

**1 John**  
Chapter Four  
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*1John 4:1-3 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. <sup>2</sup>By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; <sup>3</sup>and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.*

In the time of Elijah there were people claiming to be prophets of Baal and of Asherah who were gods of Canaan (1 Kings 18:19). Of course there were prophets of God like Elijah (1 Kings 18:4, 13, 22). Determining if they were prophets depended upon the truthfulness of the predictions as most utterances were forthtelling rather than explanatory. Two tests were available in OT times to determine if a prophet was really a spokesman for God:

- 1.) Deut 18:22 "When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.
- 2.) Deut 13:1-5 "If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God is testing you to find out if you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. "You shall follow the Lord your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him. "But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion against the Lord your God who brought you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, to seduce you from the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from among you.

In the NT times true prophets inspired others to prophecy also and so it was necessary to determine the source of their predictions. There were people who falsely claimed to be speaking under the authority of a spirit or those who were speaking under the authority of a false spirit. John thinks in terms of two spirits: the Spirit of God and the spirit of the Antichrist. A couple of decades before John's writing of this epistle Paul had stated a simple method to determine between true and false utterances: "Therefore I make known to you, that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit." (1 Cor 12:3) John adopted a version of Paul's test. Ask the person if Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. This is in line with John's comments in his gospel:

*John 1:1-2 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.*

*John 1:14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

Those who deny the incarnation are speaking in the spirit of the antichrist no matter how eloquent the speaker and how appealing the message to the ears of the recipients:

*2Tim 4:3-4 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths.*

It is becoming increasingly common for preachers to preach false doctrines such as the promise of prosperity and healing for followers of Jesus. Such messages attract huge crowds but the people do not seem interested in testing the spirits of the messengers because they love the message. Rather than seeking speakers who properly exegete the Word of God the “seekers” want to come to join a social club with music and messages that are very worldly. This message by John then mostly falls on “deaf ears”.

*1 John 4:4-6 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. <sup>5</sup>They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them. <sup>6</sup>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.*

John summarized what I just wrote above! Verse 4 states how we test the spirits. The Holy Spirit is in Christians and He is greater than the antichrist in the world. So we let Him inform us of dangers from messages we hear.

*John 16:7-11 "But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. <sup>8</sup>"And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment; <sup>9</sup>concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; <sup>10</sup>and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you no longer behold Me; <sup>11</sup>and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.*

*John 16:13 "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.*

We are blessed to have the New Testament as well as the Old Testament from which the Holy Spirit can draw to guide us in testing the spirits behind the messages we hear. The teachers who are guided by the antichrist are of the world and so their messages resonate with the spirit of the world. Those who are also of the world will listen to their messages and consider them as being what they want to hear. One method to test the messages is to see if they are reflecting some

changing morality of the world for that is what the antichrists do. An example is the current gay, lesbian movement for just a few years ago no major Christian denomination would be ordaining homosexual priests. But acceptance of homosexual lifestyles is now a major emphasis in the world and it has invaded the churches. God's ethical teachings never change but the morality of the world changes to suit whatever wave is prevalent in the world. The church should be resisting this movement and not embracing it.

But those who are of God do not embrace the shifting morality of the world and the world does not listen to those who oppose anti-Biblical standards. Therefore it is easy to see the Spirit of Truth and the spirit of the antichrist.

*1John 4:7-10 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup>The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>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.*

John is writing of self-giving love rather than possessive love. Remember that John has stressed three tests to determine if we are children of God: righteous living, love other Christians, and proper doctrine. Now he seems to stress love but the other two must not be eliminated. Love is stressed because it is easier to seek to live a righteous life and to seek proper doctrine than it is to also love some people who may not be very lovable. Living a righteous life and testing doctrines can both be done in relative isolation from other Christians. But true self-giving love will not let a fellow Christian practice sin or adopt an obviously incorrect Christian doctrine. Christians will not then show love for a fellow member of a church by affirming his/her choice of a non-Christian lifestyle. True self-giving love demonstrates that a person is born of God and knows God but only if the other two tests are passed also.

John then writes that God has shown His love toward us in sending His Son to die for our sins so that we might live through Him. Verse 10 clearly states that God does not love us because we love Him but that we love Him because He first loved us and sent Jesus to take His wrath for our sins. It is difficult to believe that God sent His Son to die for us for we cannot totally identify with that love. But it is true and we should keep the cross at the forefront of our mind as we seek to live life before God as He is perfecting that love within us.

