

Lesson Five: 1 John 4¹

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.

1. About what “spirits” is John speaking? We can see from the sentence that he is speaking of “false prophets”. Are the false prophets the “spirits” or are they demonic spirits influencing the “false prophets” (teachers)? It is most likely the later since “spirits” usually refers to something non-human, either good or evil.

Many false prophets—not "prophets" in the sense "foretellers," but organs of the spirit that inspires them, teaching accordingly either truth or error: "many Antichrists."-Jamieson, Fausset, Brown Bible Commentary. (JFB)

The word "spirit" is pneuma. The word as used here refers to "one in whom a spirit is manifest or embodied, hence one actuated by a spirit, whether divine or demonical" (Thayer). Paul finds the source of false doctrine in demons who actuate the false teachers who propound heresy (1 Tim. 4:1 "devils" should be "demons" daimonion). Thus these spirits are human beings actuated either by demons or the Holy Spirit. In this case they would be the teachers, pastors, and evangelists who circulated around the local churches.- Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament - Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament - Volume 2.

The exhortation is to try these individuals to see whether they are of God or not. The word "try" is dokimazō, "to put to the test for the purpose of approving, and finding that the person put to the test meets the specifications laid down, to put one's approval upon him." Thus, the teacher, for instance, was not to be put to the test for the purpose of condemning him, but with the intent to approve him. The brother was not to be treated as a heretic before he had shown himself to be one.-Wuest

2. Notice in verse 2 that John contrasts these “spirits” with the “Spirit of God”. How do we distinguish between a false and true spirit? John in his black and white fashion makes it clear.
3. Those who do NOT teach that Jesus Christ (Messiah) came in human flesh are NOT from God: for this is the spirit of the Antichrist. This is the spirit of “the” Antichrist’s constant message was, is, and will be that Jesus the Christ, did NOT come as God in the flesh. It denies that Jesus is who He claimed to be. The Antichrist, which many believe to be Satan, inspires these false prophets to teach falsely and to oppose the truth about Christ.

The great heresy of John's day came from the Gnostics, who believed that Jesus wasn't real, or wasn't physical. They thought that God just made it look like He

¹ Main text Scripture is from New American Standard Bible (NASB)

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became a man and died for our sins. Therefore, there wasn't a real atonement or resurrection. With this in mind, John was stating that anyone who didn't acknowledge the physical reality of Jesus was not speaking by God's Spirit. Jesus became a man, died, was buried, and rose again with a glorified body. This has to be a central truth for anyone who is a true prophet of God. -Andrew Wommack

Now, what is involved in the statement, "Jesus Christ is come in the flesh"? The name "Jesus" is the English form of the Greek Iēsous, and this is the Greek form of the Hebrew name "Jehoshua" which means "Jehovah saves." "Christ" is from christos, "the Anointed One." The words "is come" are in the perfect tense in the Greek text. From the foregoing it follows that the statement speaks of the God of the Old Testament who in the Person of His Son became incarnate in human flesh without its sin, died on the Cross to satisfy the just demands of His law which man broke, and raised Himself from the dead in the body in which He died, to become the living Saviour of the sinner who places his faith in Him in view of what He did for him on Calvary's Cross. The person who teaches that, John says, is actuated by the Holy Spirit. Likewise, the teacher who does not agree to that doctrine is not of God. He is actuated by the spirit of Antichrist who denies and is against all that the Bible teaches regarding the person and work of the Lord Jesus. This is Modernism. -Wuest

a. Paul also teaches of truth versus error.

2 Corinthians 3:6

He also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life....7 But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones... 8 how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?... 9 For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory.... 14 But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. 15 But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. 16 Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

b. Paul is comparing the New Covenant to the Old Covenant. Paul uses synonyms for the New Covenant and Old Covenant

New Covenant vs.6

Spirit vs.6,8

Ministry of righteousness vs.9

The Lord vs.16

Spirit of the Lord vs.17

Letter vs. 6

Ministry of Death Vs.7

Written on stones vs.7

Ministry of condemnation vs.9

Moses vs.15

c. When anyone teaches the Old Covenant, the ministry of death, the ministry written on stones (the 10 commandments), the ministry of condemnation, Moses, if it is ministered as the covenant to be followed, then there is a veil on their heart.

d. The veil is removed by teaching and following the New Covenant, the Spirit, the ministry of righteousness, the Lord, the Spirit of the Lord.

