

Study Notes For First John **(Chapter Four)**

I John 4:1 *“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.”*

- This epistle has the term “ἀγαπητός” [beloved] five times (**I John 3:2**, **I John 3:21**, **I John 4:7**, and **I John 4:11**).
- God’s people should know better than to believe everything or everyone (**Proverbs 14:15**, **Jeremiah 29:8-9**, **Matthew 24:4**, **Ephesians 5:6**, **Colossians 2:4-8**, and **I Thessalonians 5:21**).
- What if the supposed prophet has a spirit working through him or her though? That is impressive enough for some (**Acts 23:9**).
- There were different spirits (**II Corinthians 11:4**). Of course, faithful prophets were moved to speak by the Holy Ghost (**II Peter 1:20-21**; cf. **II Samuel 23:2** and **Acts 28:25**). However, there were other spirits that did/could work through those prophesying and/or teaching (**II Chronicles 18:1-34**, **Acts 16:16-18**, and **I Timothy 4:1**).
- Among the spiritual gifts, Christians in the first century had from the Holy Spirit (**I Corinthians 12:1-11**), there was the spiritual gift known as “discerning of spirits” (**I Corinthians 12:10**). I am NOT saying this verse is implementing the usage of that gift. Verses 2-3 give, in this context, a non-miraculous measure to be used.
- In verse three we see the spirit of “antichrist” and in verse six the “spirit of error.” Paul used the language of “the spirit of the world” in contrast to the Holy Spirit (**I Corinthians 2:10-13**).
- This epistle has already addressed those that left them that would seek to seduce others away from Christ (**I John 2:18-28**).
- There were many false prophets (**Matthew 7:15-20**, **Matthew 24:11**, **Matthew 24:24**, **Acts 13:6-12**, and **II Peter 2:1-3**).
- Do you think there will be less false teachers over time? No, (**II Timothy 3:13-4:5**)!

I John 4:2 *“Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:”*

- The difference here between the anti-Christ spirit and the Holy Spirit is confession of Christ. This differentiated those who were opposed to Christ (**I John 2:22** and **II John 1:7**).
- It has to be said that this verse is NOT indicating that all evil spirits were unable to confess Christ (**Luke 4:31-36**).
- The Holy Spirit testified of Christ (**John 15:26**). The word translated “testify” is defined as: “to be a witness, that is, testify (literally or figuratively): - charge, give [evidence], bear record, have (obtain, of) good (honest) report, be well

- reported of, testify, give (have) testimony, (be, bear, give, obtain) witness” (Strong’s # 3140).
- Wait? What is the plurality of spirits? Remember, angels are spirits (**Psalms 104:4** and **Hebrews 1:7**). Remember, the “*seven Spirits of God*” (**Revelation 3:1**).

I John 4:3 *“And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.”*

- Herein is the other side. Verse two addressed the spirit that confesses Christ is of God. This is the opposite. Remember, the context of this letter addresses those opposed to Christ (**I John 2:18; 2:22**).
- This is hard from some today to consider because we do not live in a time wherein there are unclean spirits (**Luke 7:21** and **Acts 8:7**). That time has past (**II Peter 2:4** and **Jude 1:6**).
- Remember, there were those who had spirits working through them to show signs and wonders (**Mark 13:22**).
- We have seen the writing about antichrists in this letter. What we see in this verse is that they were taught about antichrists outside of this letter as well. Again, the Christians were not untaught (**I John 2:21**).
- It is repetitive, but the point that antichrists were then and are now is something we shouldn’t pass over though it is already covered in this letter.

I John 4:4 *“Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.”*

- Those addressed in this letter were “of God” (**I John 3:10** and **I John 5:18-19**).
- We have discussed the phrase “little children” earlier in our studies of this epistle (**I John 2:1, I John 2:12, I John 2:13, I John 2:18, I John 2:28, I John 3:7, and I John 3:18**). When you examine this Greek term (Strong’s # 5040) you can clearly see it applies in the sense of a teacher to His disciples (**John 13:33, Galatians 4:19, and I John 5:21**). This idea is shown in how Paul referred to the Corinthians, Timothy, Titus, and Onesimus (**I Corinthians 4:14-17, Philippians 2:19-23, I Timothy 1:1-2, Titus 1:1-4, and Philemon 1:10**).
- They had overcome [subdue; conquer] those who had the spirit of anti-Christ (**I John 2:13-14**).
- On a greater scale, the world (**I John 5:4-5**).
- Even as Jesus stated regarding overcoming the world (**John 16:33**).
- The acknowledgement that He who was in them (**I John 2:20, I John 2:27, I John 3:24, and I John 4:15-16**) was the reason of victory of the evil spirits in those opposed to Christ.

