

① 【God is love】

“Love comes from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ... For God is love.” (1 John 4:7-8)

The scripture “For God is love” is a famous phrase. It also appears in verse 16: “God is love.” The elder John used this phrase for the first time. It likely came from his own experience. The expression “God is love” does not describe God's essential nature, but rather one of His peripheral attributes. When God relates to and seeks communion with the humans He created, He pours out His energy—what we call love—without limit. God's love surpasses any love conceivable to humans, for God is infinite. Consider God's love as solar energy. The sun radiates its light and heat equally upon both the righteous and the wicked. Yet from the human perspective, each person feels it differently, complaining selfishly about it being “too hot today” or “just right today.” Similarly, God's love is poured out equally upon all people, yet each individual perceives it differently. Even so, God never ceases to love. When a mother holds her newborn baby, she relaxes her arms and cradles it gently. Even if she loves it deeply, squeezing it tightly would kill the baby. In the same way, God continuously adjusts the intensity of His loving energy to convey it in a way that benefits humanity.

It is written, “Love comes from God.” This becomes clear when compared to a mother and her baby. Even before the baby is born, the parents' love, their desire for that child, exists, and the baby comes into this world. The baby is born into the parents' love. The baby may be selfish, but the parents respond with love. It wasn't that the baby loved the mother first; the mother loved the baby first and poured out her love. That is how the baby comes to know love. In the same way, God's energy of love existed before the world began, and the overflow of that energy created this world and humanity. Why was I born? The answer is that God created you because He loves you and desires to give you His love and abundance.

● At the grandparents' open house, the kindergarten principal greeted the grandparents with these words: “Grandchildren are truly adorable—unconditionally adorable. I don't know why, but they're just adorable. So please give them a big hug.” This is the principal's own sentiment. When you become a parent, grow older, and have grandchildren of your own, you come to understand God's love deeply through your own experience.

② 【Love one another】

The elder John saw God's love especially in Christ's birth and crucifixion. He

declares: "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." (1 John 4:10) In Isaiah, God addresses the Israelites in Babylon thus: "You who swear by the Lord's name and invoke the name of the God of Israel, yet do not act faithfully or show mercy" (48:1). "For my name's sake I have withheld my anger; for my glory I have restrained myself from destroying you" (48:9). You are unfaithful and do no good. I have held back my anger against you and endured, not destroying you. This is for my glory, he says. Yet to such a rebellious people, God still calls out, "I am the Lord your God" (48:17). This is astonishing. It humbles me. It is beyond human capability.

● Regarding this passage, Pastor Enomoto writes: "God repeatedly declares, 'I am your God.' Even when Israel, having rebelled against God, could not utter a single word in response to being told, 'I am not your God; I do not know you,' God always drew near, saying, 'I am your God. Return to me, and I will heal your sins.' When things get awkward between people, it's hard to reconcile unless one side yields. Yet it's difficult to be the first to say, 'I was wrong' or 'Let's make up.'... In that sense, I believe God truly loved Israel."

Here, the elder John says that even though humans are the ones at fault, God reached out to us to make peace, sending His Son, Christ. Long ago, I heard somewhere that "love means suffering great loss for the sake of another." We don't want to suffer loss. That's why we avoid getting involved with those who might cause us to lose. But God is not like that. He willingly gets involved with such people, suffering great loss. And He doesn't consider that loss a loss. That is what love is. To love means to imitate that love of God. Therefore, love is not merely liking someone; it is engaging with that person, suffering great loss, and becoming impoverished oneself.

③ **【Having the Holy Spirit dwell within me = a sign that God is with me】**

How can we know that God is with us? Not getting sick, success at work, protection from disaster, succeeding in everything we do—these things are certainly written in the Old Testament. "No harm will befall you, no plague will come near your tent." (Psalm 91:10) But the New Testament tells a different story. Even believers can face martyrdom and short lives, trials, and suffering. Jesus clearly stated, "In this world you will have trouble" (John 16:33), and St. Paul said, "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). " (Acts 14:22). Even with God present, suffering exists. Therefore, we must not seek signs of God's presence in our circumstances. The surest sign that God is with you is that you have received God's Holy Spirit. "God has given us his Spirit. From this we know... that God also dwells in us." (1 John 4:13) Nowhere in Scripture is it written that the Holy Spirit was created. Rather, it is written that the Holy Spirit created all

things. This is because the Holy Spirit is God. This God dwells within me. What then happens? “Whoever publicly declares that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.” (1 John 4:15) Those in whom the Holy Spirit dwells believe in Jesus and can confess that Jesus is the Son of God. This is also what Paul says. “No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.” (1 Corinthians 12:3) Therefore, if the Holy Spirit departs, one can no longer make this confession. Buddhism seeks human enlightenment, but in Christianity, it is possible for someone filled with joy yesterday to feel no joy at all today. This is because faith is not built by our knowledge or strength, but is made possible by receiving the Holy Spirit.

● In the 2nd century, there was a man named Origen in Alexandria. His father, Leonidas, was a pagan but converted to Christianity. He held a fervent faith, read the Scriptures daily, and taught the Bible to his children himself. Origen studied the Scriptures from a young age and is said to have bombarded his father with questions, putting him to great trouble. His father rejoiced in such a son. It is said that once, while his son slept, he opened his chest and kissed it, declaring it the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. In 201, during Emperor Severus's persecution of Christians, his father was arrested and martyred. Origen was 17 years old. He too attempted to be martyred, but it is said his mother hid his clothes, preventing his capture. He carried his father's memory in his heart throughout his life, maintaining a fervent desire for martyrdom and living by his father's example. In 249, during Emperor Decius' persecution of Christians, he was captured, chained, tortured, and thrown into a cold dungeon. He was later released, but this ordeal led to his death around 254 at the age of 69.

Jesus said, “The Son can do nothing by himself; he does only what he sees the Father doing” (John 5:19). Jesus himself lived by imitating God the Father. Origen also imitated his father. Gregory of Nyssa said, “Christianity is the imitation of the divine nature (the Trinity).” Christianity is a religion of imitating God. The faith of believers who walk ahead becomes etched in the eyes of those who follow, leading the latter to live similarly. Thus, throughout the ages, those resembling Christ arise. The Holy Spirit dwelling within us makes this possible. Let us all strive to live like Christ. Then, believers who follow will be raised up. It is not others who change, but you who must change first. Not others, but I must first follow Christ. Let us never forget this starting point.