

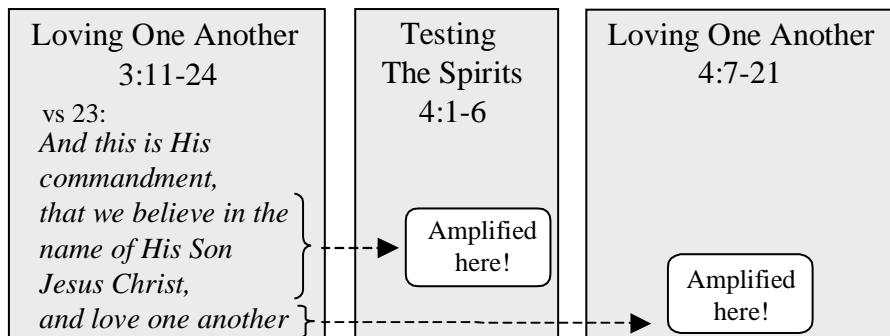
## SESSION TWENTY-THREE

### False Prophets and Loving our Brothers

#### 1 John 4:1-21

#### I. INTRODUCTION

*Loving one another* is discussed in 1 Jn 3:11-24 and 4:7-21. In between stands a small section dealing with "testing the spirits" (4:1-6). This probably suggests that there is a relationship of 4:1-6 to the context. Observing 3:23, we notice that the author stresses both "believing" in the Son and loving one another. Since the "testing of spirits" concerns the confession that Jesus is the Christ, this suggests that 4:1-6 is an amplification of his concern to believe in the Son. The second concern is picked up and amplified in 4:7-21.



#### II. TESTING THE SPIRITS (4:1-6)

The mention of the Holy Spirit in 3:24 triggers a thought about the *spirits* in 4:1. The Holy Spirit is not the only spirit operating in the world; there are other spirits, and one must not be naïve. Not every spirit which influences human behavior and belief is from God.

##### A. The Test of the Spirits (4:1-3)

1. The Warning About Spirits Not From God (4:1)
  - a. By "spirit," John is thinking about a person. This is true for two reasons:
    - (1) he refers to them as false prophets in 4:1b
    - (2) in 4:2-3, he is concerned with the confession that one makes about Jesus.

Of course, such persons are ultimately backed by Satan himself, just as the Antichrist will be. As we saw previously in 2:18-27, John is really talking about the false teachers who were deceiving the brethren.

- b. Old Testament Background
 

John's call for a test parallels the OT testing of prophets to see if they were really from God or not (cf. Deut 13:1-5 and 18:14-22). In this case, however, the test centers around their *christological* confession—what they believed and confessed about the person of Christ.

## 2. Instructions for Testing False Teachers (4:2-3)

## a. The Proper Confession About Jesus (4:2)

The verb "has come" is actually a participle in the Gk. Best to translate: "Jesus *is the* Christ having come in the flesh." Support:

- (1) notice the ellipsis in vs 3 ("Christ having come in the flesh" is missing)—so *NASB* and *NIV*. However, some Greek manuscripts (⌘, Byz) do include this phrase, and thus the Arabic Bible has it. [Mss A and B do not have it, and USB<sup>4</sup> gives this an A rating].
- (2) similarity to Gk construction in John 9:22 (note textual variants)

So, the issue is whether they believe He is the Messiah who has come in the flesh. False teachers may have advocated that the divine Christ only descended on the human Jesus.

## b. The Demonic-inspired Confession About Jesus (4:3)

The words "the Christ who has come in the flesh" are probably meant to be understood. This is the same kind of teaching about Jesus that the future Antichrist himself will assert.

**B. The Relationship To the Apostolic Circle (4:4-6)**

In the Gk text, each verse begins with a pronoun: you, they, and we. This refers to the readers, the false teachers and the apostolic circle.

## 1. The Readers: From God (4:4)

In contrast to the false teachers, John reminds the readers that they are "from God." They have *overcome* the false teachers. In 1 Jn 2:13-14, John had told them that they had overcome the evil one. Now we understand why. They overcome Satan by resisting the false teaching of his emissaries. For this, they can thank the Holy Spirit who indwells them (recall 2:27).

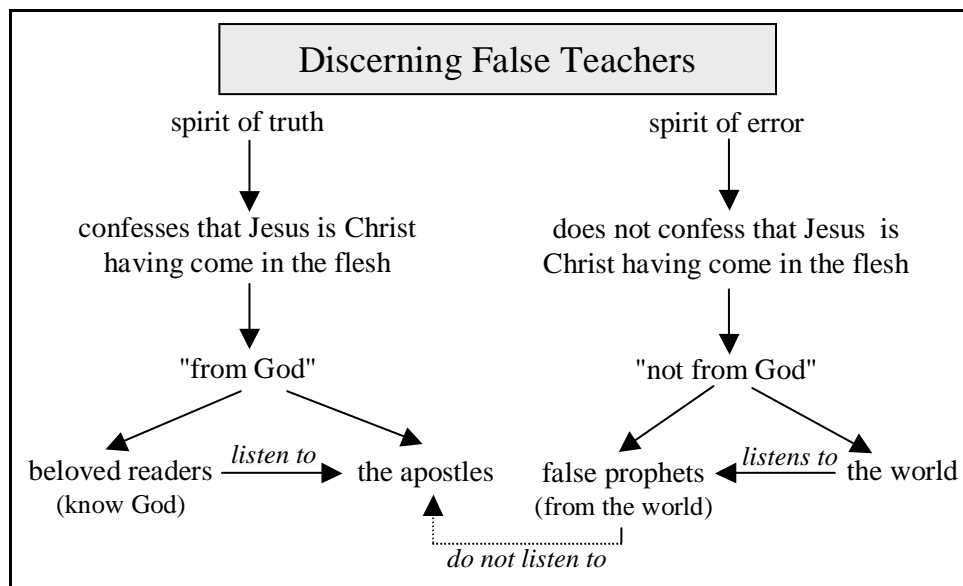
## 2. The False Teachers: From the World (4:5)

John explains why the false teachers gain adherents: they are all part of the same godless world system.

