

God with us, for us, in us

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Let us start another year with a very real and deep sense of how very near God has come to us in Jesus Christ our Lord. To some of us evils of a physical and material sort are all too near, and to all of us the seductive evils, that proceed from the world without and the flesh within, are very present. From all these evils we shall only be preserved as God is real. to us and we walk before Him.

In the course of his prophecy Jeremiah raised this striking question: "Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off?" (Jer. 23: 23). What was the answer to that question? From the moment that God redeemed Israel out of Egypt to be His people, He had made known His desire to dwell in their midst. Yet under the conditions that then existed He had to shroud Himself in fire and cloud and awful majesty, and man had to keep his distance. This was so, whether with Moses, or Aaron and his sons, or with Solomon, when the Temple was finished, and yet the priests could not enter when the glory of the Lord filled the House. It was nearness in one sense, but distance in another.

We open the New Testament, and all is changed, for we are immediately introduced to JESUS, who is EMMANUEL, which being interpreted is, "God with us." Here we have something entirely new. He who once dwelt in the devouring fire on Sinai was now amongst men in perfect manhood and in lowly grace. The One who is light and who dwells in light unapproachable, had now appeared in such fashion as to soften down the piercing rays of His glory so that human eyes might take them in. Those who were His disciples in the days of His flesh could say, "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father." God was with them indeed, and they were not afraid. We have not His personal presence today, but we have the inspired record of His presence, and we have what the disciples who followed Him on earth did not have — the presence and indwelling of the Spirit of God — and therefore, "God with us," may be a reality to us today.

God desires to dwell in the midst of His people, yet on our side desire for His presence would hardly exist if we did not know what was His attitude towards us. How necessary then to pass on from Matthew to Paul and discover from his pen in the Epistle to the Romans, that He is wholly **for us** and not against us. We read the opening of that Epistle and get such a statement of what man is that we might conclude He must be against us; but the exposure of man's sin is followed by the unveiling of God's grace, reigning through righteousness by Jesus Christ our Lord. God has acted in redeeming power so that by the time we reach the close of chapter 8, a challenge can be flung out to the universe, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Is God for us? He is, for He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all. There was no ram in the thicket for Him, as there was for Isaac. He rather became like "a ram caught in a thicket," for us, and was offered up "in the stead of," that is, substitutionally for us. That being so, "It is God that justifieth."

But not only does He justify in the Christ who died and is risen again, and is even at the right hand of God, but we are enfolded in the embrace of the love of God, that prompted all, and which finds its expression and its centre in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Here we pause a moment. God is **with us in grace**, and He is **for us in righteousness**, which is the fruit of the love which finds its eternal spring in Himself and in Christ Jesus our Lord. What can be more assuring than this as we face all the difficulties of the hour, and anticipate perhaps all the upheavals and earthly sorrows that may lie ahead? God is with us and God is for us. Can there be more

than that?

There can; we must turn to John's first Epistle to have it fully brought before us. It is reiterated in a very striking way in his fourth chapter. We will quote a few extracts: —

"Greater is **He that is in you**, than he that is in the world."

"If we love one another, **God dwelleth in us** Hereby know we that we dwell in Him, and **He in us**, because He hath given us of His Spirit."

"Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, **God dwelleth in him**, and he in God."

These quotations are sufficient to emphasize our point. The believer in the Son of God and the confessor of His Name may rejoice with confidence that God is not only with Him objectively in Christ, and for Him as guaranteed by the sacrificial work of Christ and the love that lay behind it, but also **in him** in the power of the indwelling Spirit of God.

In the verses quoted, the Divine indwelling is connected with the Spirit of God being in us, with the love of God — the Divine nature — being operative in us; and with the confession of Jesus as the Son of God. By the Spirit we confess Jesus as Lord, and also as the Son of God. By that same Spirit the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts and we ourselves are taught to love one another. By the indwelling Spirit, who is greater than the adversary — that spirit of evil who is god and prince to this world — we may overcome, however powerful and seductive the force that is arrayed against us. Does not this further reinforce our confidence as we step forth into the unknown future?

There is just this further to be said. God is with us, and He is for us, whatever may be at the moment our state and condition as before Him. But when we come to God in us it is possible and even needful to bring in an "if." This we see in 1 John 4: 12, God dwells in us, "if we love one another." This gives a very practical and experimental bearing to the whole matter.

The Apostle has previously contemplated someone finding his brother with need and shutting up his bowels of compassion from him, and he pertinently asks, "How dwelleth the love of God in him?" Now, if we, who are brethren in the family of God, do not manifest the Divine nature in love one toward another, how shall it be said that God is dwelling in us? As we read, both here and in John 1: 18, "No man hath seen God at any time." In the Gospel He was, however, to be seen in the only begotten Son, who is abidingly in the bosom of the Father. In the Epistle, He is to be seen in us who are in the family of God, as born of Him, and who consequently manifest the nature of God in our love one to another.

So let us take this thing very much to heart. If there is no manifestation of the love, what proof is there that God, who is love, is dwelling in us? And there is more involved than this, for just after we read "And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world." Here is love, not circulating within the family of God, but flowing out from the family in large-hearted testimony to the world, with a view to salvation.

We often deplore, and often have heard others deplore, the little power and effect that seems to accompany the testimony to the world of God as a Saviour. One of the main reasons, which accounts for this sad fact, is here unveiled before us. There is so little display of love — the Divine nature — in the bosom of the Divine family.

God in us has to become a fact which is patent to the view of the world. When it is so, even in a very small measure, it has a very potent effect. So let us not seek to avoid some heart-searching as we step forth into another year. God is with us, as revealed in Christ. He is for us in grace, in

righteousness, in love. And He is in us, if indeed we are born of Him and possess His Spirit. Being in us, and being Himself love, it is only an outflow of love from us each that will declare that fact — an outflow, first within the circle of the family of God, and then outwards towards the world.