

Love in Action

1 John 4: Believing in Love

Lesson 4

1 John 4:1–21

In a nutshell ~

The beloved Apostle John reminds his readers in chapter four of the critical importance of discerning between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error, a warning which still applies today. The world puts forth philosophies and beliefs that seem to make sense but when held up to the truth of God's Word, are shown to be what they are—wrong and dangerous. Christians must learn not to rely on the claims or credentials of other people, but to make it their aim to know God's Word well enough to be able to discern truth from error for themselves.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read 1 John 4:1–21.

Are you in the habit of testing every person you listen to and every message you hear to see if they line up with Scripture? Do your words and actions present an accurate picture of God to others around you? These are some of the issues we will deal with in our lesson this week, as we add to our understanding of what a mature, loving disciple of Christ looks like.

By the time John's letter was written, he was most likely the only remaining eyewitness to the person and work of Jesus in the world. A portion of the second and third generation believers had begun to doubt what they had been taught about Jesus. The influence of the false teachers was being felt. John makes the point that the responsibility for testing the spirits does not rest on church leaders or theologians, but each individual believer.

1. Why is it so important to try (question) every spirit and teaching we hear? v. 1
 - a. What is the most important "test" to apply? v. 2
 - b. What does John say in vv. 2–3 that reiterates his statements in 2:22–23?

2. What does John state about God's "children" in vv. 4–6?

a. What does he say in these same verses about the false teachers in the world?

b. Why do *you* think a false teacher would be well received by the world?

“ . . . By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error” (v. 6). We can closely inspect a person's lifestyle and the fruit of their ministry but the most important test must be *what is being taught about the person and work of Jesus Christ!* The ultimate truth test for whether or not a person is speaking for God is his (or her) belief about Jesus Christ. John's point is that every believer has the responsibility to call into question anyone who rejects the biblical representation of Christ.

Note: John's use of the pronoun *you* (v. 4), is plural and refers to the community of believers. The use of "them" and "they" are both references to false teachers. John implies here that while every believer must battle the enemy daily, we are not meant to do battle against him alone. There is a greater power available to us in numbers whenever "we" come together, locking our shields for prayer, protection and guidance.

Up close ~

The world turns a deaf ear to the things of God. Look up 1 Corinthians 2:12–14 to find out why and note the reason below.

The Spirit of God, however, enables the believer to do many things. Briefly note what He does for the believer according to the following:

a. John 14:17

b. John 14:26

c. John 15:26–27

d. John 16:13–15

Key Verse ~ (Memory verse) 1 John 4:17

"Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.."

Review this verse often throughout the week. Write it out a couple of times in the space provided to help you commit it to memory. By week's end, try to notice *how* and *where* you are able to put it into practice. Note your results.

Earlier in his letter (1:5), John described God's nature as light; here in v. 7, John describes Him as *love*. Genuine biblical love finds its true origin in God. It is in Him that believers discover the resource from which to draw the purity, holiness, and joy needed to love others. Unfortunately, we all too often neglect these valuable resources, trying to supplement them instead from the depths of our own imperfect hearts, causing ourselves and others great disappointment.

3. What is the proof of the Christian's spiritual birth and relationship with God? v. 7
 - a. How does this love come into the world? v. 8
 - b. What does a person who does not love other Christians reveal about themselves? v. 8
 - c. What is the proof and purpose of God's love for us? v. 9

4. Verse 10 provides the true definition of love. Finish the verse below by filling in *your own name* where space is provided. (Read it through again with this emphasis.)

"... This is love: not that _____ loved God, but that He loved _____ and sent His Son to be the propitiation for _____'s sins."

Take a moment to pause and ponder the full meaning of what you just read. The essence of verse 10 reveals why God created you, why He cares, and why He allowed His Son to die on the cross for you. Briefly state what this means to you personally.

Selah ~

The phrase “*God is love*” appears so simple on the surface, but behind these words is the Master’s plan of the ages. To help add some clarity to the depth of God’s love, try the exercise below. Read the phrase and the corresponding verses in parenthesis; then pick out a key word that is significant to you. This is completely subjective and will vary in your group but be ready to share and support your answer.

<i>Because God loves—He gave</i> (4:9)	My key word: _____
<i>Because God loves—He died</i> (4:10)	My key word: _____
<i>Because God loves—He completes</i> (4:12)	My key word: _____
<i>Because God loves—He blesses</i> (4:13, 18)	My key word: _____

Being born into God’s family opens up the way for a mutual love relationship—both incoming and out-flowing! “*Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another*” (v. 11). As we continue taking on our Father’s likeness, we also allow His love to become the motive that compels us to love one another.

Evidently there were false teachers who had left the church, claiming to love God and yet at the same time hating God’s children. In verses 11–12 and 19–21, John reiterates that it is not possible to love God whom they had never seen and, at the same time, despise those belonging to Him. God was present on earth—visibly—in the life of His Son, Jesus Christ. Presently, the Holy Spirit is with God’s children on earth—*visibly*—in the lives of His children. There is evidence of His presence and power each time believers reach out in love.

5. When we do live by God’s love, what dual action takes place? v. 12

- a. Look up the word *perfected* in several different translations and note your findings.

God never intended for His children to hoard His love for their own enjoyment; He intends for us to give it out and, as we do, His inexhaustible supply of *Agape* is continually replenished as needed. When He abides in us and we demonstrate our love for one another, His love becomes *perfected—matured* in us. If you have ever wondered why Christians go through difficulties in life, part of the reason is because God wants to mature our love to the point that it becomes second nature to us. Love is not something for us to keep close—it must overflow to others in order to be effective!

- b. What reason does John give as to why we love God and others? v. 19

- c. Personal: On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being best, how much are you visibly showing your love for God and others *by your actions*?

Trusting in His Love

Reread 1 John 4:13–18 for review.

Following the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the disciples experienced the fulfillment of the promise of the Holy Spirit, making it possible for them and every believer thereafter to know what it means to abide—to *live in God* and have *God live in them*. “*We know that we live in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit*” (v.13). The Holy Spirit is the gift who enables believers to trust in their relationship with God.

1. What other reason does John give for believers trusting in the message they have heard? v. 14

The “we” referred to here pertains to the apostles and other eyewitnesses of the Lord’s life on earth.

- a. What is the test that proves a person’s belief genuine? And what is the evidence of that profession of faith? v. 15

In verse 16, the pronoun “we” refers not to the apostles, but to John and his readers. He says that believers have known by experience and therefore trust in the love of God.

2. As believers trust in that love daily, what understanding to they gain? v. 16b

- a. Personal: Share one of the ways *you* personally experienced God’s love abiding in you this past week.

- b. What kind of love is produced by this mutual indwelling love of God? v. 17

When we have boldness we do not fear. Love and fear cannot co-exist; one will automatically exclude the other. Since fear has to do with punishment and since Jesus Christ took the believer’s punishment upon Himself, any fear in the believer’s life has to do with a lack of confidence in God’s provision. Believers do not need to be afraid of the future or of impending judgment because God’s love has set them free to love Him and others openly. The future is your friend when Jesus is your Lord!

- c. Personal: Have you come to terms with how much God loves you? Your love for Him will be reflected in your love for others. As you continue to let your love overflow, what great truth can you claim in Matthew 25:37–40?

Notes