

1 JOHN

4:1-21

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Taught at our Sunday evening service, 24th July 2022 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: 1 John 4:1-21

Good evening. Let's pray.

Introduction

Tonight we're picking up our verse by verse study of 1st John in chapter 4, and God willing we'll conclude by studying all of chapter 5 next week.

As a reminder, there are 5 reasons John notes as to why he wrote this letter:

1. That you may have fellowship with other believers (1 John 1:3)
2. That your joy may be full (1 John 1:4)
3. That you may not sin (1 John 2:1)
4. That you may know that you have eternal life (1 John 5:13)
5. That you may *continue* to believe in the name of the Son of God (1 John 5:13)

Overview of 1 John

And as a summary of the 5 chapters we see:

- Chapter 1 - A real Jesus and restored relationship with God who is light

- Chapter 2 - We know that we know Him, but should walk our talk, and avoid deceptions
- Chapter 3 - We are children of God, and should abide in Him, and love others that do
- Chapter 4 - Be careful what you listen to, and love one another for God is love
- Chapter 5 - Obedience to Christ should follow the certainty of what has been done for us

Overview of chapter four

Chapter four then, can be broken down as follows:

- v1-6: Beware of false teachers, and know how to spot them
- v7-16: The example of God's love (Jesus in our place)
- v17-19: The accomplishment of God's love (We can have boldness)
- v20-21: The result of God's love (We can't help but love others)

You may recall, that the verses leading up to chapter 4 are speaking of brotherly love. Specifically love between believers. However, love does not mean accepting lies. It does not mean tolerating a false gospel, or false doctrine. And it doesn't mean loving those who are false prophets.

And I think that's really important to note. For in an effort to show love, Christians often put up with a lot of tripe. For example, at the height of Todd Bentley's notoriety where during church services he was literally kicking people in the face to heal them, I heard Christians say "oh, well, we should give him some time, give him the benefit of the doubt". No. No, we shouldn't. Nor should we give an ear or platform to any who actually oppose Christ - *especially* those in the church. Some suggest the first 6 verses of this chapter are almost in parenthesis... that is, John is speaking of brotherly love in chapter 3, switches to this warning in the first 6 verses of chapter 4, then moves back to speaking of brotherly love. Perhaps in summary he is saying, "Love Christians. Be wary of those who say they're Christians yet seek to deceive you, but love real Christians."

This is a real issue. Look at the heartfelt warning Paul gives to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:

Acts 20:29-31

For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

The second thing I would suggest you note is that the opening verses of this chapter talk about the spiritual realm. And that is something that, as Christians, we can get our theology in a twist about. But put as simply as I can, there is no reason to panic or to be obsessed by spirits, but neither should we be ignorant of the spiritual realm and that there is a very real battle going on all the time around us. We must pay attention to what John writes here, but as he'll give us clear reason for, we are not to panic.

Chapter four

So then, let's get into this chapter. In verse 1 we read:

1 John 4:1

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

In other words, don't be gullible. Just because someone says they are a Christian, or mentions the Bible, or believes in God, or says they have heard from God, is not reason enough to have assurance that they do know God, or are representing Him faithfully.

It's like this, someone calls you and says "Hi, this is Jonathan from Amazon and we're having trouble processing the payment for your recent order and we need to verify your card details - so we can avoid any delay in delivery, can you read out the long card number on the front of your card..."

If you're not careful, in an instant, a thief has your card details and is using them for their own ends. The same happens with emails. Just this week, the IT department at my employer sent out another warning that colleagues are getting emails pretending to be from our executives, in an effort to get confidential info. This isn't an exception for my employer, this is standard practice by criminals today - to do a good job of pretending to be someone they are not.

And in a very similar way, as Christians, we must stand fast on the Bible. The Holy Spirit will never contradict Himself. And if anything is taught contrary to it, we are to reject it. We need to be like the Bereans of Acts 17:11 who checked out what they heard to make sure it was true. In the same way that you would not give out your card details without being absolutely sure it was a trustworthy person you're talking to, you must not follow teaching and doctrines without checking them out with what the Bible has to say. Don't listen to so-called Bible teachers, online or in person, just because they say they are a pastor or Bible teacher, or because they say they have special revelation from God. If the Bible doesn't back it, don't listen to it.

