is described—but with all their diversity I’m convinced that one of the most beautiful descriptions of a true Christian is found here in our text, as John describes them as those who—“have known and believed the love that God has for them...”

If you recall beginning with v7 the apostle returned to the subject of brotherly love, a theme he continues into the first 2 verses of chapter 5—having stated in v12 that love of the brethren is a mark or evidence of union with Christ, the apostle then proceeds to provide two additional evidences, the spirit’s inner witness (v13) and an orthodox confession (v15)—now in considering this witness last week, I pointed out that v15 is connected to v14 as a building to its foundation—that is, our confession rests upon the apostolic testimony of holy Scripture...

If you recall I suggested three things about this confession—[1] it’s heartfelt, Rom.10:9-10—“for with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation...” [2] it’s submissive—which is to say it of necessity entails the acceptance of Christ as Lord, Phil.2:11—“every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord...” and [3] it’s of God—by which I meant, no person can truly from the heart confess that Jesus is Lord but by the powerful work of the Holy Spirit, 1Cor.12:3—“no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit...”

Thus in v16 we find the result of such a confession and fourth evidence of union with God, that is knowing and abiding in love—“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 other words, our knowledge, belief, and continuation in love are an evidence or mark that God abides in us and we in Him...

#### I. An Explanation of the Text

#### II. An Application of the Text

#### I. An Explanation of the Text

##### A. A knowledge of love—v16a

1. If you notice John returns in our text to plural pronouns—“we have known and believed the love that God has for us...”
2. In v14 he spoke of himself as an apostle, in v15 he opened it up to “whoever”—and in v16 he combines these to “we” and “us”...
3. Thus regardless who his readers were, if they could give heart-felt confession concerning the person and work of Christ—they too had come to experience the love of God in Christ...
4. The terms “known and believed” refer to—“an experimental, heart-felt, Biblically-grounded knowledge and faith...”
5. In trusting Christ as the Son of God incarnate, given by the Father as the propitiation for our sins—they came to know and believe God’s love for them...
6. Howard Marshall—“The believer is sure of his faith because he has personally experienced the love of God. He has come to know it and also to put his trust in it...”
7. We find the same two verbs but inverted in Jn.6:69—“we have come to believe and know that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God...”
8. Thus the knowledge and faith referred to is inseparably related—to know is to believe and to believe is to know...
9. The verbs that John uses describe a completed act that occurred in the past, and yet has ongoing present consequences...

10. Thus one grammarian suggests a close paraphrase would be—"We have come to know and still know, we have come to believe and still believe..."
11. John probably had the words of our Savior in Jn.17 in mind, notice vv21-23—"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 "that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 "And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: 23 "I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me..."
12. Within this section of our Lord's prayer to His Father, our Savior is describing the union that He has with His people and that they will have within themselves...
13. He is describing a positional but also practical unity, v21—"that they all may be one..."—that is, manifest an obvious love that results in a practical oneness...
14. The purpose of this unity [or love] is found in two phrases, v21b—"that the world may believe that you sent me..." v23b—"that the world may know that you have sent me, and have loved them as you have loved me..."
15. Notice if we were to put these two phrases together they would be very similar to our text—"that the world would know and believe that you sent me, and have loved them as you have loved me..."
16. In other words—that they might know and believe the love that God has for them—that they might come to experience God's love in a personal and saving way...
17. And so what we have expressed here byway of a prayer, we find realized by experience in our text—namely—the knowledge and belief of God's love...

#### B. A continuation in love—v16b

1. Here we learn that John goes beyond an initial knowledge of God's love but then speaks of a continual and abiding knowledge—"God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him..."
2. Because God is love, to abide in love is the same as abiding in God—this is to say, as we continue to abide in union with God we continue in love...
3. The biggest difficulty comes in understanding what John meant by—"abide in love..."—the options are two—[1] he means to continue in our love to God and others...
4. If this was the case he would be saying the same thing he did in v12—"if we love one another, God abides in us..."—that is, as we continue in love for one another...
5. But a [2] possibility and I'm convinced a greater probability, by abiding in love John meant a continuing in the knowledge and belief of His love toward us...
6. Having just described them as those who have known and believed God's love, he now exhorts them to continue in the knowledge and belief of the same love...
7. Thus John says that upon making the good confession, we came to experience His love for us, and as we continue to know and experience that love, it's evidence that we're in union with Him...
8. Let me put it this way—as knowledge of God's love for us was a means of assurance in the beginning of our Christian life, so it remains throughout...
9. In other words—our abiding or continuing in the awareness of God's love for us is a means to know that we abide in Him and He in us...
10. Jn.15:9—"As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in my love..."—that is, remain in the conscious awareness of my love for you...
11. "Abide in my love"—one man said—"it is just as if he had said, 'Abide under the sweet smiles of my love to you...'"
12. This I suggest is the exact same thing that John refers to when he says—"he who abides in love..."—to abide within the awareness of His love...
13. Pink—"To abide in His love, is to be occupied with it, to count upon it, to be persuaded that nothing shall ever be able to separate us from it..."
14. Jude 1:21—"keep yourselves in the love of God..."—that is, keep yourselves within the awareness of God's love toward you...

