

FEARLESS LOVE: 1 JOHN 4

1 John 4:1-3 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

- John isn't talking about literal demonic spirits, but what a person teaches. The Spirit is known as the Spirit of Truth, but lies were circulating. False prophets were into the world (**2 John 7**) teaching that Jesus did not come in the flesh or from God. They were antichrists.
 - Jesus warned His disciples (**Matthew 7:15-20**) of false prophets. They are wolves in sheep's clothing. You can know them by their fruit. It's either good or bad. True or false. In fact, one of the miraculous gifts mentioned in **1 Corinthians 12:10** was the "*ability to distinguish between spirits.*" No miracle needed for this one: either Jesus is the Son of God who came in the flesh or He wasn't. You either know and profess that or you don't.
- There are times when we have to teach against false spirits that creep into the church causing confusion, doubt and fear.
 - We must do so with wisdom: not obsessing over it or allowing a certain mentality (one of continuous debate and paranoia). It's so easy to fall into an "issue oriented" mindset. This results in continuous criticism of those "outside". *Focus on it too long and Satan will get the focus off yourself.* That's when the real problem can occur. You see a problem with everyone else, but never yourself. A weakness in another person, but not you. Pride creeps in. A false sense of security may occur. Studying ceases or becomes shallow and less personal, etc.
 - However, there's a time and place to address them head on. Threats made against the church will come and go in various forms and some "old spirits" may return again. Some of these spirits of error can even come from those among us. Paul had to warn the elders in Ephesus that "*fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, . . .*" **Acts 20:29-31**
 - **1 Timothy 4:1-2**, "*Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared,*"

4-6 Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

- The brethren long ago overcame this false teaching because they had a different Father living in them. They were of God and His kingdom. The world is of . . . well, the world and serve Satan who has power and persuasion over them.
- This goes back to the principle of the world not knowing them like it didn't know Jesus. They didn't know Jesus because they chose to ignore Him. They chose to ignore Him because He wasn't like them. He wasn't like them, because He had a different Father. Not only that - the world associates with and listens to each other. Just like God's people cling to each other and listen to truth.
- In the world there are those who either listen to the Spirit of truth or the spirit error. Listen to Jesus' own words: [John 8:42-47](#).

7-8 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

- The text doesn't say that God loves (though that is most definitely true). No, the text says that "God is love." I really appreciate statements like this. There are others: "God is light." "God is spirit." These deserve our attention. Every aspect of love originates from God. If only the world would understand and accept this truth. If only we, as His children, would keep this at the center of our hearts and minds at all times.

9-12 In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

- I've heard a brother in Christ say that God does not ask us to "feel" for Him anymore than a man can make a woman "feel" a certain way towards him. The point was that love is an action, not a feeling. A passage like this could be used as an illustration: look at what God *did* for the world.
- Listen, there's no doubt that love demands us acting on behalf of others even if we don't feel like it. I want to make that crystal clear! A marriage requires that kind of love. Save your words and emotions if they have no action! But brethren, I don't know how we can read such a passage and not feel God's love for us. We need both. I can hear Mary and Martha's message for Jesus, "*Lord, he whom you love is ill.*" And upon seeing where they laid the body of Lazarus, Jesus wept. The Jews said, "*See how He loved him!*" [John 11:2, 34-36](#). Again, John records Jesus' last night before He washed His disciples feet and wrote, "*When Jesus knew that His hour had come to depart out of the world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.*" [John 13:1](#). Brethren, tell me the earth is flat. Tell me people only look out for their own interests. Tell me I'm naive and wrong about 90% of the time, but don't tell me that God doesn't have feelings for you. This passage moves me because I know HOW God FEELS towards me by

WHAT He DID for me. You keep the Stoic Savior and I'll cling to the Sympathizing Shepherd.

- You know, I referenced Paul's warning to the Ephesian elders earlier. There's a touching scene in that account: [Acts 20:36-38](#), *"And when he had said things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again."* Why so upset? Brethren, Paul reminded them that day of Jesus' words, *"It is more blessed to give than to receive."* Paul was that kind of guy. These people didn't see Jesus, but they saw Jesus living in Paul. It'd be hard for me to say goodbye too. **As I've said before: no one has ever seen God . . . until they met you.** When this love abides in you, then they see God through you. The love and spirit of Jesus needs to be in us all, brethren. We need to take these truths about Jesus: how He interacted with the world, and follow in His footsteps.

- **Question: would others be sad to see you leave for good? What would they miss?**

13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

- There's something they could know because He had given them His Spirit. This wasn't a feeling. It wasn't intuition. They knew it. I find myself going back to passages like this, trying to get an accurate picture and understanding of how the Spirit is used, but I've realized something: there's a temptation to lose ourselves in this question to the point that it distracts us of the effects we know He can have in our life.
 - We know the Spirit has delivered the mind of Christ. We know we can follow His guidance and walk righteously. Billy, for example, is about to begin a new study on the fruit of the Spirit and you'll see what I mean.
- We know that truth had been delivered to them, it could abide in them and they were to follow the truth of Jesus: He come in the flesh and was from God.

14-16 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

- The apostles were eyewitnesses. Again, they saw Jesus, talked to Him and touched Him. John was an eyewitness to Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain! There was no doubt that he knew who Jesus was. **The final nail in the coffin for any doubt John may have had was the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The only thing dead that day was his unbelief.**
- Take note that we abide in God and God in us - this is more than the Holy Spirit. It's a powerful statement that deserves the same attention as the Spirit dwelling in us.

17-18 By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

- This is the same point found in chapter three (we discussed this last week). This context is still sandwiched between brotherly love. Again, we don't shrink back at the Lord's coming because we abide in God and our hearts don't condemn us when we love the brethren by action.
- There is a security, a peace that we have with God, when we know that we genuinely love Him and therefore love our brethren. When we do so, love is being perfected in us. This peace doesn't rest on our performance, but on God whom we have fellowship with.
- We should only fear judgment if we don't abide in God and love the brethren. But brethren, we shouldn't fear judgment. This is where God wants you to be in your life. If you're waiting around until you've done enough to feel secure, you're going to be waiting until the day you die. **Mature Christians do not fear judgment. They have fearless love.**

19-21 We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

- Several years a brother in Christ quoted this verse and then said, "Love takes the initiative."
 - I don't know why, but it struck a chord with me. It's not to say that true love always acts before it's requested. God responds to our requests. Many times there's a need you weren't aware of until asked.
 - However, it does speak to the principle that God has loved us first, and love doesn't wait for the other to act. There's nothing we could have done anyways for God. God took the initiative. He's done so many things and in many ways. He's acted on your behalf when you didn't even ask for it - did you know that? Paul wrote, "*Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think*" [Ephesians 3:10](#). Did you see that? God is able to do something you didn't even ask or think of!
- Bottom line: You can't say you love God and not love your brother.
 - John is practical. God is practical. Jesus is practical. How are you going to love someone you've never seen when you can't love the guy right in front of you? It's hard!
 - This doesn't happen by accident. It has to be a purposeful love, because many times our pride and selfishness get in the way. Sometimes our brothers and sisters let us down, offend us or even sin against us. It's not meant to be an intellectual exercise. Jesus isn't asking us to follow Him when it's easy or convenient. So, with that I have a few questions:
 - How can we love those we're never around?
 - Being away from others may save you some hurt, but will it hinder growth?
 - How can we serve one another? Will we wait around or will we seek to do good for others?
 - If you're not secure concerning the day of judgment, what is your game plan? Does your plan set you up for failure? Do you want to be free from punishment or free in Christ?