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Sermon Study on 1 John 4, 12-14

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p. 116 f.) And in the *Lutheran* of January 14, 1937, Dr. H. C. Alleman labels certain portions of Scripture "dregs and filth," which must be separated from the pure portions. "The Bible is not a sacred oracle, speaking infallibly in every book on everything that is contained in it; yet it is infallible when it speaks of the object of our faith and the way of life. . . . We must do what Luther said in a homely, but penetrating sentence: 'The pure Scriptures must be separated from their dregs and filth, which it has ever been my aim to do, that the divine truths may be looked upon in one light and trifles of men in another.'"

The Neo-Lutherans have identified themselves with the liberal movement to do away with verbal inspiration. TH. ENGELDER

Sermon Study on 1 John 4, 12-14

Part Two of the Eisenach Epistle-Lesson for the Third Sunday after Easter, Jubilate

The apostle had pleaded with his readers that they love one another, v. 7a. In order to make them the more willing to obey this admonition, he had added a threefold motivation, v. 7b. Only he that loves, knows God, who is Love and who has manifested His love in sending His Son into the world, vv. 8. 9. Love itself is of God, whose sending of His Son into the world to be the propitiation for our sins is the very life and being of our love, vv. 10. 11. In the passage before us he elaborates the remaining motive that "every one that loveth is born of God." What a privilege to be born of God, to be God's own child! What an inducement for us to love one another! Such mutual love is proof positive of one's regeneration, that one indeed is born of God, by whom alone this love can be created in the heart of man. This argument is developed by the apostle, v. 12 ff. He calls the attention of his readers to three blessed effects of their rebirth,—each one in itself a powerful motive for Christian love of the brethren,—skilfully weaving them together into an irrefutable argument for the necessity of heeding his admonition. If Christians do not love the brethren, they lose their blessed privileges. Where there is no loving heart, there can be no regenerated heart, and consequently there can be no fruits of regeneration; for only in a regenerated heart does God dwell; only in a regenerated heart is God's love perfected; only a regenerated heart partakes of God's gift of His Spirit. The possession of these glorious rights and privileges must be a constant and powerful incentive to fervent, unceasing brotherly love.

"No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us," v. 12.

Reading the opening words of this verse, we are at once reminded of the almost identical words written by the same apostle in his gospel, John 1, 18. There the apostle had used the more general expression, *ἑώρακεν*, indicating merely the act of seeing, while the term employed here, *τετέαται*, denotes an attentive and wondering contemplation. Neither is possible to mortal sinful man. Whenever God was seen, He assumed some shape or form, which, while revealing the invisible God, at the same time served to veil His essential glory. Only when this mortal shall have put on immortality, 1 Cor. 15, 53, shall we see Him as He is, 1 John 3, 2, face to face, and know even as we are known, 1 Cor. 13, 12. Yet, if we love one another, we have in our love the infallible pledge and token of God's dwelling and abiding in us, the irrefutable proof that the invisible God is in closest and most intimate communion and union with us. Self-evidently the apostle does not mean to say that this indwelling is the effect of our love, as little as the regeneration of man is an effect of his love, v. 7. Both are prior to our love of Him; but where such love exists, it *proves* that we are born of God, that He dwells in us, for God alone can create this love.

Though we cannot see or feel God's presence by means of our senses, though His union with us is a mystical one and therefore a mystery to human reason, yet it is an actual union; we are really made the dwellings of God, the temples of the Lord. What a privilege to be God's own home! What a blessing to have the assurance of God's indwelling in our hearts! That heart of ours, the abode of sin, the den of wickedness, Gen. 8, 21; Matt. 15, 19, has become the temple of the living God, who in love divine and omnipotent has kindled in our dead hearts the flame of love toward God and the brethren, an accomplishment possible only to Him. What an inducement to love one another, since the practise of this love, which we can feel, the effects of which upon others we can observe, is to us a sign and token that God the Invisible dwells within us. Cease to love, and He will cease to live within us. Therefore, love! — On the indwelling of the Holy Trinity in our hearts compare Dr. Graebner's article in this periodical, Vol. I, 1930, p. 15 ff. 85 ff.