4 You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. 5 They are from the world; therefore, they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them. 6 We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

4. **What a comforting verse this must have been to those who were being troubled by these false prophets, and what a comfort it is to us.** It's important to note here, that even though obviously, these false prophets were being inspired by false spirits, John, when he says "greater in he who is in you that he who is in the world", is likely also referring to the false prophets.

John states that the saints to whom he is writing have overcome these false teachers. The verb is perfect in tense, speaking of a past completed victory, and a present state of being a conqueror. That is, the saints to whom John refers were not taken in by the heresies of the false teachers, and were in a settled state of victory over them. They were confirmed in their attitude against heresy and had their eyes wide open to its source and nature. The reason why they thus gained a complete victory over the false teachers and their heresies is that God the Holy Spirit who indwelt them is greater than that fallen angel Satan who is in the world system of evil. - Wuest

5. **"The world" which John just told the reader to "love not" listens to these prophets because they are of the world.** Those of the world speak as from the world to those of the world.

These false teachers have their source in the world system of evil, this present pernicious age. "Speak they of the world" could mean, "speak they concerning the world." But the Greek is clear here. It is, "out of the world as a source they speak." The source of their false doctrines is the world. The demons of Satan are part of this world system, and the source of all heresy. - Wuest

John 8:42-47²

Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. ⁴³ Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. ⁴⁴ You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵ But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. ⁴⁶ Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? ⁴⁷ He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God."

Verse 5. of the world—They derive their spirit and teaching from the world, "unregenerate human nature, ruled over and possessed by Satan, the prince of this world" [Alford]. -JFB

6. **In what must be an assurance, John states clearly that "we" are from God, not the world.** One test to know if someone is of the world or of God is do they listen/heed our word? The one who refuses to listen is of the world. So, here's are two tests: Does the

² Supporting Scripture is usually NKJV.

prophet believe that Jesus, as God, came in the flesh, died physically, and rose from the dead bodily, and do they listen to true believers or the world?

John 18:37

Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

7. Paul is addressing Christians. "Beloved" (with only one exception Mark 11:6) is a term used in the New Testament exclusively for Jesus, believers, and the nation of Israel.

- Those who love God will love each other because love is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal.5:22) and because "we love because He first loved us," (1 Jn.4:19)
- Even so, we are encouraged to love each other because, let's face it, sometimes loving each other is challenging (when we don't agree, when we are offended, when we are bothered, when we are in a bad mood, when someone else is having a bad day...and on and on.)
- LOVE EACH OTHER. You don't have to "feel" love, but we are commanded to "do" love.
- This is not to say that we do not love non-believers. Yet, we are to put special attention to loving each other.

Galatians 6:10

So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.

(4:7, 8) "Beloved" is agapētoi, "divinely-loved ones," that is, "beloved ones, loved by God." Those who are loved by God should love one another. The love with which children of God should love one another is the agapē love which God is in His nature, the love which is produced by the Holy Spirit in the heart of the yielded saint, the love which was seen in action at the Cross, and the love whose constituent elements are defined for us in 1 Corinthians 13. The exhortation is in the present subjunctive which speaks of continuous action. The translation reads, "Let us be habitually loving one another." The words "one another" are a reciprocal pronoun in the Greek text. There should be reciprocity in the exercise of this love. Everyone who habitually loves "is born of God." "Is born" is perfect tense in the Greek text, literally "has been begotten with the present result that that person is a child" of God. The new-birth is a permanent thing. A child of God remains a child of God forever.-Wuest

8. Non-believers love, don't they? So what is John saying? How is their love different from ours? In many ways.

- Human love is often conditional on the other person's appearance and behavior. "I will love you IF, but if you don't, I'm outta here!"
- Hatred is very common in the world. All we need to do is read the news.
- You could be hated for simply disagreeing with someone.
- We as believers might have very good reasons for not wanting another particular believer in our lives, HOWEVER, we should never cease to love each other. In fact, this peculiarity is a testimony to the world.

John 13:34-35

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

*As to the statement, "God is love," we would suggest that that simply is not true. God is not an abstraction. The word "God" has the article, the word "love" does not, which construction in Greek means that the two words are not interchangeable. The absence of the article emphasizes nature, essence, character. The translation should read, "**God as to His nature is love.**" That is, **God is a loving God. It is His nature to be loving.**-Wuest*

9 By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

9. This perfectly mirrors John 3:16.

John 3:16 (cdh expanded)

Because IN THIS MANNER God loved the world, that He gave (as a gift) His only begotten Son (by giving His Son in death for us), that whoever believes (has faith/trusts) in Him will not perish (die/be destroyed), but have everlasting life (absolute fullness of life, life real and genuine, life without end).