15. Eph.3:18-19—"may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height, 19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God..."
16. Here we find the prayer of the inspired apostle for the believers in Ephesus—that they would continually and increasingly comprehend and know the love of Christ...
17. I suggest the phrase in v19—"to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge..."—is akin to our text—"he who abides in love..."
18. Having come to know God's love [1Jn.4:16a], we need to remain or continue within this knowledge [1Jn. 4:16b]...
19. Let me illustrate—let's liken the love of God to an ocean, and having come to place our feet in it, we are to venture out into the depths of it...
20. Hymn—"O the deep, deep love of Jesus! Vast, unmeasured, boundless, free; rolling as a mighty ocean in its fullness over me. Underneath me, all around me, is the current of thy love; leading onward, leading homeward, to thy glorious rest above..."
21. Thus we are to continue, remain, or abide in love—yes love for God and others, but primarily our knowledge and belief in God's love for us...
22. And this abiding in love is directly related to our intimacy and fellowship with God—"and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him..."
23. That is—as we abide in love we foster an intimate and mutual fellowship between ourselves and God—it's as if love is the atmosphere within which this fellowship thrives...
24. Now I've purposely overlooked the statement—"God is love"—simply because I spent an entire hour considering it in v8...
25. But I will remind you that when John says God is love, he's referring to the essential nature of God, which says more than God is loving...
26. No—God is love—this is His very nature, as we learned back in v8, that God's attributes are one with His very essence...
27. Thus because God is love, to remain in love [both our love for others, but especially the awareness of His love for us] is necessary in maintaining a practical union...
28. Thus in conclusion—having stated his own apostolic testimony (v14), described the Christian's personally confession (v15), John now described the results of this confession, v16a—"and we have known and believed the love that God has for us..." and the means to maintain this union, v16b—"God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him..."

## II. An Application of the Text

### A. The certainty of knowing

1. As I mentioned in the introduction, I wonder if there is a more glorious statement in the whole of Scripture—"we have known and believed the love that God has for us..."
2. We can not know or believe the love that God has for another—but we can know and believe the love He has for us...
3. Now because there may exist some confusion concerning this point—I want to spend a few minutes attempting to pastorally clarify and apply the first part of our text, especially to those who struggle with whether or not they have known and believed the love that God has for them...
4. Notice [1] His love should be experienced—I think this is where we must begin—God wants His children to know His love...
5. 1Jn.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..."
6. The apostle wrote this letter that those who believe would know that they have eternal life—that they would know that God loves them...
7. Isn't it a tragedy that the world by nature rejects God's love—they have refused to know and believe the love that He has for them...

8. But perhaps an even greater tragedy is that many Christians are not clear as whether or not they've come to know and experience God's love...
9. Whenever the subject arises immediately they grow uneasy as they question whether or not they have ever known or believed God's love for them...
10. Or if they were to be honest with themselves, they might even feel left out—as if they were missing out on what other Christians have...
11. But my dear friends, it's important to notice the order of this passage—in v10 we have the historical death of Christ, in v14 the inspired apostolic testimony, in v15 a personal confession, and in v16 a sure knowledge...
12. In other words I think this is the necessary place to begin—to get ourselves convinced that God does in deed want us to be assured of His love...
13. Have you put all your trust in Christ—is He your only hope—have you ceased all efforts to make peace with God by any other means...
14. Have you made the good confession that Jesus is the Son of God—have you from the heart owned Him as your Lord and as your Savior...
15. Thus I urge you along with the Psalm writer, Ps.34:8—“Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him...”
16. Notice [2] His love is diversely experienced—here I mean to say that not every Christian knows and believes the love of God in an exactly same way...
17. We must be careful at this point as not every person is identical—some are more emotional and contemplative others are not...
18. Am I attempting to reduce true religion to a mere intellectualism—am I gutting it of all emotion and experience...
19. Of course not—I don't think a single person can honestly accuse me of that—as throughout this epistle I have repeatedly pointed out the experimental nature of true religion...
20. But all I'm saying is that “Christian experience” includes the head and heart, and for some the emphases might lye in the one more than the other...
21. Put another way—the emotional element of “Christian experience” may differ in terms of degree from person to person...
22. Listen to the words of a man who has repeatedly been criticized as being overly subjective and focused on experience...
23. Martyn Lloyd-Jones—“How do I know that God loves me? Is it because of some sensations or feelings? No! Rather, in the first instance, the first thing is Christ, what I feel about Christ, what Christ is to me...”
24. Thus the knowledge and belief of God's love for us may differ with reference to the emotion elements and yet for all that, be a true knowledge and faith in God's love...
25. Notice [3] His love is increasingly experienced—by this I mean that as we grow in grace and become more settled in the faith our knowledge of His love should increase...
26. Mk.9:24—“Lord, I believe; help my unbelief...”—as a Christian is one who has come to believe the love that God has for them they have yet to believe that love in perfection...
27. That is, while a measure of unbelief remains within the best Christian, there of necessity remains the potential for doubts and confusion concerning God's love...
28. Now with all of this being said, let e not take away from my main point—the love that God has for us can and should be known with certainty...

