

John's First Epistle
Week Four
1 John 4:1-21

Day One

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.

v. 1 – John revealed here that much of the Church's business is not just with flesh and blood but with things from the spirit world. These are also known as demons or evil spirits. They are fallen angels who assist Satan in spreading his kingdom of darkness. There are good spirits who come from God and then there are evil ones that come from the devil. Some spirits are doctrinal spirits and it makes sense that their main purpose is to confuse people as to who Jesus is, what He came to do and what He did.

These spirits obviously have to use humans, so those whom they influence with false doctrines become false prophets – those whom God did not send with a message. John urged the church to be mindful that there are false spirits, doctrines and prophets and to test each spirit and doctrine to identify its source.

The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer (1 Timothy 4:1-5).

vs. 2&3 – John gave his readers this simple test to see whether or not a spirit was from God. If the doctrine acknowledged that Jesus truly came in the flesh, and just didn't appear to be here like some phantom or ghost, then that spirit or doctrine was acceptable. Now that test pertained to the doctrine that the church was combating at that time when John wrote. Those who left must have denied that Jesus came in the flesh, which has been a common heresy through the centuries. You can see that this doctrine would have its roots in evil, for it was a lie that denied the basic work that Jesus came to do.

Many are waiting for a literal antichrist to appear, one man who will deceive many. Yet John said that this lying spirit that the church was dealing with was part of the antichrist's plot to discredit Jesus. John maintained that many anti-Christ spirits had already been released on the earth and we certainly know that there are many more today.

Today there are lying spirits who spread untruths that there are many ways to God, that Jesus is not the only way and that God will not judge anyone or condemn them to hell. These are all lying spirits, part of the devious plot of the evil one to rob God of His glory and dominion.

Have you settled once and for all that Jesus is the Son of God and faith in Him is the only access mankind has to God? Any other doctrine, no matter how spiritual or noble, is simply a doctrine from hell itself. This is why our work is so urgent. We have the truth and we are fighting many who want to prevent that truth from ever reaching the ears and hearts of men.

Day Two

⁴You, 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. ⁵They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶We 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.

v. 4 – **Who did they overcome?** They overcame the many antichrists that had already been released on assignment in the world. **How were they able to over these antichrists?** They did so by the power of the risen Christ who lived in them! This will be the same means by which you and I will overcome them as well.

In John's gospel, Jesus promised that He would lose none whom the Father gave Him! That is a bold statement and could only be made by One who is God Himself, for only the Lord has the power to protect and preserve in that manner and with such confidence and certainty.

“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day” (John 6:39).

While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been **lost** except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled” (John 17:12).

v. 5 – Those of the antichrist are simply those who follow the values of a world system instead of the Lord God. They gather goods, protect their self-interests and love or hate as they choose. You must always be careful when you listen to or accept a worldly viewpoint. Repentance and serving God require that you constantly work to align your values, lifestyle and goals with those things that are acceptable to God. And God's ways are not man's ways! **Is it time that you consider your ways in every area of life to see if they are consistent with God's word?** That would include relationships, attitudes, money, and thoughts.

For example, yesterday I received a message sent to many people that we carry the church within us and that there is no need to attend worship services to access that church. While that sound spiritual, it is a statement from the world or the antichrist. Church attendance is a requirement for all God's people and anything that does not affirm that truth is an example of the "world" and not the "Word" speaking.

As I write, the Winter Olympics are in full swing. The "world" says that this billion-dollar entertainment program is worth it. The "Word" says that this money does nothing to build the Kingdom of God and carries on while the poor suffer. I hope you get the picture.

v. 6 – John was straightforward: those who listened to John and the apostles were from God. Those who did not were not from God. **Was this just a statement from John's ego? Was he simply insisting on his own way, that his way was the only right way?** John was not speaking from ego, but he knew what he had seen, heard and learned from Jesus. He had faithfully imparted that to his world, as had the other apostles. So John concluded that anyone who rejected what John had to say, which he had received from Jesus, was not from God! They had rejected what God had to say and the One whom He sent, so they could not be in line with the Father.

