

## WEDNESDAY BIBLE FELLOWSHIP

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No: 69

### 1 John Chapter 4

#### Open:

What big test made you very nervous?

#### Introduction

Our key verse, which I trust we'll be able to recite together is in chapter 5 v 13: "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you might **know** you have eternal life." Once again John returns to a discussion of the false teachers. He knows that his readers' assurance of eternal life was under attack from those false teachers who were undermining the Christians' hope by teaching falsehood and sowing seeds of doubt. During the time of John, as it is in our times, those false teachers and prophets infiltrated the church and caused a lot of confusion. They claimed to speak with knowledge and divine authority but their message was nothing short of heresy. "Some of them tried to reinterpret Christianity in a way that would be more acceptable to the world. To this end they stripped the message of the offending cross, and reduced the Person of Christ to the level of a human being." (Selwyn Hughes). John therefore had to give additional guidelines which identify the false teacher and those in error.

The false teachers failed on all three tests of genuine Christians, a moral test, a love test and a doctrinal test. The false teachers were marked by moral indifference, in that they taught that it really didn't matter how you behave. Sin is not really that serious at all. Their teaching was also marked by arrogant lovelessness. In other words, they were harshly unloving to those in need. And thirdly their teaching was marked by theological error, that is defective views about Jesus, not believing he was truly the Saviour of the world.

**Read 1 John 4: 1-6**

## Discussion Questions

1. What is every believer advised to do when he sits under the ministry of a teacher or preacher and why is this necessary?

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2. How do people motivated by God's Spirit differ from false teachers in their attitude (a) toward Christ? \_\_\_\_\_  
(b) to other Christians? \_\_\_\_\_  
(c) to the world? \_\_\_\_\_

3. What relationship to God, if any, does a teacher or preacher have if he denies that Jesus came in the flesh? What spirit does this denial represent? ( 1 John 4:3; 2 John 1:7)

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4. What power enables you to discern and overcome? \_\_\_\_\_

5. How does the world react to the false teachers and why?  
(4:5; 2 Tim 4:3). \_\_\_\_\_

## Comment

For John, Christian belief could be summed up in one great sentence: "The Word became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14). Hence, any spirit which denied the reality of the incarnation (the full deity of Jesus Christ) was not of God and he laid down two basic tests of belief. 1. To be of God, a spirit must acknowledge that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. A denial of this fact is to deny that Jesus is the fulfilment of the promises of God; it is to deny his kingship. 2. To be of God, a spirit must acknowledge that Jesus has come in the flesh. That was what the Gnostics could never accept. Since in their view, matter was altogether evil, a real incarnation was an impossibility, for God could never take flesh upon himself. Christians must realise that there are spiritual influences loose in the world which do not emanate from God. Satan is busy undermining Christian truth and doctrine all over the world. "A minister who speaks from a pulpit and attacks the deity of Jesus Christ, although he may appear to be highly respectable and even pious, is at that moment, albeit unconsciously, the voice and expression of deception—not unlike the Gnostics of John's time" (Selwyn Hughes). Let us beware of misguided tolerance of false prophets and teachers.

## Read 1 John 4: 7-21

6. Can you identify the 27 times love is mentioned in this passage?

7. What can you learn about its origin? (b) its connection with spiritual reality and knowledge (c) its relationship to God?

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### Comment

The Gnostics, according to some early writings, believed there were 36 steps which they needed to climb before they could come into union with God. Their motto was this: the more we know, the closer we will get to God. But Gnosticism was an attempt to find God through the mind rather than through the heart. John countered this error by stating that we know God through opening our hearts to His love and not through efforts of the mind. Paul corroborated this fact in 1 Cor. 8:1-2.

8. From verses 8-15, what can you learn about the relationship between (a) the Father, the Son and the Spirit? \_\_\_\_\_  
(b) About their relationship to us? \_\_\_\_\_

9. What clarification does John add regarding the love of God? (1 John 4:10,19; John. 3:16)

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### Comment

God is love. What a profound statement! It states more than that God has love, or even that He is loving. It tells us that the main-spring of His personality is love. "Take love out of an angel—a devil remains. Take love out of a human being—a sinner remains. Take love out of God— nothing remains. For God is love." (Selwyn Hughes).

10. How does the fact that God is love (vv8, 16) relate to the fact that "God is light" (1:5) "? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Comment**

In the NT there are three other statements whereby the author says that God is something. Two of them are in John's writings. In chapter 4 v 24 of his gospel, John says that God is spirit, and then in chapter 1 v 5 of his first letter he says that God is light. And in Hebrews 12 v 29 the writer says that 'God is consuming fire'. Now when John says here that God is love, he is not saying that God is a little bit loving sometimes and then a little bit holy, like consuming fire, then a little bit light. He doesn't alternate between these qualities depending on what day it is or what kind of mood he is in. Love is not a number of options that God can choose from. Rather God is 100% loving, he is 100% holy, he is 100% light, hating all that is darkness, all that is sinful. All these qualities are to be affirmed together. So that means when God judges, he judges with love. When God disciplines us, he disciplines us in love. When God shows us what to do and how to behave, he is not bashing us with a big stick, he is lovingly telling us what pleases him and how we can delight the God who made us. Love, as John sees it, marks all of God's activities, however he is acting whether be in justice, in salvation, or in judgement.

11. What is relationship between love and fear? Are they mutually exclusive according to 1 John 4:18? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Comment.**

The root cause of fear is an absence of love. If you had a vivid awareness of how much God loved you, every fear troubling you would vanish. So the answer to your problem of fear lies not in self-centred efforts to conquer it but in concentrating on the fact that God loves you, and has control of all the situations and circumstances of your life. The more you focus on that fact, the more His love will flow in.

**For Reflection.** In your life, when has perfect fear cast out love? When has God's love cast out fear?