## 3. The Apostolic Circle (4:6)

Those who "know God" (are not part of the world) listen to apostolic teaching. The words "from God" and "not from God" harken back to vv 2-3. In John's day, what they believed about Jesus identified whether or not they were from God and representing the truth.

## Summary of 1 John 4:1-6

**III. LOVING ONE ANOTHER (4:7-21)**

In 1 John, the issue of "loving one another" is presented in 2:7-11, 3:11-24, and 4:7-21. The fact that he puts the section on discerning false teachers between the latter two may suggest that in their system of false teaching, loving others was not considered important. According to John, it was of supreme importance.

**A. The Call to Love One Another As God Loved Us (4:7-11)**

Note how the expressions "beloved" and "love one another" occur in both vs 7 and vs 11.

## 1. The Implication of the Truth That God is Love (4:7-8)

John begins with a call for believers to love one another. The rationale is simple: love has its source in God, i.e., it is one of God's own attributes. To love is to be like Him. In these verses, John is thinking in terms of extremes: those who love and those who do not. He is not saying that all Christians will always act in love all the time! Nor is he saying that non-Christians can never love.

- a. The one who exercises true Christian love (7) -- does so precisely because he is born of God and knows God.
- b. The one who fails to exercise true Christian love (8) – this is due to the fact that he has not come to know God. Note that "know" in vs 7 is present tense, while in vs 8 it is aorist. The latter is probably an *ingressive aorist*—stress on the beginning of the state.

If love comes from God, how can one expect to love if he has not become a child of God and come to know Him. If he does, he should exercise love.

2. The Proof That God is Love (4:9-11)
  - a. John has asserted that God is love. For proof, John holds forth God's act of sending Jesus to die for our sins on the cross. This is the proof *par excellence* that God is love. "That we might live through Him"—by His death, we can have eternal life. Certainly, God has shown His love for us, and we ought to love others accordingly. For Christians who understand the cross, loving one another is a response to His love for us!
  - b. Lessons From God's Love
    - (1) Love sacrifices for the benefit of others  
God "sent His only begotten Son"
    - (2) Love blesses others (God gave us *eternal life*)
    - (3) Love is not a *response* to what others do—it takes the initiative  
"not that we loved God, but that He loved us"
    - (4) Love does not wait for others to be worthy  
He became the "propitiation for our sins"

B. The Relationship Between Loving and Abiding in God (4:12-16)  
Note how the word "abide" occurs 6x in these verses, but not elsewhere within 4:7-21

1. John's thought reaches back to 2:28—3:2. Though we cannot see Him now, we can *abide* in Him now. But we must *love* to be abiding in God and He in us [to abide, we must obey His commands (3:24), but "love one another" is the great commandment].  
  
Insight: The "if" in 4:11 is first class condition—presumed true. But the "if" in 4:12 is third class condition—maybe we will and maybe we won't. We will not necessarily always love one another. But when we do, we can *abide* in God, and His love will be *perfected* in us (recall 2:5).
2. John is really thinking of *mutual* abiding (note 4:13, 15, 16) – this was first introduced in 1 Jn 3:24. [Also, the thought of the Spirit *given* was seen in 3:24].
3. 1 Jn 4:14 seems to have the apostles in mind. The phraseology is similar to 1:2, and the pronoun "we" is emphatic (contrast vs 13 where "we" is contained in verb). Sending the Son to be the Savior was God's demonstration of love.

If one truly comprehends and believes this, he will do two things (cf. 3:23):

- a. Vs 15 – he will confess Jesus as the Messiah
  - (1) "Son of God" was a title for the Messiah – see Jn 11:27
  - (2) To confess this requires divine illumination – see Mt 16:17
- b. Vs 16 – he will love in order to abide in God

## C. Love and Judgment (4:17-18)

1. Love not only enables one to abide in God, but it prepares him for the judgment seat of Christ. Hall Harris thinks this has *eternal judgment* for the lost in view, but this thought obviously links back to 2:28 (recall that Christians may experience shame at His return). The word "confidence" (Gk παρρησίαν) occurs in both places.
2. "as He is (i.e., a Savior who loves), so also are we in this world (i.e., instruments of His love)"
3. "Perfect love" is a love that has been *perfected* (4:12)—one that has matured and reached its goal. Such a love must love "in deed and truth, not just words" (3:16-18).

## D. The Implication of Loving God (4:19-21)

"Hating" one's brother is probably defined by 3:17-18. To say you love God and yet "hate" your brother is tremendously inconsistent and a lie. You are not entitled to say you "love God" if you don't also love your brother.

**FINAL LESSONS FROM OUR STUDY**