Oh, but we don't want to be judgemental, right?! J Vernon-McGee makes this observation:

Paul wrote to the Philippians whom he loved a great deal, "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment" (Phil. 1:9). It is a wonderful thing to love, but you and I are in a big, mean, wicked world, and this world we live in will take us in; it will deceive us. We need to be careful. This lovey-dovey idea the liberals have—love slopping over on every side—is not what the Word of God teaches. Paul prayed that the Philippian's love might abound in knowledge and judgment. Don't be taken in by everyone who comes along and says that he is a Christian, because many of them are not.

J Vernon McGee

So how do we know who to listen to? Well, again, the Spirit of God - His Holy Spirit - will never contradict the Word of God. And John gives us a clear example next:

1 John 4:2-3

By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

This is direct rebuke of the Gnostics of the day. But also, it is direct rebuke of those in our day who say that Jesus was a good man, a moral teacher, but not God. Biblical teaching will affirm both the deity and humanity of Jesus.

The Gnostics didn't question that Jesus was God, but that Jesus was really a man - suggesting rather He was a spirit without physical body. But of course, that is beyond problematic for if it were the case, Jesus was not crucified in our place, only *appeared* to be crucified in our place - leaving our faith an illusion.

Conversely, today it seems many are willing to accept Jesus' humanity, but not his deity. And we should expect that to be pushed more and more - for ultimately the false prophet that we read of in Revelation, who will unite the worlds religious systems under *the* Antichrist, will not be able to do so by claiming Jesus is God. But claim He is merely a prophet? Well, that's something the Muslims and Jehovah's witnesses already believe.

We must hold fast to our faith. That's why when we went through our recent series titled "Things we believe" we looked at Jesus literal bodily incarnation through a virgin birth, salvation through His crucifixion and our sure hope through His resurrection. Any one who denies these things is against Christ, regardless of what label they put on themselves, and regardless of whether they are standing in a pulpit or not. In fact, you can't be a Christian and deny these things. Yes, you can live with Christian principles, but you can't actually be a Christian if you dispose of the very things on which your faith is built.

Don't let anyone tell you that doctrine is unimportant. Don't let anyone tell you that it has no relevance. It has every importance and relevance for if we get these fundamental things wrong then we are not saved! If we are not saved, we are dead in our sins. We are still slaves to sin.

Now with all this effort and influence around us to confuse us, should we be worried? No. For we read...

1 John 4:4

You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

Don't be worried about those who think they know what they're talking about yet speak lies - because the facts, the truth is not on their side. Jesus did come in the flesh. John says "We saw it. We can prove it. I witnessed it with my own eyes."

And God has given each one of us as believers His Holy Spirit. Very evidence in our own lives of the great thing He has done. To be clear, every Christian is in-dwelt by the Holy Spirit. Every one. And the Holy Spirit doesn't do time-shares. That is, you cannot be a Christian and demon-possessed. It's simply not possible.

As such, we are not to be pre-occupied with demonic spirits, but to be looking to the Holy Spirit who will guide us into all truth. Jesus said:

John 16:13-14

However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.

That's where our attention should be. And those who get caught up in fascination with evil spirits rather than the Holy Spirit and His guiding us into all truth, usually don't have a love for the rest of scripture, right?! If we're not willing to talk about God's commands, or His love for us, or our love for others, then we should get to those basics first.

But speaking of those who are not of God, and deny that He was both God and man, John writes:

1 John 4:5

They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them.

Of course, we want the world to hear the good news of what Jesus has done. Nothing should stop us preaching that. But as sad as it is, not everyone will accept Him. In fact, many will reject Him, and thus reject you.