I John 4:5 *“They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.”*

- There is a clear distinction of those “of the world” being the opposite of those in Christ (**John 17:14-16** and **James 4:4**).
- Those of the world act accordingly (**Ephesians 2:1-3**).
- The works of the world are evil (**John 7:7**).
- Those in Christ do not act in accordance of that which comes from the world (**Colossians 2:4-8; 2:20-23**).
- Remember what we have considered earlier in this letter (**I John 2:15-17**).
- People of the world listen to each other because they are unified against the truth in Christ (**John 15:18-20**).
- Simply put, those of the world listen to those whom tell them what they want to hear (**Jeremiah 5:31, Micah 2:11, and II Timothy 4:3**).

I John 4:6 *“We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.”*

- They were not of the world, but of God (**I John 5:18-19**).
- Actions separate those of God and those who are not (**III John 1:11**).
- Those of God hear God’s words (**John 8:37-45** and **John 10:22-27**).
- Of course, this is through men delivering God’s word (**Matthew 10:40-42, Luke 10:16, I Corinthians 14:37, and I Thessalonians 4:1-2**).
- Without the spiritual gift of discerning spirits, one could tell the false spirit because of refusal to hear the truth (**Isaiah 8:20**).

I John 4:7 *“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.”*

- As we saw in verse one of this chapter, we see the term of endearment “beloved.” This epistle has the term “ἀγαπητός” [beloved] four other times than in this verse (**I John 3:1-2, I John 3:21, and I John 4:11**).
- Christians are not love one another (**John 13:34-35, John 15:12-13, John 15:17, Romans 12:10, I Thessalonians 3:12, I Thessalonians 4:9-10, Hebrews 13:1, I Peter 1:22, I Peter 3:8-9, and I John 4:21**).
- The phrase “born of God” is used throughout this letter a few times (**I John 3:9, I John 5:1, I John 5:4, and I John 5:18**). Cf. **I Corinthians 4:15**
- We serve the God of love (**II Corinthians 13:11**).
- Think about **Titus 1:16** in relation to this passage. Those that claim they know God, but they do not love the brethren do not know God!

I John 4:8 *“He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.”*

- As we will be addressing in the coming verses, God’s love is visible. God’s love is undeniable. Love is an attribute of God. God is not just love, He is love (**I John 4:16**).
- God is also merciful (**Deuteronomy 4:31**), judge (**Psalms 50:6**), the God of Salvation (**Psalms 68:20**), holy (**Psalms 99:9**), gracious, righteous, merciful (**Psalms 116:5**), the everlasting Creator (**Isaiah 40:28**), jealous (**Nahum 1:2**), true (**John 3:33**), a consuming fire (**Hebrews 12:29**), light (**I John 1:5**), etc.

I John 4:9 *“In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.”*

- God made known His love through sending Christ into the world that we might live through Him (**John 3:16**, **Titus 3:4**, and **I John 3:16**).
- We also see the love of Christ in what He did of His of free choice (**John 10:1-18**, **Ephesians 5:2**, and **Ephesians 5:25**).
- Life is through Christ (**John 14:6**, **John 20:30-31**, **Romans 5:21**, **II Timothy 1:10**, and **I John 5:20**).

I John 4:10 *“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”*

- One could not claim that God’s actions were because of man’s love for Him (**Romans 5:6-10**).
- Think about what was said to Israel (**Deuteronomy 7:7-8**).
- Think about how this point of reality keeps one from boasting (**Ephesians 2:1-10**).
- Remember the point that He loved us first (**I John 4:19**).
- Jesus is the propitiation, the atonement (**I John 2:1-2**).

