

1 John 4 Notes

Cautions Of Fellowship (4:1-21)

- False, lying spirits (4:1-6).
 - The Old and New Testaments are filled with warnings about false teachers (Deuteronomy 13:1-3; Isaiah 8:19-20; Matthew 7:15; 24:4-5, 11, 24; Acts 20:29; Romans 16:17-19; 2 Corinthians 11:4, 13-15; Jude 4) and their counterfeit doctrines (Acts 20:30; 1 Timothy 1:4-7, 19; 6:20-21; 2 Timothy 2:17-18; 2 Peter 2:1; cf. Isaiah 30:10).
 - Any ideology, philosophy, opinion, or religion other than God's truth fits Satan's agenda -- which is why it is so crucial for believers to recognize the difference between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.
 - "Believe not" indicates the forbidding of an action already under way. It is likely that the false teachers gave evidence of their "inspiration" through "prophetic utterances" and perhaps even other "signs." The "test" (the word refers to a metallurgist's assaying of metals to test their purity and value) itself hinges on the words "that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh." The false prophets may well have believed that Christ was the Savior of the world, but they denied the connection between the divine Christ and Jesus of Nazareth.
 - Vs. 2's negative counterpart is in vs. 3, and the source of this denial is seen as "the spirit of antichrist." In the false teachers, the spirit of antichrist is already present. Truth can be sabotaged by mixing it with error, so everyone must be cautious (2 Corinthians 11:14-15; 2 Peter 2:1).
 - The readers have resisted their teaching and thus proved that they are "from God." In contrast, the false teachers are successful "in the world" because their thinking is accommodated to the world's belief. The world hears such teachers gladly.
 - Whoever has knowledge of God through fellowship with Him by loving Him and abiding in Him and His word "heareth us," for the teachers proclaim the word heard "from the beginning" (1 John 1:1).
- True, loving spirits (4:7-21).
 - Brotherly love (4:7-10).
 - John uses the same motives for love as he did for obedience in chapter 3. True Christians will have love for one another for the reasons given in this chapter. God defines love; it does not define Him. Love for one's brother comes from God. It is evidence of our being "born of God" that is as important as righteous behavior (2:29).

- The Jewish leaders of Jesus' day knew a lot about God, but they did not really know Him (1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Timothy 3:7). Whoever does not love does not know God at all, for God in His very nature is love.
- If love does not reign in the heart, you cannot pretend to be like God. Love here is not to be understood as one of God's many activities; rather, every activity of His is loving activity. God's love for us defines what true love requires -- the commitment to sacrifice one's most beloved possession for another's gain.
- Just as God's children must be holy because He is holy (Leviticus 11:44-45; 1 Peter 1:15-16) and merciful because He is merciful (Genesis 19:16; Luke 6:36), so they must love because He loves (cf. Matthew 7:16, 20; 1 John 3:18).
- The glorious nature of love (4:11-21).
 - The simple but profound statement, "God is love," is explained by what God did. The author makes clear that the love he speaks of involves concrete actions. God's love required Him to send His Son. God's love in us requires deeds by which we show our love for one another.
 - John continues to show that the true nature of love is unselfish and sacrificial. Just as God's children must be holy because He is holy (1 Peter 1:16) and merciful because He is merciful (Luke 6:36), so they must love because He loves. We must be like Him.
 - No one has seen God at any time (John 1:18). However, when we keep the command to love one another, God will abide in us, and His love will be perfected (fulfilled, finished) in us (1 John 4:12; 3:24). As God was once present in His Son, so now He is present in Christians, and it is in Christians that love has its ultimate fulfillment.
 - This does not mean we are perfect, but going beyond what would naturally take place points us toward the perfection of God (Matthew 5:48).
 - This love of God is not something that we work up; it is the work of the Spirit in our hearts (Romans 5:5). God's love flows from us as we yield to the influence of the Spirit (Galatians 5:18). Christians do not love each other because of their good qualities, but in spite of their bad qualities.
 - We "see" by faith that the cross of Christ was for our sins and for our salvation. We do "see" in Jesus our own Savior and Lord. John goes on to state that anyone who confesses Jesus has fellowship with the Father. Because the Holy Spirit gives us this "seeing" experience, we are commissioned to bear witness to the event. The apostles testified that the Father sent the Son to be our

Savior (1 John 4:14). Therefore we must be willing to confess Jesus as the Son of God (1 John 4:15).

- The same combination of words in vs. 16 of knowing and believing is found in Peter's confession of Jesus in John 6:69, except that there the order of "known" and "believed" is reversed. The sequence of thought is this: First, we must know and rely on the fact that God loves us. Second, we come to realize through relying on His love that in His very nature God is love. Third, we discover that to live in God means to live in love.
- The perfection or completeness of love brings "boldness," confidence relating especially to the time of judgment. Not to love is to disobey Jesus and to spurn the Father's own love in sending Jesus. Just as Jesus abides in the love of the Father, an abiding that already marked His earthly existence and gave Him "boldness" before God in the face of temptation, trial, and death, so "in this world" we also may abide in the Father's love and share in that same boldness.
- The other side of boldness is "fear." If we truly abide in the Father's love, we will be without fear. So love and fear are incompatible. The "fear" spoken of here is not to be confused with reverence for God. Reverence will only deepen through the experience of the Father's love for us. If we experience fear in any portion of our lives, to that extent we deny God's love and fail to trust Him.
- The love John speaks of originates with the Father, became manifest in and through the Son, and now characterizes the life of children of God. When we fail to love our brother, it proves that one's claim to love God is a lie.
- The final warrant of the life of love is obedience to the teaching of Christ. John makes it clear that obedience expresses itself in a single command. Love for God cannot refuse love to the image of God that meets them in their fellow Christians. Brotherly love seeks nothing in return. Instead, it forgives (Matthew 18:21-22), bears burdens (Galatians 6:2), and sacrifices to meet needs (Philippians 2:3-4). Those who love God cannot refuse to love the image of God that meets them in their neighbor; they are inseparable (John 13:34-35; Matthew 22:35-40).