Day Three

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.

v. 7 – John returned to the main theme of his life and ministry and that theme was love. John was not referring to a natural human inclination of affection; he was referring to self-sacrificing divine love that can only come from the Father. In the context of what John wrote, this love is best expressed to those in the family of God, but is certainly not restricted there.

v. 8 – God is love. When you want to know what love is all about, you can consider God and His actions toward His creation. If someone does not or cannot love, it is because he or she has no relationship with the source and definition of love, which is God Himself. I have heard some say, however, that if God is love, then love is God. That cannot be, for the Word also says that God is light, but you cannot say that "light is God." "God is love" is an affirmation of God's character and is borne out by the abundant evidence in Scripture of God's love for His creation in general and man specifically.

v. 9 – John repeated a statement that he wrote in his gospel:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not

condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son (John 3:16).

God's love is a giving love. It is not selfish, as Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 13:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

God's love gives life to those who receive it. Therefore those who share God's love also share God's life. **Do situations come alive when you arrive?** If not, then you may be carrying God's love as you should. **What can you give or do to bring life as God intends to any situation in which you invest yourself?**

Day Four

¹⁰This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

v. 10 – We did not love God first, rather He loved us first. Therefore your love cannot depend on someone else's behavior. You love because God loves and you love unworthy people because God loved and loves you when you are unworthy.

I heard someone say that God did not have to give us a second chance when man sinned the first time. Yet God did and He continues to do so. I cannot fathom His grace and love that caused Him to love by sending His Son to cancel sin's' debt that we had incurred.

God did not just have affectionate, warm feelings toward us. He did something about our impoverished condition. **Is your love active or is it just sentimental? Does it cause you to meet others' needs?** John repeatedly emphasized that your love is to be practical and visible. **Do you meet the criteria?**

v. 11 – Here it is again. We are to love as God loved and loves. When I want to be challenged or directed in how to love, I read James' epistle that is full of practical advice on active love. As stated earlier, since James was probably Jesus' brother, we have a wonderful picture of what love looks like from Jesus' perspective. For instance, James wrote:

My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand

there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? (James 4:1-4).

Are you fulfilling the law of love by showing equal respect for all, no matter what their status in your culture?

v. 12 – God is made real in the midst of a community of believers when everyone loves one another. What’s more, when love is pursued, then love is also perfected. Furthermore, since God is love, He is where love is carried out according to His commands. So love is a good place to live and a great place to be. **Are you “in love”?** You can only be in love when you obey the Father and that starts with faith in Christ. After faith in Christ, you are commanded to love the family of God and do good to them every chance you get.

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers (Galatians 6:9-10).

Day Five

¹³ We know that we live in him and he in us, because 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 him and he in God.

v. 13 – John indicated you can have assurance that you live in God and He in you when the presence of the Spirit is real in your life. This is another theme of John’s writings, which we first saw in his gospel. **What proof can you have that the Spirit is present in your life?**

1. Spiritual gifts
2. Spiritual fruit
3. A conviction of sin
4. Leading and guiding you into truth
5. Fellowship with God
6. Insight into His Word
7. Power to live a holy life
8. Power to live an effective life
9. Being conformed to the image of Christ
10. The mind of Christ

Can you think of any other proofs or evidence that the Spirit of God is in your life?

v. 14 – John mentioned all three Persons of the Godhead in these two verses today: The Father, Son and Spirit. The Father sent the Son, the Son sent the Spirit, the Spirit preserves the saints whom the Son saves. **How is that for a division of labor?** Each person of God has specific duties, yet they mutually support and assist one another in

perfect harmony and peace. Of course, even the words I just did to describe God are totally inadequate to describe Him and the relationship of the Three-in-One!

It is important to understand that John and the apostles bore witness to the truths they proclaimed. They did not read them in a book; they lived those truths. That is why it is so critical that we stay true to what they saw and knew, for they received it firsthand from Jesus in the power of the Spirit according to the Father's will. **Are you being true to the apostolic tradition?** If you put your faith in Christ and are diligent to follow His commands, then you are! Anything else or extraneous is to be avoided.

v. 15 –Here is proof of what I wrote in the previous verse. The means to a relationship and life in Christ is to acknowledge the supremacy of Christ in the plan of God's salvation. There is no other way to God. People were looking for another way in John's day and they are still looking for one today. They will discover, hopefully before it is too late, that there is no other way: Jesus is the only way!