I John 4:11 *“Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.”*

- As we have discussed in our study of this epistle, God’s love is the pattern for Christians to follow in love for one another (**John 13:34-35** and **John 15:12-13**).
- Think about this from a brotherly relation. We share the same Father. Shouldn’t there be a brotherly/sisterly love among His children (**Romans 12:10**, **I Thessalonians 4:9-10**, and **Hebrews 13:1**).

I John 4:12 *“No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.”*

- No man hath seen the Father at any time (**Exodus 33:17-20**, **Deuteronomy 4:12**, **John 1:18**, and **John 6:46**).

- Figuratively speaking, those that saw the works of Christ saw the Father (**John 15:24**).
- Knowing Jesus is knowing the Father (**John 8:19**).
- Through brotherly love, the indwelling of the Father (**I John 3:10; 4:16**).

I John 4:13 *“Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.”*

- Faithful Christians are dwell in God figuratively speaking (**I John 3:24**).
- The indwelling of deity, figuratively speaking, is taught throughout the New Testament (**I Corinthians 3:16, II Corinthians 6:14-18, Ephesians 3:17, and Colossians 1:27**).
- Jesus stated the Father was “in Him” and “dwelleth” in Him (**John 14:10**). Yet, He said the Father was in Heaven (**Luke 11:2; cf. John 12:27-29**).
- Because they were given the Spirit (**Luke 11:13, John 7:39, Acts 8:5-24, and I Corinthians 12:3-11**).
- See also: **Romans 8:16, II Corinthians 1:22, II Corinthians 5:5, and Ephesians 1:13**

I John 4:14 *“And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.”*

- This epistle began with eye-witness testimony (**I John 1:1-3; cf. John 15:26-27**).
- Jesus was sent to be the Savior of the world (**John 1:29, John 3:13-18, John 4:42, John 8:12, I Timothy 1:15, Titus 2:13, and I John 2:1-2**).
- To this end, the Apostles did testify (**Acts 10:38-43**).

I John 4:15 *“Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.”*

- In reference to God dwelling in the believer and vice versa, see the notes on verses 12-13.
- In this passage we come back to the necessity of confessing Christ. Remember, those “antichrists” that left the brethren (**I John 2:18; 2:22-23; 4:1-3, and II John 1:6-11**).
- See also: **Matthew 10:32-33, Luke 12:8-9, and Romans 10:9-10**

I John 4:16 *“And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.”*

- In the past Israel was the people that knew and believed God (**Isaiah 43:1-10**).
- Think about faith based upon knowledge (**John 4:39-42**).
- Know and believe based upon evidence (**John 10:38**).

- This letter was written to strengthen these things among the saints being addressed (**I John 5:13**).
- We know and believe the love God has for us because of His actions that prove such (**I John 3:16; 4:9-10**).
- Knowing and believing is emboldening (**II Timothy 1:8-12**).
- As we have been talking about, God is love (**I John 4:8**).
- Whether or not the love of God dwells in a Christian can be seen through behavior (**John 5:38-42** and **I John 3:17**).
- The love of God is obedience (**I John 5:1-3**).
- Christians have to keep themselves in the love of God (**Jude 1:21**).
- As we have addressed, the dwelling of God in the saint and the dwelling of the child of God in God (**I John 4:15**).

I John 4:17 *“Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.”*

- When we think about the indwelling of God, obedience, and perfected love; all of this text comes together (**John 14:21-23**).
- Perfected love is through the keeping of His word (**I John 2:3-5**).
- Boldness; confidence (**Ephesians 3:12, Hebrews 10:35, and I John 3:21**).
- That boldness, confidence had to be held onto (**Hebrews 3:1-6**).
- Boldness in the day of judgment (**I John 2:28**).
- When we get to the next verse (**I John 4:18**), we will talk about how perfect love casts out fear.
- Now to put some things together here in the context. With the relationship with God already in place (**I John 1:1-3**) and obedience leading to salvation (**Hebrews 5:8-9**); what is there to fear (**John 5:24-29**)?
- We should be looking forward to the Judgment (**I Corinthians 1:4-7, Philippians 3:20, I Thessalonians 1:7-10, Hebrews 9:27-28, Hebrews 10:36-37, and II Peter 3:12-13**).
- In this letter we find that Christians shall be made like Him regarding His form at His return (**I John 3:1-2**).
- Now, this verse focuses on being as He is while we are in this world (**Romans 8:29, Philippians 2:3-5, Colossians 3:10, I Peter 2:21, I Peter 4:1-2, and I John 2:3-6**).
- So, we being like Christ, what is there to fear in the Judgment when we meet Him face to face? We know what He will think because we have His mind revealed to us through the Scriptures (**I Corinthians 2:13-16**).
- As we addressed earlier in this letter, our hope guides us to live in a manner to be pure as He is pure (**I John 3:3**).

