

A Study of 1 John 4

I. Outline.

1. The spirit of truth and the spirit of error (1 John 4:1-6).
2. Knowing God through love (7-11).
3. Seeing God through love (12-16).
4. The consummation of love (17-19).
5. A commandment from God (20-21).

II. Summary.

John points out to us in this chapter that there is a need to be cautious in accepting what men teach us. The reason is that there are many false prophets out in the world who will lead us astray from the truth if we allow them to do so. Fortunately we have a completed written revelation from God which provides all we need as a basis of comparison. So long as what is taught harmonizes with God's Word, then we should accept it, but when it does not, we must reject it. One prominent false doctrine of the first century was that Jesus had not come in the flesh. In verses 7-11 John develops the idea of testing the truth of love. John suggests that since we cannot see God literally, the next best way to see Him is through love. John emphasizes that love and fear do not go together. He teaches us that it is not possible to love God and hate our brethren.

“In this chapter, the apostle warns against evil seducing spirits, advises us to examine and try the spirits, gives rules by which evil spirits are recognized and then returns to his favorite subject — brotherly love!” [Henry Mahan, *1 John: Bible Class Commentary*, an e-Sword Module].

III. Chronology.

BIBLE PERIOD: The Period of the Church

If you are not familiar with the 15 Bible Periods, please click here:

<https://maplehillchurchofchrist.files.wordpress.com/2018/05/15bibleperiods.pdf>

IV. Words/Phrases to Study

- 4:1... **TRY THE SPIRITS**—“Do not confide implicitly in everyone who professes to be under the influences of the Holy Spirit. Compare Matthew 24:4-5. The true and the false teachers of religion alike claimed to be under the influence of the Spirit of God, and it was of importance that all such pretensions should be examined. It was not to be admitted because anyone claimed to have been sent from God that therefore he was sent. Every such claim should be subjected to the proper proof before it was conceded” [Albert Barnes' *Notes on the Bible*]. |||| “Compare 1 Corinthians 10:15; 11:13; 12:10; Ephesians 5:10; 1 Thessalonians 5:21. It is most important to notice that this examination of truth and error is inculcated on all alike, not merely on an ordained and materially separate class” [W.M. Sinclair, *The Epistles of St. John*, A Bible Commentary for English Readers, Editor: Charles Ellicott, an e-Sword Module]. |||| “The word ‘spirit’ signifies to a man who claims to be endowed with the gift of the Spirit to perform the office of prophet, preacher, or teacher. God’s word is received from the mouth of man, but some who claim to speak for God are false preachers and are sent by Satan to deceive and disturb the church. There were false teachers among Israel, there were false teachers in the days of the apostles and there are false teachers today (2 Peter 2:1-3; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15). Let this fact be fixed in our minds that, from the time the gospel began to be preached, false prophets immediately appeared, and we must not be dazzled by everybody who claims to be holy, to speak for God, to work wonders and to be a minister of righteousness. We must try these spirits (these preachers and religious leaders)” [Henry Mahan].