It has always been God's goal to live in the midst of His people, to tabernacle with them. That happens now when anyone puts his or her faith in Christ. God lives in that person and that person lives in God. What good news that is! Let's proclaim it far and wide!

Day Six

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 him. ¹⁷ In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. 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.

v. 16 – **What does it mean to live in love? Does it mean being nice to people, sort of like a Mother Teresa clone? Is it never saying anything difficult to another that may hurt their feelings? What is this love?** This love must first be expressed to God and it can only be expressed by accepting the Father's gift of salvation through the Son. Jesus is the only key to a vital relationship with God. There can be no other way.

You see this love in action in the early days after the Spirit was poured out in Acts 2. Believers loved one another and showed that love in practical ways as they gathered to worship, pray, eat and share life together. This is why people who say, "I don't need to go to church to express my love for God" are wrong. You cannot express love for God unless you are manifesting that love to others, especially to the household of faith.

Are you involved in a local church? How deep are your relationships? What more can you do to carry out the love of God with your church family?

v. 17 – Love is perfected and matures in your life as you love others in practical, tangible ways. Furthermore, as your love matures and grows, you have confidence that God is at work in your life and you can face Him when you die and face judgment. You will be

like Him then, but you can also be like Him now when you love others. **Are you growing in love and confidence that God is with you? What more can you do?**

This concept of confidence is important, for there are many who carry ideas of what they should or could do. Yet they don't act on their ideas because they are waiting for confirmation. **Are you one of those people? Are you waiting for God to bop you on the head before you step out to express your love? Do you see that God wants you to have confidence that He is with you, so that you can act out your love boldly? If you are not confident in the Lord, why aren't you?**

v. 18 – Fear is the problem that keeps you from functioning in love. It “talks you out of” what is in your heart to do and say. **Why are you so afraid?** When you love God and He loves you, it is a relationship that should eliminate fear. Yet I behold fearful believers everywhere I go! They are afraid of missing the Lord, getting ahead of the Lord or of offending the Lord. It is good not to want to offend the Lord, but most people have it within their power to do good but don't because they are either afraid “God isn't in it” or that they will do the wrong thing. I am convinced that sometimes “no thing” is the “wrong thing” where love is concerned. Love and faith always act, so if you are not acting, then perhaps you don't love or have faith.

Day Seven

¹⁹ We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. ²¹ And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

vs. 19&20 – We cannot claim any spiritual success or merit. What we are and what we do are all because of Him. We are incapable of love, so He must first love us. We are incapable of selfless service, so He first served us. Now He gives us His Spirit to conform us to the image of Christ. So the Lord met us in our need, forgave our sin and now equips us to do His will. This is summarized in Philippians 2:

Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him (Philippians 2:12-13 NLT).

God gives us the desire to serve Him and then equips us for the service! No one can accuse God of driving a hard bargain. His work in your life is free but it isn't cheap. Someone had to pay the price and that person of course was and is Jesus.

John was clear that hatred of a brother or sister in the family of God is unacceptable and inconceivable! Because God first loved you, you must now love God's family. No one can maintain that he or she loves God, who is invisible, while not loving the visible expression of God's family on earth.

So, are you a visible, active part of God's family? In other words, are you part of God's church? Do you simply attend and look at the back of someone's neck, or are you a vital member, offering your gifts for loving service? Do you financially contribute to the work of your church? Those people who say that they don't need church to love God are deceived, according to what John wrote. Your love for your God is worked into you through your church family, not through reading or watching church on television.

It is true that church is full of imperfect people and that church can inflict pain and suffering on those who worship there. Yet God can even use the suffering for good in your life, if you allow Him to do so. Certainly Jesus left you an example of suffering with and for God's people that He wants you to emulate. So I ask again: **Where are you a part of the body of Christ and how can you be even more integrally involved in the life for that entity?**

v. 21 – Jesus gave us this command, not this option: He ordered you and me to love our brother. There are no other options or excuses not to do so. When asked, “who is my neighbor or brother?” Jesus responded with a parable today called the Good Samaritan. Perhaps it would be good for you to read that in Luke 10:25-37. Once you read it, ask the Lord to help you apply it right now, right where you live!