

"Is God Alive in You?"  
I John 4:7-13

Last week I said that your source of security as a believer in Jesus Christ is God's sovereign power. It is by His power that you are born of God, born again, you become a child of God. That when your salvation is grounded in God's power, your eternal security is based on His work in your life. Because of that, you need never fear that you will lose your salvation. Your salvation is accomplished and secured by the supernatural power of God! But having said that, Christianity is not an event, a "miracle of the moment" when God reaches into the very core of your being (your heart, your mind, your soul) and changes you forever. No, Christianity is a life, certainly a life that begins by a miraculous intervention by God, but it is also a life, a new life that is distinctly different from the one you lived before you met Jesus and embraced Him as your personal Savior and Lord. In His Word God tells us what that new life looks like. He even has a goal for you, for each person He's saved. First Thessalonians 4:4 says, "It is God's will that you should be sanctified." That is, that you should become holy (also I Peter 1:15-16). Ephesians 4:13 describes God's goal for you as becoming "mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Jesus Christ." You may say at this point, "Wait a minute! You mean to tell me that now that I'm a Christian God expects my new life to be holy and mature and full of Jesus Christ? How is that going to happen?" I think it's valuable to remember this important principle: God never calls you to do anything without giving you the resources to make it happen. Today we're looking at the resource, the help He's given us to make His goal a reality in our lives.

That brings us to the first of our three points, verse 13 of our passage, which says, "We know that we live in Him, and He lives in us, because He has given us of His Spirit." Who is "He"? It's God. The resource God gives you to accomplish this goal, to become holy and mature and Christ-like is no less than the life of God Himself. In Jesus Christ "we know that we live in Him," that is, in God, "and He lives in us." The resource, the power for Christian living is God Himself! Do you realize this? God gives His Son for your salvation. God gives Himself so you can live the life of salvation found only in His Son! This is not the only place where this glorious truth is declared! First Corinthians 3:16 asks, "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" In John 14:17 Jesus promised that "the Spirit of truth...lives with you and will be in you" (also Romans 8:9).

Let me ask you a question: when you become a believer, when you become a "new creation" in Christ, what's really "new" about you? Do you physically change? Is your appearance different? No. What's new is that the life, the nature of God Himself is now alive in your life! This is what Peter meant when he wrote that in Jesus Christ, we "participate in the divine nature" (II Peter 1:4), which is our second point. It's the very nature of God Himself which is alive in your life: His love, which is the number one evidence of His life alive in you, according to the verses before verse 13. But that's not all: His peace, His joy, His righteousness, His truth, and yes, His holiness. God's goal for your life as a follower of Jesus Christ is to embrace and experience and exhibit (that is, show the world) these proofs of His life alive in you! A very practical way to do this is to participate in our ministry to needy families at Panther Lake Elementary School. The One God's given to help you reach this goal is none other than the Holy Spirit. As the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is no more holy than the Father and the Son. We don't often speak of the Holy Father, the Holy Son, and the Holy Spirit. The reason the Spirit is called the Holy Spirit is not so much because of Who He is, but because of what He does, which is to make believers in Jesus Christ, you and me holy. Sanctification is the word we use to describe how the Holy Spirit works in us to make us holy, to grow the character of Jesus Christ in our thoughts, words, and actions.

I have one application today. It's my response to a question a number of you have raised with me over the years about your relationship with Jesus Christ. In one form or another the question comes this way: If the power of God has intervened in my life and has saved me, and now you say that the life of God Himself is alive in me in Jesus Christ, then why do I continue to struggle with sin? The answer is that we do have this new nature that is God's life alive "in here," in our inner being. However, the fallen instincts of our old sinful nature are still "in here," too. That old sinful nature has been dethroned, it's no longer in control. However, it's not been destroyed, and it's in constant conflict with that new nature. The Apostle Paul was incredibly open and honest about the conflict that raged in his own life in Romans 7:21ff: "I find this law (or principle) at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members." But notice what Paul says about this: "It is no longer I myself who does this, but it is sin living in me" (verse 17). Paul is careful to note that when he speaks of sin in his life, he identifies it with the old sinful nature in his life, not the new nature, the new life that is the Spirit of God living in Him. John Eldridge, in his book "Wild at Heart" builds on this distinction in a way that's been challenging and helpful to me as I face this conflict in my own life. Eldridge argues that in Jesus Christ, you are not your old, sinful self. In Jesus Christ, you're a new creation. In the core of your being is a new nature, a new character, a new person. That new nature is full not of sin, it's full of the God Who lives within you! In here you're in conflict. As you face that conflict, choose to be true to who you are today, now, in Jesus Christ! That's helpful, but it's only a partial solution. The problem remains: what are you to do with that sin? Do you say, "That's not me," and ignore it? No! God hates sin. As you grow in holiness, in Jesus Christ you will grow in hatred for sin in your life. That sin needs to be confronted and dealt with. God's Word declares that He's provided forgiveness and cleansing from your sins. First John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." When we're forgiven and cleansed from all unrighteousness we get a clean slate, which allows us to continue to embrace and grow in the direction of God's goal for our lives. That's why confession and forgiveness allow us to confront, deal with sin in our lives, and move on. Move on with confidence, with hope and with anticipation for the good things God has in store for us.

Let me close with this challenge, which is directed to me as it is to you. In responding to this clearly taught truth that God Himself lives in you in Jesus Christ, is it possible that we have chosen to be satisfied with far less than God has promised us, provided for us? That we've decided to be satisfied with far less than is possible in our lives in Jesus Christ? I'm afraid that the reason there are so many discouraged, depressed, and defeated Christians is because they don't recognize what they possess, they don't draw on the supernatural power and resources that God has given to them. They don't know, or they've chosen not to tap into all God has made possible for their lives. Because of that, these believers are plagued with "I can't" thinking, thinking that's full of worry, anxiety, sadness, pessimism, and distress. The world is full of "I can't" thinking. My friends, the world can have it! The church of Jesus Christ doesn't need "I can't" thinking; the church of Jesus Christ needs "I can do everything in Christ" thinking! That's the thinking you see in the book of Acts, as the church of Jesus Christ set out to conquer the world, to witness the magnificence, glory, truth, and love that is salvation in Jesus Christ. That's the thinking that comes when the Spirit of God is alive and active and obvious in the lives of His people! That's what's needed today, in this hour of human history, the excitement, exuberance, enthusiasm, and joy that God promises us in Christ, and provides for us by His Spirit. On this side of glory, your life in Jesus Christ is a life in which you can do everything in Him. God has withheld nothing to show His power, His glory, His goodness, and His love in blessing you, blessing His church with His very life! In Jesus Christ, you live in God. In Jesus Christ, God lives in you!