



Communion

Safe in Christ

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In Christ, the love of God is poured out, and by His love, we honour all people, including those who seem the least (1 Corinthians 12:22-23). This does not imply that some people are useless, or undeserving of honour. It means we particularly honour those whose works in the body of Christ are not evident.

The apostle Paul, using the analogy of the human body, wrote that it is not the body parts we see that require honour but those we don't see. We are naturally inclined to give the most honour to the parts of the body that look good, like a perfectly aquiline nose or beautifully proportioned face, yet ignore the vital internal organs on which our all our other functions depend.

Many of our older folk have been to us just such vital organs. Let's just remember that, giving honour to them as well as to those whose function is more visible to us, honouring everyone, and not some at the expense of others. For God loves *every* son (although He doesn't love everything we do!)

Abide in Christ

Today, I would like to focus on what it really means to be 'in Christ', and exhort us towards abiding in Him, for abiding in Him is the faith of our baptism. Being in Christ is such a safe place! As the psalmist wrote:

"He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty."
(Psalm 91:1)

The secret place of the Most High is the place of prayer. A person who is found in prayer is dwelling in Christ, in fellowship with Him. They do not live somewhere else, merely hanging out or loitering in the secret place. They *inhabit* the secret place of the Most High. It is where they live; it is where they are nourished. They abide in Christ.

You and I need to abide in Christ. Jesus exhorted His disciples to abide in Him (John 15:7). How may we abide in Him? By dwelling in and drawing our nourishment from the place of prayer where we commune with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As we dwell there, in Their fellowship, we *will* abide in Christ, not in some generalized way but under the shadow of the Almighty.

Are you afraid of anything? You are safe under the shadow of the Almighty, because if His shadow is over you, then He is standing right beside you. Abiding under the Lord's shadow, whom or what need you fear? You are in the unassailable place of safety!

"I will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust!" (Psalm 91:2)

In Christ through baptism

The Scriptures speak of our being in Christ as a fruit of our baptism into His death and resurrection (Romans 6:3-5), not as a state of mind, a feeling, or a product of the right theology (as many people mistakenly believe). In Jesus' day, the Jews believed they were accepted by God because they had the right lineage, descending from Abraham (Luke 3:8). In our day, many Christians believe they are in Christ because they have the right lineage, deriving from right theology. However, being in Christ is actually a description of how and where we abide as we walk in the faith of our baptism into Him.

We can so easily step away from this place of safety! When we depart from what we've heard and know, from what the Lord has ministered to us in the secret place, we cease to abide under the shadow of the Almighty and we are no longer safe. We are exposed to other things, and, feeling their impact, wonder what's happening. Well, we didn't abide in Him, and we need to turn and return.

"...he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit... My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples." (John 15:5,8)

The faith of our baptism is to dwell in the secret place, under the shadow of the Almighty; in Christ, who is our refuge and the One in whom we trust. There, we hear Him say to us, just as He said to Abraham:

"Do not fear... I am a shield to you..." (Genesis 15:1)

However, if we remove ourselves from abiding in Him and engage in an alternative dialogue, a word other than the Lord's word to us, we will be impacted by what we have chosen. No longer in the place of safety, we will be exposed to the world's systems, hostilities and threats to our safety. Having removed ourselves from the word and secret place of the Lord, we may still say that the Lord is our strength and that in Him we trust but we will not really feel or believe that to be true in us, for it *won't* be true. In contrast, when we *are* abiding in Him, regardless of how we feel, we just *know* we are in Christ, the One in whom all God's promises are 'Yes and amen' (2 Corinthians 1:20). Abiding in Him, we are not all the time wondering and weighing up good and evil, or lying awake at night trying to rationalise one thing or another. We are at peace, in Christ, in the place where all the promises of God are 'Yes and Amen.'

In the safety of His name

When we walk in the faith of our baptism, we are walking in faith for resurrection life. Alternatively, when we walk according to our own flesh, resurrection life is not even remotely possible. It is not spiritual to regard the landscape of our circumstances and lament nostalgically for a lost world, or for what has been lost to us with the passing of time. All that kind of living is likely to produce in us is annoyance, cynicism or despondency.

However 'innocent' the cause of our turning from abiding in Christ may be, it still separates us from the fellowship that is in Christ and removes us from the safety of His name. Imagine being a soldier encamped in enemy territory and deciding one evening to go off-base for an evening stroll out into enemy-held territory. Leaving your place of safety, you would be completely exposed to the enemy. You may not die; you may escape injury; you

may even do something heroic while you're out there, but you would nevertheless be very stupid.

