

1 John 4

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.

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)

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

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

? How have you learned to identify false spirits?

? 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)

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

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

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

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.

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?

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

? How are we able to love one another?

? What is the result of us loving one another?

? 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?

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?