"His love is perfected in us." The apostle does not mean to say that our love to God will become perfect by our love to the brethren. Loving God perfectly is tantamount to sinlessness, the possibility of which the apostle denies, chap. 1, 8. Neither can he mean that God's love would reach a higher stage of perfection because of our love; there are no stages of perfection in God. *Τετέω* here is used in the sense of carrying to its end; in the

passive, to accomplish one's purpose, reach one's goal. The purpose of God's love in sending His Son has been reached when man has been regenerated into a loving child of God, when this offspring of divine love, love to the brethren, has been created in hearts once devoid of such love. Again we see that the apostle is proving his statement of v. 7 b and at the same time exhorting his readers to practise this love, daily to grow in fervent, unselfish, serving love, that daily our love may become more and more the image of its divine parentage, that love of God which alone is the life of our love.

"Hereby know we that we dwell in Him and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit," v. 13.

The apostle had stated that our love is evidence of God's indwelling in us, v. 12b. There is another proof, even more conclusive, that God dwells in us, yea, that we also dwell in Him. That is the fact that He has given us of, and we have now in our possession (*δέδοται*), His Spirit. That Spirit of whose work within the believers the Savior had spoken at such great length on the eve of His betrayal and death, John 14-16; that Spirit who brought us to faith and shed abroad in our hearts the love of God, Rom. 5; that Spirit by whom we cry, "Abba, Father," Rom. 8, 15-17; that Spirit the first-fruits of which we have received, Rom. 8, 23, and are able to recognize, that Spirit is at the same time the surest pledge that God dwells in us. If His Spirit is active in us; if He daily gives us gifts out of His unmeasured supply; if God's Spirit, who is God, Acts 5, 3, 4; 1 Cor. 2, 10, dwells within us, can there be any doubt that God dwells in us? 1 Cor. 3, 16. Moreover, the Spirit assures us that we dwell in God. Every believer, every Christian, young and old, rich or poor, dwells in God. Not only shall he after his death dwell in the mansion prepared for him in his Father's home, John 14, 2; cp. 1 Cor. 5, 1, 2; not only can he already during his lifetime come boldly to the throne of grace, Heb. 4, 16; 10, 19-22; already in this world and in this life he has the privilege of an abiding dwelling (*μένομεν*) in God Himself. Not only does he know that he is safe in the hands of his God and Redeemer, John 10, 28, 29; that underneath are the everlasting arms, Deut. 33, 27; he dwells in God as in his own home. What a mystery! At the same time, how exalted a privilege, how high an honor! What unspeakable joys are his, abiding in the Fountainhead of all bliss! What assurance of salvation is his, dwelling, remaining, in the Author and Finisher of his salvation! In his masterly exposition of the Ninetieth Psalm, Luther interprets the meaning of our dwelling in God and some of its implications in language so beautiful that we cannot refrain from quoting it. He writes: "These opening words [*"Lord, Thou hast been our Dwelling-place*

in all generations"] also breathe life and serve to give to us a certain hope of the resurrection and of eternal life, since he [the psalmist] calls God, who is eternal, our Dwelling-place, or, to express it more clearly, a place of refuge, whither we may flee and be secure. For if God is our Dwelling-place and God is Life and we His inhabitants, it necessarily follows that we are in life and shall live eternally. We know that all this results by good and altogether sure deduction by virtue of the First Commandment. For who will call God a Dwelling-place of the dead? Who will regard Him as a grave or as a cross? He is Life; therefore shall they also live whose dwelling-place He is. . . .

