1 John 4:1-4 | Sunday March 15, 2026

Last week we saw how deceptive our own hearts are in trying to convince us that we are not abiding with Jesus. God gave us truth that is meant to reassure, and tranquilize our hearts. God is greater than our hearts and fully knows us. He knows our failures and weaknesses and still wants a close walk with us. He does not pull back from us.

1 John 3:24 ESV

> (24) Whoever keeps His commandments abides in God, and God in him**. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.**

Our God is so loving that He gave us the Holy Spirit so we could abide and walk in this type of close relationship. As John mentions the Holy Spirit, he wants to quickly clarify that there are many other spirits that are out there that will not help us abide and that we need to be cautious of.

1 John 4:1-4 ESV

> (1) Beloved, **do not believe every spirit**, but **test the spirits to see whether they are from God**, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.
> (2) By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,
> (3) and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.
> (4) Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

Many false prophets can claim to be abiding in God and have a message from Him. The false teachers who broke fellowship with the apostles were claiming to have a new word from God. This message was supposedly a special insight from the Holy Spirit. **John warns us as Christians not to be gullible**. Just because someone claims God told them something, we should not immediately believe them. We are being warned **that there are many spirits in the world besides the Holy Spirit that are behind false prophets**.

1 Timothy 4:1-5 ESV

> (1) Now the Spirit expressly says that **in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,**
> (2) through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared,
> (3) who **forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods** that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.
> (4) For everything created by God is good, and **nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving,**
> (5) for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

These false prophets are departing from the faith and from the anchoring truths found in the word of God. Instead, they have turned to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons. Their message is not based on the Holy Spirit but on the lies of the enemy. There are many falsehoods that we would think of as a teaching of a demon. Typically we would not think of forbidding marriage and rules about what food to eat. **Yet, this shows how damaging and hurtful legalism is. Taking God’s freedom and making it into a rules-based, self-righteousness is a teaching from demons.** This kind of teaching leads us to follow rules instead of God. There are many other

examples of false teaching in scripture.

2 Peter 2:1-3 ESV

> (1) But false prophets also arose among the people, **just as there will be false teachers among you,** who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.
> (2) And **many will follow their sensuality**, and because of them **the way of truth will be blasphemed.**
> (3) And **in their greed they will exploit you with false words**. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

False teachers can also lean into sensuality. Instead of making hard rules to follow, they can violate the clear commands God has given to us. They are motivated by greed and use false words to gain followers. Their testimony blasphemes the truth, and unfortunately there are many of them.

1 John 4:1 ESV

> (1) Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but **test the spirits** to see whether they are from God, for **many false prophets** have gone out into the world.

There are many false prophets who are sharing a message that is not from the Holy Spirit. We are called to test the spirits. John is using spirit in a very broad sense of the word. **Spirit can refer to an attitude** in our human spirit (Col 2:5) or even to **supernatural spirits like demons**. This is why we need to test the spirits. **Test means to make a critical examination of something to determine its genuineness**. We are to examine what is taught with the goal of approving it and accepting truth. This is not to be done with a critical heart.

1 Thessalonians 5:19-21 ESV

> (19) Do not quench the Spirit.
> (20) **Do not despise prophecies,**
> (21) **but test everything; hold fast what is good**.

As we are called to test the spirits and everything for that matter, we are to be careful not to despise prophecy. This means we don't **reject and view other teachings as beneath our consideration,** but we are to test everything so we can hold fast to the truth. Notice this does not say only elders and pastors are called to do this. **Every believer is called to have discernment and keep comparing what we hear taught to the Word of God.**

Matthew 7:15-16 ESV

> (15) "Beware of false prophets, who come to you **in sheep's clothing** but **inwardly are ravenous wolves.**
> (16) You will recognize them **by their fruits.** Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?

Jesus warns us that false prophets will look like sheep on the outside. This means their actions and message will seem correct. **The inward heart of the false prophet's life and message is where the issue is.** When their teaching is followed, it cannot be lived out and also will lead to sin. This is the fruit that Jesus mentions. **False messages lead to false living**. The early church set up guards to try and discern who a false prophet was. The **Didache** is from the 1st or 2nd century, and it includes these warnings. When a prophet visits your church, he "**shall not remain except one day; but if there be need, also the next; but if he remain three days, he is a**

false prophet. […] **if he asks for money, he is a false prophet.** […] **every prophet who teaches the truth, if he does not do what he teaches, is a false prophet**." To help us separate out false prophets from the truth, John gives us a rule of truth that each message can be measured against.