- 4:3... **THIS IS THAT SPIRIT OF ANTICHRIST**—“Significantly, in light of modern confusion concerning ‘The Anti-Christ,’ John here employs the neuter ‘it’ in reference to the spirit of antichrist, rather than the masculine ‘he.’ This would seem to indicate that the spirit of antichrist is the predisposition on the part of all false prophets to oppose God’s anointed ones, rather than a personal monster who is to make a dramatic appearance at the end of the present age” [Clinton Gill, *Hereby We Know: A Study of the Epistles of John*, 1966, Bible Study Textbook Series, College Press, Joplin, MO: an e-Sword Module].
- 4:4... **HAVE OVERCOME THEM**—“They had overcome the false teachers by refusing to listen to their false doctrines, and by repudiating that which these teachers sought to impose upon them” [Guy N. Woods, *A Commentary on 1 John*, p. 291]. “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” [Kenneth S. Wuest, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*, 1942-1955, an e-Sword Module].
- 4:5... Cf., John 8:44; 15:19.
- 4:8... **GOD IS LOVE**—“God is love, and love thus becomes the infallible test of the birth from above. God is love because love originates with him; he is the very essence of love; and only those who truly love are born of him (v. 7). This definition was not designed to be exhaustive; from John we learn that God is also LIGHT (1 John 1:5) and SPIRIT (John 4:24). ... Inasmuch as love is a characteristic of his nature, it follows that all who partake of his nature acquire the characteristic of love; in its absence, sonship itself is wanting” [Guy N. Woods, *A Commentary on 1 John*, p. 295]. “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” [Kenneth S. Wuest].
- 4:12... **NO MAN HATH SEEN GOD**—“The meaning is, no man has seen the divine nature, the real essence of the Godhead, inasmuch as it is invisible to the physical eye. Deity (God) can be seen only through its manifestations, and the revelation which it has made of itself in the incarnation. ... Though God, deity, the divine nature, is not seen with the eye, this does not mean that he is not near us; on the contrary, he is so near he abides in us, providing we love one another and his life is perfected in us” [Guy N. Woods, *A Commentary on 1 John*, p. 298]. “*God in His essence no one has ever yet beheld, with the result that no one has the capacity to behold (Him)*” [Kenneth S. Wuest]. “No one has seen God in His pure essence without some kind of filter (cf. John 1:18). Instances in which the biblical writers said that people saw God were theophanies, manifestations of God in human or angelic form (e.g., Genesis 18:1-22; Exodus 33:18-23; et al.)” [Thomas Constable, *The Expository Notes of Dr. Constable*, 2012, an e-Sword Module].
- 4:13... **HE HATH GIVEN US OF HIS SPIRIT**—Cf., Galatians 5:22-23.
- 4:14... **THE FATHER SENT THE SON TO BE THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD**—“The entire story of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation is here reduced to one line” [James Burton Coffman’s *Commentaries*].
- 4:15... **WHOSOEVER SHALL CONFESS**—“There is a form of metonymy (synecdoche) in a statement of this kind. The primary pre-requirements of salvation, i.e., the so-called ‘plan of salvation’ is meant by this. The New Testament reveals that ‘obeying the gospel’ as the New Testament writers called it, meant believing in Christ, repenting of one’s sins, confessing the Son of God, and being baptized “into Christ.”” [Ibid].
- 4:17... **HEREIN IS OUR LOVE MADE PERFECT**—“There are some ways we can be like God in this world. Love is one of those ways. As God has demonstrated His love toward us, we must be towards others. There are some things that God is like that await us when we get to heaven. Right now we

can be like God in love while on earth” [T.J. Clarke, *Bible Institute of Missouri Notes*, Produced by Bradley Cobb, 2014, an e-Sword Module].

- 4.17-18... **BOLDNESS IN THE DAY OF JUDGMENT... THERE IS NO FEAR IN LOVE; BUT PERFECT LOVE CASTETH OUT FEAR**—“...the saint who has experienced the fullness of this divine love in his earthly life, will have no fear of correction or penalty (loss of reward) at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The word ‘perfect’ is *teleios*, ‘that which is complete, brought to its fullness.’ The saint who approaches that tribunal in a spirit of fear is the saint who has not experienced the fullness of this love, and for the reason that he did not maintain a Spirit-filled life during his earthly sojourn” [Kenneth S. Wuest].
- 4.21... **THAT HE WHO LOVETH GOD LOVE HIS BROTHER ALSO**—“This is another argument for brotherly love drawn from the authority and commandment of Christ. He not only commanded us concerning the love of the Father, but commanded us to love one another (1 John 3:23-24)” [Henry Mahan].