#### B. The necessity of abiding

1. Here I simply want to underscore that knowing and believing God's love must be an ongoing and continuing experience...
2. We must abide or continue in His love—we must remain conscious of it, and dwell within the awareness of it...
3. Now before I give you a few helps in doing this, I want to first make a general statement concerning the need to put forth effort...

4. Notice what John says—"he who abides in love..."—that is, to abide presupposes work, it presupposes effort—nobody ever abided in love without conscious and purposed work...
5. Prov.13:4—"the soul of a lazy man desires, and has nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made rich..."
6. Some of us desire to walk in the awareness of God's love but fail to put forth the necessary effort and work...
7. But this relates to a larger fear that I have increasingly noticed, and that is some of us have little desire to spend time in what I call "heart work..."
8. We tend to think in terms of practice as if practice was in some way disconnected from our hearts—but the Scriptures teach—"above all else guard the heart, for out of it are the issues of life..."
9. And how is the heart to be worked upon but by having personal dealings with God in the quiet place—this is how we become better Christians, fathers, and husbands...
10. It all begins with the heart—the reason why we don't live right is because our hearts aren't right, and the only way our hearts will be made right is if we work on them...
11. Jude 1:20-21—"but you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life..."
12. Within these two verses there is only one imperative, or one main commandment, v21—"keep yourselves in the love of God..."
13. In v20 we have two supporting verbs [participles], "building" and "praying"—these compliment the main verb—they teach us how we are to do it...
14. How are we to keep ourselves in the love of God—by building ourselves up on [in] our most holy faith, and—by praying in [with] the Holy Spirit...
15. Now I suggest to you that this can not be done without personal and purposed effort—we must build, we must pray, if we are to—"keep ourselves in the love of God..."
16. Accordingly, I want to finish our time by suggesting a few practical helps in assisting you to—"abide in God's love..."
17. Notice [1] think upon His love, Ps.48:9—"We have thought, O God, on your lovingkindness, in the midst of your temple..."
18. It's nothing less than tragic to see so many learning more about God and attempting to obey God but spending so little time with God...
19. We think and we do things—but we spend precious little time thinking about God and His love—in taking time to be holy...
20. Let me ask you this question—how much of this past week did you spend in meditating upon the lovingkindness of God...
21. Notice [2] believe His love—here I refer to the fact that at times we must rely upon His testimony of love regardless if all else seems to contradict this...
22. The apostle Paul put it like this—"we walk by faith not by sight..."—this is to say we must believe the truth of God's word regardless what we presently see or feel...
23. Pink—"no matter how mysterious His dispensations be, no matter how severe the trials through which He causes us to pass, we must never doubt His immeasurable love for us and to us..."
24. Oh my dear brethren, may I tell you something that you probably already know—there will come times when the best Christian may question God's love...
25. Haven't we repeatedly seen this through the Psalms, for example, Ps.77:8—"Has His lovingkindness ceased forever? Has His promise come to an end forever..."
26. Thus it becomes essential if you and I are to abide in His love, that we be able to believe this love regardless of external appearances...
27. We must above all else, stand firm upon the sure promises of God's word—we must stand our feet firm upon the unchanging character of God...
28. Rom.8:38-39—"for I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord..."
29. Notice [3] obey His commandments—by this I mean that our continuance in the felt-sense of God's love is inseparably connected to our continuation in His commandments...

30. Jn.15:9-10—"As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. 10 "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love..."
31. Notice [a] what we are to do, v9—"abide in my love..."—here is one of the primary reasons why I'm inclined to interpret our text the way that I have...
32. For it seems very probable that John is thinking of these words of our Savior—"as the Father loved me, I also have loved you; abide in my love..."
33. Notice [b] how we are to do it, v10—"if you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love..."—that is, in keeping His commands we will know a sense of His love...
34. When it's all said and done, we come back to this simple point—"Trust and obey, for there is no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey..."
35. Some of us are desirous to abide in the awareness of Christ's love but have drifted from His commandments...
36. If you or I are not being careful to keep His commandments then we have no right to be aware of His love...
37. J.C. Ryle—"The man who makes conscience of diligently observing Christ's precepts, is the man who shall continually enjoy a sense of Christ' love in his soul..."
38. Notice v12—"This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you..."—here we have a summary of what His commandments entail...
39. Now think about this—it's to the degree that we love others, that we will know and sense His love for us....
40. Oh may the Lord help us to know and believe the love that He has for us, and having come to know it, may we ever abide in it!—Amen.