



1 John: God of Discernment

Memory Verse: 1 John 4:1-3 “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. 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, 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.”

Background

First John is the 62nd book of the Bible and the 23rd book in the New Testament. The letter of First John, like Hebrews, does not name its author nor to whom it is addressed. The author confirms that he was an eyewitness to the life and ministry of Jesus, declaring to his audience, “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.” (1:3). Based on early church tradition and a similarity in both vocabulary and style to the Gospel of John, the apostle John is the accepted author of this letter. John, the disciple “whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23), was one of the original twelve and part of Jesus’ inner circle of disciples along with Peter and James. He also wrote the Gospel of John, 2 and 3 John, and the book of Revelation. John ministered to the church in Ephesus later in life. It is believed that the letter of 1 John was a circular letter to the churches in and around Ephesus. John likely wrote this letter around 90 AD, either from Ephesus or from the island of Patmos where he was exiled for a time.

The Short Story

God is light and love and we can have fellowship with Him through His Son Jesus Christ.

What’s the Big Idea?

John begins by proclaiming the good news about Jesus, emphasizing the reality of the incarnation (the fact that Jesus as God became man). “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.” (1:1-2). John wrote so that others may share his feeling of fellowship, companionship, and joy in Christ and in the Father, as well as with one another (1:3-4). However, John further states, “I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray.” (2:26). False teachers were once again disrupting the churches with their heresies, denying that Jesus Christ had actually become flesh. John did not want anyone to be deceived. He declares that Jesus was fully man and fully God and warns against those who would deny Jesus Christ as the Son of God (1:1-4; 2:22-23; 4:2-3; 5:1-12). John also calls his readers to love, following Christ’s example by loving one another and caring for those in need (3:10-17). “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.” (4:11-12). Finally, John concludes his letter by asserting that believers can be certain of the following: Jesus is the Son of God and eternal life is found in Him (5:5; 5:11-13). God hears and answers prayers (5:14). Believers are children of God and are no longer in bondage to sin but are kept safe by God from the evil one (5:18-19). Jesus Christ is “the true God and eternal life” (5:20).

So What? Why is this book so important? What was God’s purpose for the book?

John wanted his readers to have true fellowship with God and with God’s people. Jesus Christ, God’s own Son, became human so that we might have eternal life and fellowship with Him as children of God. As children of God, we are to emulate, in increasing measure and consistency, our Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. We are to “walk in the light, as he is in the light” (1:7), and we are to “love one another, for love comes from God.” (4:7). In so doing, our relationship with God and with each other will grow ever deeper and richer, producing a pure, discerning, and loving life. “And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.” (2:28).

**Material taken from various sources.*

Teaching Text

1 John 4:1-3 “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. 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, 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.”

Sermon-Based Discussion Questions

- What is the Biblical view of the spirit world? How do spirits influence people? How do they function?
- Why is it so important to “test” the spiritual content of a teaching? How do you know if it is truth from God?
- What is a “false prophet”? What does it look like in our cultural setting? List some modern false prophets?.
- Why is it important to acknowledge that Jesus became human? What are the implications of His humanity?
- What is the “spirit of the antichrist”? How are we to handle its influence in our culture?

Practical Application

- Have you ever sensed or felt a presence of evil? What did it feel like? How did you respond?
- How do you test something to see if it is from the Lord? How do you evaluate truth?
- What do we learn from and about the humanity of Jesus that can be applied to our personal lives?
- How do you counter evil in your life? What power do you rely on to aid you in the midst of an attack?
- What are we to do as Christians to counter false beliefs about Jesus and Christianity? Explain.

Hitting the Highpoints

- 1:3-4 “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us....”
- 1:5-7 “If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth.”
- 2:1 “But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ...”
- 3:8 “The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning.”
- 4:14 “And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.”
- 5:13 “I write these things to you who believe so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

Bonus Features

“Christians who are well acquainted with the Scriptures, may, in humble dependence on Divine teaching, discern those who set forth doctrines according to the apostles, and those who contradict them. The sum of revealed religion is in the doctrine concerning Christ, his person and office. The false teachers spake of the world according to its maxims and tastes, so as not to offend carnal men. The world approved them, they made rapid progress, and had many followers such as themselves; the world will love its own, and its own will love it. The true doctrine as to the Saviour's person, as leading men from the world to God, is a mark of the spirit of truth in opposition to the spirit of error. The more pure and holy any doctrine is, the more likely to be of God; nor can we by any other rules try the spirits whether they are of God or not. And what wonder is it, that people of a worldly spirit should cleave to those who are like themselves, and suit their schemes and discourses to their corrupt taste?”

Personal Takeaways and Notes