10. Before we loved God, He loved us. Thus, His love for us is not a RESPONSE to our love for Him, but rather our love is a response to His love. Again, we see that the giving of His Son in death while we were still His enemies is proof of His love which still speaks today.

Romans 5:8

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:10

For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

11. We see here that the REASON we love is not to obtain God's love, but rather BECAUSE we have His love, we love. "Ought to" has to do with moral obligation and duty. This may go against our idea of not being under the law, which we are not. However, from God's perspective, since He loved us by giving His life for us, we are duty-bound to do the same for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Romans 13:8

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.

12 No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. 13 By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. 14 We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

12. **No one has seen God refers to God the Father.** Clearly, Jesus claimed to be God, and was seen. What John is getting at here is that our love for each other is one way people can “see” God, and we can see God as we behold this unique love among ourselves.
- a. **His love is perfected in us. Stunning, actually.**
13. **Believers know that they are in Christ, but how can they be sure?** It is because we have the Holy Spirit living inside of us.
14. **“We” in verse 14 might harken back to how John began the letter.** He personally walked with Jesus and knew Him to be the Savior. He saw Him die for our sins. Or perhaps since he has just said that we “know” that we abide in Him and He is in us because of His Spirit, that we have “seen and testify” that the Father has sent the Son to be our Savior.
15. **Confession that Jesus is the Son of God is core to salvation.** When we confess Jesus as the Lord, God abides/dwells in us and we in God. Confessing “the Lord Jesus Christ” is equivalent to confessing “that Jesus is the Son of God”. Believing produces confession—they are so closely linked as to be inseparable (If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus Christ, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved (Rom. 10:9)

Acts 8:34-38

So the eunuch answered Philip and said, “I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?”³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.³⁶ Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?”

³⁷ Then Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.”

*And he answered and said, **“I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”***

³⁸ So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.

16 We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. 17 By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment, because as He is, so also are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.

16. **God never requires that we “feel” anything, only that we “know and believe”.** Sometimes our emotions fail us. We don’t “feel” loved by God for one reason or another. God understands our weakness. We can rest in what we “know” to be true. We can “believe” in what we know: THE LOVE GOD HAS FOR US. Here now, John states that God lives in us and we live in God. When we dwell in His love for us we are acutely aware of His indwelling presence. Abiding/dwelling in love also clearly has to do with loving each other habitually.

The pronoun is used in an intensive sense, “As for us, we have known and believed.” Both verbs are in the perfect tense, emphasizing not only a past completed act but abiding results in present time. “To us” is en hēmin, “in us,” that is, “in our sphere, in our case,” speaking of the sphere in which God’s love operates.

Translation: And as for us, we have known the love which God has in our case, and have that knowledge at present, and we have believed and at present maintain that attitude; God is as to His nature, love, and he who dwells in the aforementioned love, in God is dwelling, and God in him is dwelling. -Wuest.

- a. **When we are born again, we instinctively know that God loves us. Sometimes however, this knowledge of His love can get clouded by false teaching, not being loved by those who should love us, and difficult times. It can be a process to return to that first love and understand that you are deeply loved by God.**
- b. **God's love is something that we continue to explore throughout our lives. Paul prayed that the Ephesians would know the depths of God's love for them. Thus, we will constantly expand our knowledge of His great love for us.**

Ephesians 3:14-19

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— ¹⁹ to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

17. **How is it that we have no fear concerning the Judgment Seat of Christ? It is His love for us. As He is, so are we in this world is stunning beyond comprehension.**
18. **There is no fear (exceeding fear and terror-Strong's) in love.** Not only that, but perfect (complete) love casts out (throws, scatters) fear. Believers who fear God, falsely have a sense of judgment. If a believer lives in fear of God, that person is not yet perfected in His love.

19 We love, because He first loved us. 20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. 21 And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

19. **The REASON we love, is because He first loved us.** If we don't allow ourselves to revel in God's love for us, nothing else will work.
20. **John continues his intensity about loving each other and makes it clear.** The person who claims to love God while at the same time hating his brother is a liar. If you can't love a brother or sister in Christ whom you can see, it is impossible to love God whom you cannot see.
21. **John could not be more clear.** If you love God (because He first loved you), you should love the brethren in the same way.