Therefore, beware of popularity. There are many celebrity pastors who have become quite acceptable to the world. Why? Because they are of the world. They are speaking things that the world *wants* to hear. That's what John writes here.

Any time you see a Bible teacher accepted by the world, beware. **Don't celebrate as progress that which is actually compromise.** It is not the responsibility of a pastor to give motivational speeches. It is the responsibility of the pastor to teach the Word of God.

William Still, a long serving pastor in Aberdeen, wrote this:

Pastors have a job description in the Bible and it's not improving management, vision, execution, performance, productivity, marketing, brand, or platform. It's to preach the Gospel and disciple people in biblical truth.

William Still

J Vernon McGee notes in his commentary on this passage:

I do not care whether several thousand people come to your church—that is not the important thing. I am interested in the message. Is the Word of God being given out? Is it given out in the power of the Spirit so that the Spirit of God can take it and use it?

J Vernon McGee

This should be a warning to us to be careful who we listen to. But it should also be a warning to all of us as to what we say ourselves. If you have become popular with men, and especially if what you say about God has become popular with men, be very careful to check that it is not you, rather than Christ, to which you are drawing them.

Popularity may, sadly, be one of the best measures of where truth is. Look, we don't want to offend people. But the gospel is offensive, so if what we say offends no-one, we're probably not sharing the gospel. Therefore, aim to be neither popular or unpopular - but rather faithful to God and His Word.

John continues...

1 John 4:6

We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

John had certainty to who Jesus was. He had walked with Him in person for 3 years. He had seen Him crucified. He saw Him risen. He saw Him ascend into Heaven. John knew that those who denied this, were not of God.

So let us be careful. Let us hold fast to the truth, and not listen to lies. **Indeed, in our pursuit of love, let us not be accepting of false teaching, and doctrine of devils. But oh, in our desire to hold fast to the truth, let us love.**

There are many discernment ministries that focus on what's wrong, and forget to love. And that is a great shame for many do call out genuine problems in the church today, and I'm grateful for some that I've *really* benefitted from. But we MUST love too! That's especially important regarding those who are caught up in false doctrine.

We read...

1 John 4:7

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

Love is of God. That is, the origin of love is God. As His children, we should imitate Him and love as He did, and as He does. That's clear. But what does John mean by writing "everyone who loves is born of God and knows God"? We have to take this in context of all else John wrote. What it does not mean, is that if a person is a nice guy or girl, if they love others, that they are automatically a Christian. That's not how it works. Rather, John is noting that if someone loves, that is *evidence* that they are a born again Christian. Is it enough evidence to convict them of being a Christian? No, but it is one compelling piece of evidence that should be there.

However...

1 John 4:8

He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

God is love. It's His very character. So you'd expect His creation to reflect that to some extent. But how much more His children? And remember that John is writing about brotherly love here - that is he is writing about those with the same Heavenly Father. And he says that if a person does not love other Christians, then that is evidence that they do not know God, and that their father is actually the god of this world.

How then, does God's love manifest itself? We read...

1 John 4:9

In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.

There could be no clearer demonstration of love than this. And God didn't send Jesus to merely set an example to us in how to live, but to pay for our sin...

1 John 4:10

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Remember the opening of chapter 3: "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!". What God has done for us is incredible.

God loved us when we were unlovely. Indeed, we read elsewhere in Romans chapter 5:

Romans 5:8

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

THIS is love. Real agape love. Sacrificial love. As distinct from erotic love or simple affection. God's goodness to us is based on His love for us, not on our love for Him - and how good is that news?!

Let us not conclude, however, that because God is love everything will now work out OK for all, and that everyone will go to Heaven because He is love. While salvation requires no effort on our part, it is not automatic either. You must come to Jesus in repentance and faith. There is no other way to be saved. Note what we read in John 14:6...

John 14:6

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

Rather, our conclusion given God's love toward us should be this:

1 John 4:11

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Christ is our example in how to love. And since he died for both you and the Christian sat next to you or opposite you, you must love them too. No matter what the cost, and regardless of whether you feel like loving them, or whether they have or have not, in your eyes, earned your love.