V. Lessons & Applications.

1. **TRY THE SPIRITS WHETHER THEY ARE OF GOD: BECAUSE MANY FALSE PROPHETS ARE GONE OUT INTO THE WORLD** (1 John 4:1). This may seem to be worded a little bit strangely with the use of the word SPIRITS, but the note above from Barnes should help us to see the connection. The point John makes is that just anyone and everyone who comes around claiming to be influenced by the Holy Spirit IS NOT! In that day, as also today, there were MANY false prophets who would have people following them by making a CLAIM that they were sent by the Holy Spirit. We must try them. Back then there was a spiritual gift called, “discerning of spirits” (1 Corinthians 12:10), which could be passed on by the apostles. Today, the only way we have to TRY the spirits is to compare what they teach with what the Bible teaches. If they are in agreement, then we should accept the teaching; if not, we MUST reject it!
2. **...AND THIS IS THAT SPIRIT OF ANTICHRIST** (1 John 4:3). For a person to refuse to confess both the deity and the humanity of Jesus is to have the spirit of the antichrist. That person who is unwilling to accept the basic claims that are made by Jesus Christ, places himself in opposition to Jesus Christ. John has already informed us that there are many of them, that is, many who partake of this spirit. Many brethren believe that what John was describing was one major ANTICHRIST, yet many who partook of that spirit and could thus be identified as antichrists. There are definite clues which point to the papacy as that antichrist (cf., Guy N. Woods, *A Commentary on 1 John*, pp. 242-243).
3. **HEREBY KNOW WE THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH, AND THE SPIRIT OF ERROR** (1 John 4:6). When John writes, WE ARE OF GOD, most likely he makes reference to himself and other inspired apostles. Perhaps he is also including those who teach the same thing. The way that we can distinguish between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error is very easy. We simply must study the written Word of God, which is the product of those apostles who were guided into all truth (John 16:13). There is a battle going on for the minds of men and there are many who have this “spirit of error.” We must be careful to follow the spirit of truth, that is, follow the teaching of the inspired apostles.
4. **IN THIS WAS MANIFESTED THE LOVE OF GOD TOWARD US, BECAUSE THAT GOD SENT HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON INTO THE WORLD** (1 John 4:9). How do we know God loves us? It is evident in the fact that He sent His only begotten Son to this earth to die for us. What great love! What a wonderful blessing it is to be loved to this degree by the Creator of the Universe!
5. **BELOVED, IF GOD SO LOVED US, WE OUGHT ALSO TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER** (1 John 4:11). A conclusion drawn by the inspired John that cannot be refuted! To be like our God, we must love one another. Our Heavenly Father sets the example before us, we are to walk in that way.
6. **...AND HIS LOVE IS PERFECTED IN US** (1 John 4:12). If something is perfected, in the biblical sense, it is brought to maturity. When we love one another, this process of maturing our love is brought about.

- 7. **IF A MAN SAY** (1 John 4:20). John has previously emphasized that mere profession does not suffice. It is impossible truly to love God and not to love your brother!

VI. Questions.

True or False

- 01. _____ The person who has fear is not made perfect in love.
- 02. _____ John doesn't mention commandments in his epistles.
- 03. _____ There were no false prophets in the first century.
- 04. _____ John wrote of antichrist as a threat yet to come.
- 05. _____ We are commanded both to love God and our brethren.

Multiple Choice (Select the BEST Answer)

- 06. _____ The person who says he loves God and hates his brother is: (a) exaggerating; (b) a liar; (c) honest.
- 07. _____ John uses the word BELOVED five times in 1 John and he uses it this many times in chapter 4: (a) 3; (b) 4; (c) 5.
- 08. _____ The way God's love was manifested was that He: (a) gave us the Bible; (b) gave us dominion over animals; (c) sent His only begotten Son.
- 09. _____ Perfect love does this: (a) forgives; (b) forgets; (c) casts out fear.
- 10. _____ God sent His Son to be this: (a) heralded; (b) heard; (c) the propitiation.

Fill in the Blanks

- 11. **He that loveth not _____ not God; for God is _____.**
- 12. _____, **if God so loves us, we _____ also to love one _____.**
- 13. **We love him because he _____ loved us.**
- 14. **...Hereby know we the spirit of _____, and the spirit of _____.**
- 15. **No man hath seen _____ at any time.**

Each Question is worth 7 Points

My Score is: _____

Answers will be found on next week's handout

ANSWERS to 1 John 3 Questions... **01**—True (17); **02**—True (1); **03**—False (22); **04**—True; **05**—False (12); **06**—b (5); **07**—c (13); **08**—a (1-2); **09**—a (24); **10**—b (7); **11**—heart, condemn (21); **12**—deed, truth (18); **13**—transgression, law (4); **14**—death (14); **15**—Cain (Gen 4.9).