Many people live like fools all their lives and think or say it's never hurt them. We've *all* done foolish things, some of them for a long time. Perhaps we think we've escaped harm from those things, but our foolishness has probably hurt other people around us. Our fears, our obsessions, our inflexibilities, our demands, the whole raft of our self-centred behaviours all impact the people around us. But when we are in fellowship with the Lord, in the secret place, we begin to see things as they really are. And not only are we then safe, a lot of people are safe from us!

God is in deadly earnest with us about abiding in Christ. The Christian life is not complicated to walk out, but we need His daily provision and we need it consistently if we are to overcome sin. An odd burst of enthusiasm will not overcome anything.

Olympic athletes do not train sporadically. They dedicate their lives to their sport because that is what is required for them to achieve their goal, and in most cases, it is the consistency of their dedication that determines their place on the podium.

Do not throw away your confidence!

It is so important that we don't lose heart when the way is difficult, and we are under pressure! Not that we need to bounce out of bed every morning with a big smile and hearty hoorah when the grind is hard or the work wearisome. We just get on with it, not needing to feel terrific and not equating feeling lousy or distressed with not doing well. Even when we are feeling shocking and have no idea how things will turn out, we should *not* throw away

our confidence, for our confidence is not in ourselves but in the Lord.

"Do not throw away your confidence, which has great reward." (Hebrews 10:35).

The faith of our baptism, which is faith for resurrection life, is our confidence. *He* is our confidence when we are under pressure or in difficulty; when we can't see a way ahead or our prosperity seems to have failed; when our lives haven't gone the way we planned or thought they should. Our confidence is in God, who has spoken to us, and in whom we are abiding in fellowship. Do not throw away such confidence, which has *great* reward, just as God promised Abraham!

"Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward." (Genesis 15:1)

Our shield and great reward

The faith of our baptism, the faith for resurrection life in Christ, is the faith of God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things which do not exist (Romans 4:17). If we remain in Christ, who is the 'Yes and Amen', we will be able to walk through our troubles because in the fellowship of His sufferings His resurrection life will come in us. Ministered to us by Jesus our Great High Priest in the power of an endless life, we will find the comfort and consolation of Christ. This is the *exanastasis*, the resurrection life of God in a mortal body, about which the apostle Paul wrote (Philippians 3:10).

The reason we feel all the pressures that come upon us is because we don't have in ourselves the power of an endless life. Outside of Christ, nothing lasts. Not what we value, what we long for or what we've built. *Nothing* but the life of God is everlasting.

The word of God endures forever, and we have partaken of His enduring word by faith. As we have done so, He has planted the seed of His life in us. So, let us be in faith to remain and abide in Him, for when we abide in Him:

“Surely, He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence. He shall cover you with His feathers and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler. You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday. A thousand may fall at your side and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you.” (Psalm 91:3-7)

The life of God cannot be destroyed. God is love, and when you are abiding in Him, and He in you, you cannot be destroyed!

“Only with your eyes shall you look and see the reward of the wicked. Because you have made the Lord, who is my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; for He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.” (Psalm 91:8-12)

The devil quoted the last part of that Scripture at Jesus to tempt Him (Matthew 4:6-7). Of course, that doesn't mean it's a bad Scripture! It's the truth, but you can't take it in vain or use it to tempt the Lord. The way we *don't* tempt the Lord is to abide in Him, for it's when we step out of Him, operating by our own resources or heading in our own direction, that we are tempting Him. The more we do this, the less tolerant of it God will be, for He knows we must learn that life is *only* in Him.

It is when we abide in the Lord that Satan is defeated. Trampled underfoot.

“You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, the young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot. “Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him;” (Psalm 91:13-14)

Have you set your love upon the Lord? Set your love upon Him, for you will find it nowhere else. All other loves will betray you.

“...I will set him on high because he has known My name.” (Psalm 91:14)

It is time for us to know His name!

“He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honour him. With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation.” (Psalm 91:15-16)

The Lord is very generous. In many ways, He requires so little, yet He asks us for everything. Yet how much more He gives back to us! This is not trading. We give because we love; because we have set our love upon Him. And we have set our love upon Him because He has first poured His love into our hearts (Romans 5:5).

So, our faith is the faith of our baptism, motivating us to willingly partake of the communion. We recognise His fellowship, and our own deficiencies, and we pray and are willing to be taught further by the Lord how to fellowship and abide in fellowship with Him and with our brethren. We *want* to abide more and more under the wings and in the shadow of the Almighty, and so we humble ourselves before Him, surrendering to His will. Without the reservations and controls of fear, which so often manifest in our hearts, we set our love on Him and abide in the faith and grace He gives each one of us to dwell and continue with Him in the fellowship of His offering.