Jesus said:

Matthew 5:46-47

For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?

And if we are to love as Jesus did, we are also to forgive as Jesus did. CS Lewis put it so well:

To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.

CS Lewis

There are no excuses we have to not love other Christians. Yes we may find some delightful, and others hard work. We may be filled with joy speaking to some, and exasperated talking to others. But in no circumstances do we have a valid reason not to love them, even if we're finding it harder to like them. If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

As we looked at last week, our love for one another should be so clear and obvious to unbelievers that by that love, they can tell we are Christians.

John now writes:

1 John 4:12

No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.

Let's start with that first sentence. For you may think "well, didn't people see Jesus"? Didn't Adam walk with God in the garden of Eden? Didn't Abraham see a theophany of Jesus? Didn't Moses meet God on Mt Sinai? Didn't Isaiah, Daniel and Ezekiel have visions of God? Didn't Jesus say "He who has seen Me has seen the Father"? Yes is the answer to all of those. So what is John saying?

Well, this isn't the first time John has made this statement. And on the first occasion, in his gospel, he tells us more:

John 1:18

No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

That word *declared*, implies an unfolding or revealing. That is, mankind has only yet seen Jesus to the extent that He has been revealed. The disciples saw Him walk this earth, but veiled in human flesh. But, when we stand before Him in Heaven, we'll see Him as He is.

We read this previously in chapter 3:

1 John 3:2

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

No man has seen God in all of His fullness. That is still to come. However, as one commentator notes, the point John is making is that while no man has seen God in His fullness, and while the world doesn't hear His *Word*, the world *will* see His love working in and through believers. We are His ambassadors and as such we must conduct ourselves in a way that represents Him faithfully. And when we do, we can have confidence that we are abiding in Him. We read:

1 John 4:13

By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

Again, as we looked at last week, the Holy Spirit in us is evidence of us abiding in Him. If we abide in Him, if we are filled with the Spirit, then we'll demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit, which includes love.

1 John 4:14-15

And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Saviour of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

This is another mark of a Christian. If you don't believe this, you're not a Christian, for you have no saviour, and you are still in your sins.

Yet, we, like John, do believe this. He writes:

1 John 4:16

And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

And because we have believed that Jesus came to earth to pay for our sin, we live in Him, and He in us. It changes everything - not just our relationship with man, but more fundamentally our relationship with God. We read in the next 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.

We'll have this confidence if we love others as we should love them. Then we will be able to stand there with boldness before the Bema seat where we'll give account for how we've lived. There won't be anything to fear, for we read:

1 John 4:18

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.

How can we be made perfect in love? Only through responding to the gospel. We read next:

1 John 4:19

We love Him because He first loved us.

Never get that the wrong way round. God didn't love you, and send His Son to die for you because you were likeable and we're nice to Him. He didn't love you because you did or felt anything for Him. He loved you because He is God - He is love.

John now concludes this chapter:

1 John 4:20

If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

Jon courson comments on this:

Who is living in love? The one who realizes that, although he's a sinner and a failure, because God has been so good to him, he has no reasonable option but to love his brother.

Jon Courson

No reasonable option BUT to love his brother.

1 John 4:21

And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

Loving the brethren, loving other Christians, isn't an optional suggestion on the list of what it means to be a Christian. If you love God, you are compelled to love those He died for.

Conclusion

As we draw to a close, I urge you: don't lose sight of the fact that God is love, but love is not God. They are not interchangeable terms. It is not sufficient to love. We must know God, for He is the source and the epitome of love. Jesus said:

John 15:13

Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

And that's exactly what Jesus did for us.

Application questions

As you go through this week, I encourage you to ask yourself these questions. Pin them up on your fridge if it's helpful.

- How readily are you checking out what you hear with the Bible?
- Do you know your Bible well enough that you'd easily spot a counterfeit?
- How much do you love other Christians? (be honest - God knows!)
- What can you do to love other Christians more?

Let's pray.