1 John 4:2-3 ESV

> (2) **By this you know the Spirit of God**: every spirit **that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,**
> (3) and every spirit that **does not confess** Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and **now is in the world already.**

A message is truly from God and the Holy Spirit if it confesses the core truth that **Jesus is the Christ and came in the flesh**. This means Jesus is fully God from eternity past and came and took on human flesh. He is the Christ, the anointed messiah who could pay for sins. **If anyone does not confess this, then they are a false prophet,** and their message is not from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit came to proclaim who Jesus is.

John 15:26 ESV

> (26) "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, **He will bear witness about Me.**

The Holy Spirit came to bear witness to and elevate Jesus. **If Jesus is diminished, then the message is not from the Holy Spirit.** Biblical truth is to magnify Jesus. We were told back in **1 John 2:22-23** that to deny the Son is to deny the Father also. Now we are taught that to deny Jesus or change Him in some way is to prove your message is not from the Holy Spirit. **The only way to have a relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit is through Jesus.**

In John's day, Jesus' humanity was being called into question. In our day these truths are still challenged. This would include **Mormonism, Jehovah's Witness, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism**. Each of these groups official teachings would deny Jesus' full humanity, or His full deity, or that He is the Christ, the ultimate payment for sins. The message these groups proclaim denies this truth and is not from the Holy Spirit and not from God. Anything that changes the core truth about Jesus **is in the spirit of the antichrist that is already at work in the world.** We have an active enemy that is constantly trying to draw humanity away from Jesus.

2 Corinthians 4:3-6 ESV

> (3) And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.
> (4) In their case **the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers**, to keep them from **seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ**, who is the image of God.
> (5) For what we proclaim is not ourselves, **but Jesus Christ as Lord**, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.
> (6) For God, who said, "**Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts** to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Satan sends out so many spirits to change the truth about Jesus and to blind this world to the glory of Christ. We are not to proclaim anything but who Jesus is. **God is the one who is strong enough to shine light into the darkness of our heart** and overcome the enemy that wants to keep us in the darkness. The spirit of antichrist is very active in the world, yet the great news is that we have access to something much stronger.

1 John 4:4 ESV

> (4) Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, **for He who is in you is greater than He who is in the world.**

We have overcome the false spirits and the spirit of antichrist **through the power of the Holy Spirit.** We have God in us giving us light and drawing us to an abiding walk with Him. This world is dark, but He is greater. There is a lot of false teaching in the world, but He teaches us the truth. **We do not overcome by our strength or ability but through relying on Him**.

Our security, stability, and growth are possible through the Holy Spirit in us. The Holy Spirit enables us to abide with Jesus.

Romans 8:11-15 ESV

> (11) **If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you**, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead **will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.**
> (12) So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.
> (13) For if you live according to the flesh you will die, **but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.**
> (14) For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.
> (15) For you did not receive **the spirit of slavery** to fall back into fear, but you have received **the Spirit of adoption** as sons, **by whom** we cry, “Abba! Father!”

The Holy Spirit is not to be viewed as a small part or background character of the Trinity. He had the power to raise Jesus from the grave and has the power to help us live in our new life in Christ. We are to put to death our old sin nature **through the power of the Holy Spirit**. A relationship with God is not a walk into slavery and burdensome rules. A relationship with God is being adopted as a son and daughter, and we can cry out to Him, “Abba! Father!” We get to experience this closeness with God through the Holy Spirit. So often we do not see the tremendous power we have to abide in Jesus right at our fingertips. We tend to view life and our circumstances the same way Elisha’s servant did when threatened by the King of Syria.

2 Kings 6:14-17 ESV

> (14) So he sent there horses and chariots and a great army, and they came by night and surrounded the city.
> (15) When the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. And the servant said, **“Alas, my master! What shall we do?”**
> (16) He said, **“Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”**
> (17) Then Elisha prayed and said, **“O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see.”** So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

We should echo this prayer. O Lord, please let us see the amazing power you have given to us in the Holy Spirit. Help us see how He will help us to abide in Jesus. Help us not rely on our strength but to rely on the one in us that is greater than our enemy in the world.