

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

JANUARY 3RD–4TH, 2026 // FIRST JOHN

“DO NOT BELIEVE EVERY SPIRIT” (1 JOHN 4:1–6)

False gnostic teachers (“prophets”) had crept into the church in Ephesus.

- “Spirit” in this passage can be interpreted as either (1) the spirit behind the prophet who is speaking (either the Holy Spirit or a demonic spirit), or (2) the teacher/prophet himself, “spirit” being a figure of speech and metaphor.
- Just because something feels or sounds spiritual, it doesn’t mean it’s from God!

So, John gives us a test to know if someone is speaking a message inspired by the Spirit of God (vs. 2–3): they must confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.

- In other words, the full deity and humanity of Jesus must both be affirmed by any teacher for that teacher to be legitimate.
- If that teacher teaches a different Jesus, they teach a false message, a false gospel, and a false hope.

Anyone who doesn’t acknowledge the true nature of Jesus has “the spirit of the antichrist,” which is coming but is in the world already (v. 3).

- The final antichrist will be an ultimate personification of this worldly spirit that distorts the true nature of Jesus and His work.
- The first readers of this warning might have been alarmed that they had become seduced by the antichrist because of false teaching.

But John reminds the Ephesian Believers that they are from God and have “conquered them” because they have contended for the truth and resisted the lure of false prophets.

- The one who is “in you” (the Holy Spirit, Rom. 8:9) is greater than the one who is in the world (Satan: “the ruler of this world,” Jn. 12:31).

- The false prophets are from the world and the world’s seductive systems of thought (v. 5).

The false prophets are from the world, but “we are from God” (v. 6).

- The apostles had been with Jesus and had been given authority by Jesus to establish the church and write Scripture. So, whenever they spoke, those who were born of God listened to them.
- The sign of a spiritually mature, genuine Believer is humbly listening to God’s Word and being willing to be under the authority of a local church and its leaders.

There is MASSIVE need for the American Church to practice discernment and to identify false teaching and stay away from it.

- We must know God’s Word and what the gospel actually teaches.
- We must be filled with and walk by the Holy Spirit who enables us to discern the spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.
- We must be bold and speak out against heresy.

THE SPIRIT OF ERROR—AMERICAN HERESIES

- Jehovah’s Witnesses
- Latter Day Saints (Mormonism)
- New Age Movement
- Universalism
 - “There are many paths to God—Jesus is simply one path out of many.”
- Denial of Biblical Authority
 - “The Bible is a good book, but it wasn’t divinely inspired. It’s full of errors, contradictions, and outdated mythology. The Bible isn’t the word of God.”
- “Word of Faith” movement
 - “It’s always God’s will for Believers to have perfect health and abundant wealth—we just have to speak out our blessings and claim them in faith!”
- Hyper-Grace (“cheap grace”) movement
 - “It’s about what you believe, not how you live. As long as you’ve prayed the prayer to get saved, you can live any way you want. Thank God for grace!”

LOVE IS FROM GOD (1 JOHN 4:7–13)

Here’s another test given to see if someone is truly from God: they must love others because “the one who does not love does not know God” (v. 8).

- If we want to be like God, we must love like God.
- There have been many false teachers and cult leaders who have amassed a following teaching a false version of “love” (Jim Jones, David Koresh, The Children of God, “love bombing”).

BUT TRUE, GENUINE, GODLY LOVE IS DIFFERENT.

1. True love is unconditional with no strings attached, is kind, and it isn’t manipulative.
2. True love isn’t self-serving, proud, boastful, envious, short-tempered, or rude.
3. True love rejoices in truth and isn’t accepting of sin.

- What is the truest, purest example of love? God sending His son Jesus to die for us (vs. 9–10).

If we’ve ever wondered whether God loves us, we need only to look to the cross.

- God willingly sacrificed His son for us so that we might live through Him!
- This love God showed us was in no way a response to humanity’s love for God. In fact, it was the opposite—He loved us first (v. 10)!
- So, if He has loved us like this, that’s how we are to love each other.

“No one has ever seen God” (v. 12), but the love God has for us is made visible and complete as we love one another.

- The world sees God’s love as it’s expressed by Him through our lives.
- What’s the best witness that we know God and love Jesus? How we love the people around us.
- How loving are you in your family? Your marriage? Your workplace? Your friendships?

PERFECT LOVE (1 JOHN 4:14–21)

John saw the physical Jesus with his own eyes and knew He had come from God.

- But the false teachers in Ephesus were claiming to know God while denying a core teaching of the gospel: Jesus had come in the flesh.
- So, John provides a doctrinal test in vs. 14–15 as the evidence of the Spirit’s presence.
- The one who believes in Jesus as God’s Son and as Savior abides in God, and God in Him.

John repeats an affirmation he made earlier that God is love and the person who lives in love lives in God, and God in him.

- Recognizing love as a key attribute of God’s nature and living in it (receiving it ourselves from God and extending it to others) is essential in our faith walk.
- If we don’t know how much we are loved by God, we can never love others fully.

If we abide in His love (receive it from Him and extend it to those around us) we can have confidence, not fear, on the day of judgment.

- Why? Because “perfect love drives out fear.” “Mature” might be a good synonym for perfect.
- Love that is “mature” and casts out fear understands that God loves us because of His character, not our performance. Our love for others comes from Him first loving us.

“We love because He first loved us” (v. 19). The secret to growing in love for God and in love for others is to grow (mature) in our understanding of God’s love for us.

- If that’s true, then hating other people simply proves we DON’T know God’s love for us, and we don’t actually know God.

- How can you love an invisible God if you hate His visible image (the people He created)?

It’s a simple but profound commandment we have from God: “the one who loves God must also love his brother” (v. 21).

- If your life is dominated by hate towards another person (regardless of what they’ve done to you or whether they disagree with your politics), you’re lying when you say you love God (v. 20).
- Hate is incompatible with the Christian gospel, and those who’ve received it must reject hate.

DON’T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU HEAR...

- Not every “Christian” teaching is true or even Christian—beware of the spirit of error!
- Not every person who claims to love you actually loves you—you can only know if they truly love you if you know God’s love.
- Not every person who claims to love God knows God—if they live in unrepentant sin or hate other people, they are a liar.
- Am I practicing discernment in the types of teaching I allow to speak into my life? Or am I letting my emotions and popular opinion lead me astray?
- If someone were to describe me in how I relate to my family, workplace, friendships, or marriage, would they describe me as “loving”?
- Do I know how much I’m loved?