I John 4:18 *“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.”*

- Think about what Zacharias said (**Luke 1:67-79**). * Vs. 74 specifically.

- The Law of Moses left a fear of death for Israel (**Hebrews 2:14-15**; cf. **Psalms 55:4**).
- Think about what their looking forward consisted of (**II Samuel 14:14**, **Ecclesiastes 3:19-20**, and **Ecclesiastes 9:5**).
- Under the Law, that was torment (**Psalms 119:120**).
- In the first century, that ended for the people of God (**Romans 8:15** and **Galatians 4:1-7**).
- Again, perfect love (cf. **I John 2:5** and **I John 4:12; 4:17**).
- Then the huge statement about what fear, regarding the Judgment Day, tells a person. Fear is not made perfect in love. The longsuffering of our Lord is not to damnation (**II Peter 3:15**). Faithful living is moved by the love of Christ (**Galatians 2:20**).
- Like Jesus told the disciples regarding fearing carnal needs, a faithful relationship with our Lord should have us looking forward (**Luke 12:7**).
- Think about what Jesus said to the disciples (**John 14:27**).

I John 4:19 *“We love him, because he first loved us.”*

- As we talked about earlier in this context, God took the lead in showing His love first (**I John 4:10**).
- His love for mankind was not earned by mankind (**Romans 5:6-11**).
- Being loved is motivation for reciprocating love (**II Corinthians 5:14-15**).
- This is not exclusive of other motivators. Think about the sinful woman and the contextual lesson in that example (**Luke 7:36-50**).
- Now, here is something to think about. God permits this when it comes to Himself and our return of love for Him. Think about what Jesus said about love for others though (**Matthew 5:43-48** and **Luke 6:32-35**).

I John 4:20 *“If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?”*

- “If a man say...”. Words, without actions to back them up, are useless (**Isaiah 29:13**, **Ezekiel 33:30-33**, **Titus 1:16**, and **James 2:14-17**).
- As we progress in the context, how to show God love is clear (**I John 5:1-3**).
- Words can be “vain” [empty] (**Ephesians 5:6**).
- Think about testing the sincerity of professed love (**II Corinthians 8:1-11; 8:24**).
- Consider “unfeigned love of the brethren” (**I Peter 1:22**).
- We have discussed this in regard to brother love in this letter already (**I John 3:14-18**).
- We addressed earlier in this epistle how one that says one thing and does another is a liar (**I John 1:6** and **I John 2:3-6**).
- Context reveals no man has seen God [the Father] (**I John 4:12**).
- We talked about hating your brother (**I John 2:11; 3:15**).

- How can you love Him who is invisible and not those that are visible, relatable, etc.? This is a teaching question. It is like, how can you treat your brother this way knowing Christ died for Him (**Romans 14:15** and **I Corinthians 8:1-13**)?
- Your brethren are beloved of the Lord (**II Thessalonians 2:13**). How can you not love those whom He loves (**Ephesians 5:1-2**)?
- On the Judgment Day, how we relate to our brethren will be how Jesus sees our relationship with Him (**Matthew 25:31-46**).

I John 4:21 *“And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.”*

- We have already discussed the commandment for brotherly love (**I John 2:10**; cf. **John 13:34-35**).
- Christians are taught of God to love one another (**I Thessalonians 4:9**).
- If you love God, you will/must love your brethren (**I John 4:11**).
- You are not “of God” without brotherly love (**I John 3:10**).