"It is a wondrous manner of speech, the like of which is not found [elsewhere] in Holy Writ, that God is a Dwelling-place. In other places Scripture even says the opposite, calling man the temple of God, in which God dwells. Paul says, 'God's temple is within you.' This Moses turns around and says that we are the residents and lords in this house. For the Hebrew word *מִקְדָּשׁ* properly signifies a dwelling-place; as when Scripture says, 'His dwelling-place [is] in Zion,' Ps. 76, 2, it uses this word. Since a house is for protection, this word is often explained as a refuge or a place of refuge. Moses has purposely used this expression in order to show that for us all hope lies altogether securely in God, and in order that they who wish to pray to this God might surely believe that they do not in vain suffer tribulation in this world, that neither they die, since they have God as their place of refuge and the divine majesty as a dwelling wherein they may surely rest eternally. In almost the same manner Paul writes in the letter to the Colossians, 'Your life is hid with Christ in God,' Col. 3, 3. For it is putting it much more clearly and grandly when I say that the believers dwell in God, than to say that God dwells within them. For He actually did dwell in Zion, but the place of His dwelling has been changed. It is manifest, however, that whatever is within God is not changed nor can be transferred. For God is a dwelling that cannot perish. Therefore Moses wanted to indicate the altogether sure life, saying that God is our Dwelling-place, not the earth, not heaven, not Paradise, but simply God Himself, and 'in all generations.' In other words, from the beginning of the world to the end of the world God has never forsaken His own. Adam, Eve, the patriarchs, the prophets, the pious kings, sleep in this Dwelling. For if they have not yet risen with Christ (as I believe), then their bodies rest in the graves, but their life is hid with Christ in God and will on the Last Day appear in glory. In this manner Moses indicates the resurrection of the dead and the hope of life against death, even though not altogether clearly, yet in significant words. For it was reserved for Christ in the New

Testament publicly to preach the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection of the dead, which were shown in the Old Testament under a sort of veil." (St. Louis, V, 741 ff.)

We dwell in God and God in us. Surely a change more radical could not be conceived than that which took place in the relation of God and man to each other when man was regenerated. Once lying in wickedness, 1 John 5, 19, an alien, Eph. 2, 11-13; now a temple of the living God, now residing in God Himself. What an inducement for us to love one another! The knowledge that every fellow-Christian is so honored without distinction as to race or color, or riches, or culture, or age, or position, must remove every reason for envy or jealousy, on the one hand, and for pride and haughtiness, on the other. Why should a Christian dwelling in God and having God in his possession (Ps. 73, 25, 26) within himself, why should he be jealous of his brethren because they may have a few more temporal advantages than he? Why should a Christian look down upon his brother, who in the one thing which really counts, union with God, is just as highly honored, just as truly and fully God's own as he himself? All Christians alike dwell in God; in all without distinction God dwells. Can we imagine a bond more effective in uniting them in brotherly, fervent, enduring love? What a sacrilege, what a *crimen laesae maiestatis* in the fullest possible sense of the term, would it be to besmirk this dwelling by harboring thoughts of any malice or arrogance and vain assumption, by living in hatred and strife, by quarreling and backbiting among one another! If we would remain temples of God, if we would abide in God as in our Dwelling-place, then let us love one another, let that love be manifested in our daily contact with the brethren, that love which is of God, which was engendered in our hearts when first we became children of God through faith which is in Christ Jesus. For practical demonstrations of this love compare 1 John 3, 17, 18; Jas. 1, 27; 2, 1-9. 15, 16; 3, 13-18; 4, 11; 5, 19, 20.

To sum up the argument of the apostle: Love has its being in the love of God and Christ's vicarious atonement, vv. 10, 11; love is proof positive that God dwells in us, v. 12; this dwelling of God within us and our dwelling in God is made possible only by the Holy Spirit, v. 13, through whose work God's love accomplished its aim and purpose, v. 12b. Could the apostle have furnished proof more convincing for his statement that both love and the lover is born of God? V. 7.

Yet, lest we forget, the apostle for the third time emphasizes the fact that all this has been made possible only because the Father sent His Son as the Savior of the world.

"And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world," v. 14.

