

1 John 4

Learning Objective

- To see how to accurately discern what is truth and error so that we may understand God's love for us and how we ought to love others.

Pray for your time together in God's Word!

Read Out Loud: Throughout the book, John has been comparing and contrasting how a believer can know he/she is saved vs. a non-believer. For example, he contrasts light and darkness in chapter 1, loving God and hating the world in chapter 2, and loving your brother as opposed to hating him in chapter 3. Tonight we'll talk about what it means to "test the spirits" and accurately discern if we are hearing from God or not, so that we can have confidence in God's love that enables us to love others the same way.

Read Out Loud: 1 John 4:1-6 (NIV)

¹ Dear friends, 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 This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

⁴ You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. ⁵ They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶ We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

Questions For Discussion

? This chapter is broken into sections that build upon two commands, the first of which is to not believe in false spirits. What could be considered a "spirit"? (vs. 1) What is being described as a "false spirit" in this passage? (vs. 1-3)

Possible Answers: Messages we hear from culture, from the church, etc. Things we read. Things we're taught in class. False prophets (vs. 1) and those who do not confess that Jesus came in the flesh and was from God (vs. 2).

? What does John mean when he says "do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits" in vs. 1?

Possible Answers: It means to test the messages they hear around them to see whether they are from God. In today's world, this means filtering what we hear through Scripture.

Leaders' Note: In this chapter, John is giving advice for a specific problem where people are denying that Christ came in the flesh. That is why he mentions "whoever came in the flesh is from God" (vs. 2).

? As a Christian today, what "false spirits" should we test?

Possible Answers: Counterfeit "gospels" (prosperity, etc.). Lies about where we find our worth (status, finances, etc.). Or anyone who claims that Jesus is not God, just a good teacher, or was not a real historical figure.

? How have you learned to identify false spirits?

Possible Answers: The result of what I'm doing does not exemplify the fruit of the Spirit, it contradicts God's Word, it glorifies God and not man, it makes me trust on human effort vs. God's power.

? Optional: What do you do when certain things in life are ambiguous and can potentially be a false spirit? (e.g. things like the American dream - trying to be live a comfortable life, make as much money as you can)

Possible Answers: Get advice from other godly individuals, check Scripture to see what is most important to God when it comes to doctrine (i.e. Love while seeking truth), make sure that my desires line up with God's desires.

? How does the author encourage them in their ability to know the Spirit of Truth?

Possible Answers: Beyond telling them that "every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God" (vs. 2), he continues to remind them of their identity of being children of God and of their already having victory through Christ. The apostles are delivering the message of God so "whoever knows God listens to us" (vs. 6).

? How does the Spirit of Truth help you overcome false spirits? (vv. 4-5)

Possible Answers: Reminds us that we are children of God, we are from God, and that He who is in us (God) is greater than he who is in the world (Satan).

? How have you seen these truths play out in your life and given you hope to fight against false spirits?

Possible Answers: It reminds me that I can hear truth because God speaks to His children about truth. It gives me confidence that one day the Lord will defeat the false spirits in my life which will allow me to love others. Gives me assurance that the Lord has me and I won't fall away.

Optional Transition: Now that we have seen what it means to discern what is truth from error, we must see that the only way to love others is to have the spirit of truth.

Read Out Loud: 1 John 4:7-21 (NIV)

⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

¹³ This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. ¹⁶ And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. ¹⁷ This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

¹⁹ We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. ²¹ And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

Questions For Discussion

? In vs. 7 we find the second command of this passage: to “love one another.” What does it mean (look like) to love someone?

Possible Answers: To actually treat each person you encounter as a child of God—giving them the respect and kindness they deserve. To share Christ with them. To give selflessly (time, talent, treasure).

? Can you give specific examples of times/ways that you felt loved in your lifetime?

Leaders’ Note: You can encourage group members to share specific examples of times/ways they’ve felt loved.

? How are we able to love one another?

Possible Answers: We can only love because God loved us first and because it is the best way to live out the Gospel—God sent His Son to die for us because He loved us so much. It also is a way to live radically counter-cultural—loving the seemingly “unlovable,” responding in love and kindness when others would lash out, holding your tongue, etc. It demonstrates that we are God’s children.

? What is the result of us loving one another?

Possible Answers: The world gets to see God through us because God's love abides in us and God's love is perfected in us. By loving one another we have further assurance of our faith (vs. 12).

? Does someone have an example of when they personally saw the result of believers loving one another and unbelievers were moved? What happened?

? In vs. 13 it says "This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit."

What are the results of having God live in us?

Possible Answers: We have confidence before God on the Day of Judgment and assurance of our faith in God. We have no fear because of God's love for us and our love for others. We open our hearts to His leading and direction in our lives.

Optional Transition: Because God loved us first and His spirit lives in us we are able to love others. With this in mind, we're going to transition into a time of discussion and accountability.

For Discussion and Accountability

? What "false spirits" do you need to be testing this week? Or what "false spirits" do you need to be more aware of in your life?

? What is hindering you from loving others the way God loves you? Is there one person this week who you can show greater love towards?