*1John 4:11-14 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup>No one has beheld God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. <sup>13</sup>By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. <sup>14</sup>And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.*

The love God showed us in sending His Son to take the wrath due us is the driving force for us to love other Christians. Nobody has ever seen God but we see Christians often and that is as close as we can get in this life to seeing Him. The self-giving love we show other Christians affirms that we abide in Him. The second reason we know that we abide in God is that He has given us the Holy Spirit. Only those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit are God's children: "However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him." (Rom 8:9)

There are then three reasons clearly stated as to why we should love other Christians: 1.) God is love and we are of God, 2.) God loved us in Christ and demonstrated that love to us, and 3.) God is working in us to perfect that love in us. The "we" in verse 14 probably is not just John and his companions with the earthly ministry of Christ but all his readers who remain in the true church after the false teachers left. To understand what John means by saying that Jesus was "sent to be the savior of the world" refer back to the discussion of 1 John 2:2.

*1John 4:15-17 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. <sup>16</sup>And 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. <sup>17</sup>By this, love is perfected with us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world.*

He just wrote that if we love other Christians God abides in us and now he writes that if a Christian's doctrine is correct then God abides in him and he abides in God. There then is no conflict between love and truth. Confessing that Jesus is the Son of God also includes a correct understanding and confession of the entire sinless life of Jesus, His death on the cross to accept the wrath of the Father for our sins, and the resurrection of Jesus that demonstrates that the Father accepted the perfect sacrifice of Jesus. Thus confessing that the historical Jesus is also the ever-present Son of God includes a confession of the entire Gospel message. Again, the "we" in verse 16 consists of all readers of the epistle who were left behind after the false teachers left the church. We first had to come to know the love that God has for us so that He sent His Son to suffer and die for us. But that intellectual knowledge must be matched with faith from God so that we can believe that love of God. The parable of the sower (Matt 13:18-23) is a clear explanation of the need for good soil to be present for the seed to mature and God has to prepare the soil. John then tells them again of the mutual living of Christians in God and God in His children. The church is the community of believers and the temple of God:

1Cor 3:16 Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

1Cor 6:19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?

2Cor 6:16 Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them; And I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

The church is then a preview of life in the new creation: "And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple." (Rev 21:22)

The church will be presented to Jesus as perfect: "that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless." (Eph 5:27). Christians then have confidence that they will have no fear in the day of judgment for God will deal with His children as though they are His Son. Note that John carefully states that "as He is", so "also are we in this world". Of course Jesus is now in His glorified body and John writes that we also are as if we now are also in our glorified body. John can tell his readers this wonderful truth because he knows that whatever God proclaims will be done has already been done. Paul also could similarly state that we are already seated with Him in heavenly places (Eph 2:6) Abiding in the love of God leads to perfection, or completion, of the love in Christians.

*1 John 4:18-21 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. <sup>19</sup>We love, because He first loved us. <sup>20</sup>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. <sup>21</sup>And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.*

Since we know that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1), Christians should have no fear of punishment. John clearly stated in his gospel that Christians will not face judgment: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life." (John 5:24) Anyone who then fears the day of judgment is certainly not perfected in love. John clearly – again – states that we love God because He first loved us. Again we need to be careful with properly identifying cause and effect. God first loving us is the cause and the effect is that we love God.

John then gives a test for whether or not a person claiming to be a Christian loves God. If he says that he loves God but hates his brother then he is a liar. As stated earlier, nobody has seen God but Christians see other Christians often. One might say that it is easier to love God who sent His Son to die for us to show us His love than to love that person sitting at church claiming to be a Christian but living like Satan in the world. It may be then that we do not love our Christian brother because we are too busy judging him! Church discipline needs to be carefully executed according to God's method (Matt 18:15-17) but the goal of such is to bring the person back into fellowship and out of sin OR to bring the person to repentance for the first time. Primarily we should let God deal with the problem of tares in the visible church (Matt 13:25-30). We should not associate with an immoral person in the church: "But actually, I wrote

to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler-- not even to eat with such a one." (1Cor 5:11) We then need to be careful with using the word "love" in the proper Biblical sense. We should not have philia love for a "so-called brother" but we are to have agape love for him. Our agape love for him should lead us to desire that the person repent and come into proper fellowship with God and other Christians. When we recognize that we cannot have philia love for someone but that we do have agape love for him we then have more assurance that we do indeed have agape love for God. Christians cannot practice sin and they also cannot abide with someone who professes a love for God but demonstrates that he does not love Christians.

It seems appropriate to end this chapter with quotations from John's Gospel. First it is very comforting to know that Jesus is quoted as praying for us today (those who believe in Jesus through the word of those disciples of His). Second Jesus prayed that God's children might be in Us so the world would believe the gospel. Third Jesus prayed that the Father's love for Him would also be in His children and He would be in them:

John 17:20-21 "I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me."  
John 17:25-26 "O righteous Father, although the world has not known Thee, yet I have known Thee; and these have known that Thou didst send Me; and I have made Thy name known to them, and will make it known; that the love wherewith Thou didst love Me may be in them, and I in them."