This is the all-important truth which the apostle cannot impress forcibly enough on his hearers. Cp. Phil. 3, 1. As is his custom, he adds details necessary to a fuller understanding of the subject under consideration, love. In the first place, he assures his hearers, that the sending of the Son is not a fiction, not a fable, but a fact. "We have seen," not the invisible Trinity, not the fullness of God's essential glory, but we have seen Him whom the Father sent into the world, in whom we have seen the Father, John 14, 9, 10; 10, 30; 1, 14. We have seen Him, not only for a few fleeting moments, but in adoring, intensive, enduring contemplation, *θεωροῦμεθα*, the same word used John 1, 14; "and the impression of the sight abides in us" (*Bible Commentary*); note the perfect. Cp. John 1, 1-3; 2 Pet. 1, 16-19. In the second place, "we do testify." Cp. Acts 4, 20. Having seen and tasted of the love of God, we cannot but tell others that they also may know and believe in this love of God and have their hearts filled with love. The witness of the apostles as we now have it in the writings of the New Testament is the means whereby the Holy Ghost enters the heart of man, makes it a dwelling-place of God, and creates in it true love toward God and the brethren. In the third place, the apostle speaks of Christ as the Savior of the world. He omits the article before *σωτήρα* in order to stress the fact that Christ possesses all the qualities needed to be a Savior of the world. Being the Son of God, eternal, omnipotent Love, having been sent into the world to become a true man, He is indeed able to save to the uttermost—our Captain of Salvation. For that very reason He is the Savior of the world, John 3, 16; 1 John 2, 2; Gal. 4, 4, 5; etc. It is the will of God that love rule in the heart of every man on earth, that all the children of men be children of God, beloved lovers of God and their brethren, that all this world form one household of God, one great brotherhood, a brotherhood, however, brought about solely by faith in the propitiation accomplished by the love of God, who sent His Son into the world to be the Savior of the world. For this Savior is not a savior in the sense of modern religion, in the sense that every Jew and Hindu is ready to call Jesus a savior, but a savior *only* in the sense so clearly brought out in the preceding verses and in the entire letter.

What John was privileged to see with the eyes of his body and of faith we now see only with the eyes of faith. Yet that seeing, that faith, is just as sure of its object as John was; for it is based on the infallible Word of God, and it is a faith engendered in us by God Himself, by His love, which prompted Him to send His Son as Savior of the world. Having in this manner seen with the

apostle, we with him, in true gratitude and like him, bear witness to the precious truth that God's love prepared a propitiation for our sins, even His only-begotten Son. For such witness by word and deed there is abundant opportunity for every Christian: his own example of Christian love, personal solicitation, admonition, warning, consolation of the brethren; lending his counsel and support, moral, financial, personal, to the various congregational activities and institutions, so that every member, young and old, may be abundantly supplied with the Bread of Life, even if that means calling an assistant pastor and more teachers for the Christian day-school; supporting those brethren in the faith who because of their poverty or small number or for other reasons are unable to support their own pastor and teacher, — these are but a few of the many possibilities of bearing witness open to the Christian truly loving his brethren. And since Jesus is the Savior of the world, since among those still without the fold there are also elect of God, cp. 2 Tim. 2, 10, future brethren, he will lend willing and liberal aid to the various foreign missions, loving others as he himself was and is loved.

Homiletical hints. Proceeding from the fact that all doctrines of the Bible transcend human comprehension, yet unlike the speculations of human reason are always immensely practical (compare the doctrine of the two states of Christ, Phil. 2, 1-11), one may choose the theme: *God Dwells in You and You in Him*. 1. Let us rejoice in this wondrous fact. 2. Let us joyfully fulfil the obligations resultant from it. (Love, v. 12; testify, v. 14.) — *Three Reasons for Brotherly Love*. 1. God dwells in us and we in Him. 2. By our love His love is perfected in us. 3. He has given us of His Spirit. — *Why do We So Often Fail in Our Testimony for Christ and His Gospel?* 1. Because we do not realize the wonderful privileges bestowed upon us by this Gospel; 2. because we do not realize that these privileges are to be universal. — *Why Is Our Love toward the Brethren So Cold?* Because we fail to realize the purpose of the love of God, v. 12; His dwelling in us, our dwelling in Him, His gift of the Spirit. — An outline on the entire lesson for Jubilate Sunday: Referring to the joy of Easter, this joy must manifest itself in brotherly love. *Let Us Manifest Our Easter Joy in Brotherly Love*. 1. For this purpose God has given us an example of His love. 2. For this purpose God has made our love possible. 3. For this purpose God dwells within us and we in God.

TH. LAETSCH