VII. Seek-A-Word Puzzle. The words may be backwards, diagonal, upside down, etc. See if you can find them all. The more you use the words of the Bible, the greater blessed you will be! You might be surprised at how much this little exercise will help you retain important truths. THANK YOU for the good effort you are putting forth in Bible study. –DRL

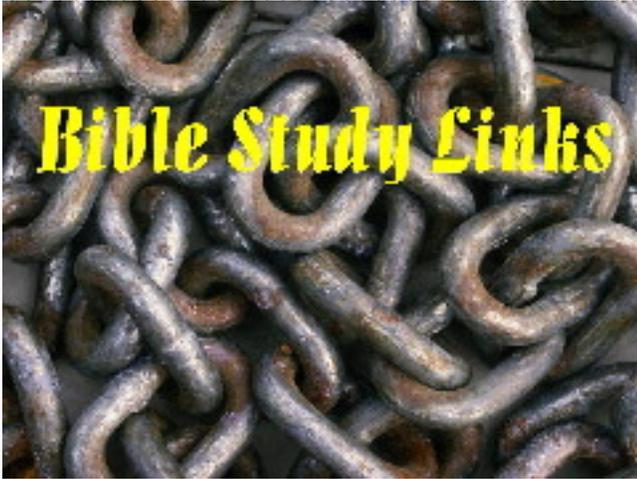
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ALSO	ANOTHER	BECAUSE	BELIEVE	BELOVED
BROTHER	CHRIST	COME	CONFESSETH	DWELLETH
EVERY	FALSE	FEAR	FLESH	HEARETH
HEREBY	HEREIN	JESUS	KNOW	KNOWETH
LOVE	LOVETH	MADE	MANY	PERFECT
SEEN	SENT	SPIRIT	WHETHER	WORLD

VIII. Crossword Puzzle.

1 John 4 (KJV)														
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		3								4				
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<u>ACROSS</u>	<u>DOWN</u>
03) There is the spirit of truth, and there is the spirit of... 06) He who loves God should love his brother is one. 09) The one who does not do this is not of God. 11) ____ is the Son of God. 12) We love Him because He ____ loved us. 13) We may have it in the Day of Judgment 14) Many false prophets were ____ out into the world.	01) Everyone that loveth is ____ of God 02) No man hath seen God at any ____. 04) This spirit was already in the world. 05) God sent His Son to be it for our sins. 07) Sending His Son into the world ____ His love for us. 08) No ____ hath seen God at any time. 10) Ye have ____ that it should come.



IX. Links.

for 1 John Chapter FOUR...

These links are to the writings of men and not to inspired Scripture, thus care and caution in weighing the conclusions is always wise. Some are not really links, but listing of material commonly available in books and publications.

- **J.W. McGarvey's *Fourfold Gospel* on 1 John 4...**

<http://www.studylight.org/com/tfg/view.cgi?bk=42&ch=4>

- **Burton Coffman's *Commentary* on 1 John 4...**

<http://www.studylight.org/com/bcc/view.cgi?bk=42&ch=4>

- **Albert Barnes, *Barnes Notes on the Whole Bible*, on 1 John 4...**

<http://www.studylight.org/com/bnb/view.cgi?bk=42&ch=4>

- **Joseph Benson's *Commentary on the Old and New Testaments*, on 1 John 4...**

<http://www.studylight.org/com/rbc/view.cgi?bk=42&ch=4>

- **Robertson's *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, on 1 John 4...**

<http://www.studylight.org/com/rwp/view.cgi?bk=42&ch=4>

- **Vincent's *Word Studies* on 1 John 4...**

<http://www.studylight.org/com/vnt/view.cgi?bk=42&ch=4>

- **Schaff's *Popular Commentary on the New Testament*, on 1 John 4**

<http://www.studylight.org/com/scn/view.cgi?bk=42&ch=4>

- Collection of notes published by Bradley S. Cobb (from notes in his classes at the Bible Institute of Missouri) available, as an e-Sword module, for \$5.00 online at: <http://bit.ly/116wncN>