

# I John 4:1-6 - A Tale of Two Spirits

Friday, February 13, 2015 8:42 AM

## I. Introduction

### A. Over the last several weeks we have studied I John 3 and the glories of the children of God

1. If we were to summarize the message of I John 3, it might go something like this:
2. The love of God is so great that He has called us children of God.
3. And so, we are children of God and should therefore be marked by God's characteristics which are hatred of sin and love for God's people.
4. When we have these characteristics, we have confidence before God in prayer and we know that the Spirit of God is dwelling in us, marking us as children of God.

### B. As we enter I John 4, John's focus is going to change somewhat

1. John has just affirmed that we are children of God and that God's Spirit dwells in us
2. But those who oppose John's message, the gnostic teachers, also claim to be speaking by the Spirit of God
3. So, how can we tell who is truly speaking by God's Spirit and who is an imposter?
4. John is going to address this question in the next few verses - how do we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error?

**C. I John 4:1-6** - *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. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 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. 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. They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.*

### D. Proposition and Outline:

1. Proposition: Prophecy is a gift of God to His people to stir up love for Christ, but there are many false prophets, so we need to distinguish between true and false prophecies. False prophets are our enemies, but we have no need to fear them because we have already won. All we need to do is keep on loving Christ and Christ's people.
2. Outline
  - a. Instruction: Test the spirits!
  - b. Interlude: Why discuss it here?
  - c. Identification 1: What do they say?
  - d. Identification 2: Who do they align with?
  - e. Intent: Encouragement

## II. Instruction - Test the spirits!

*Do not believe every spirit but test the spirits, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world... By this we know the Spirit of Truth and the spirit of error*

### A. What is a prophet?

1. As I was studying this passage, I realized that to understand this passage well, we first need to understand what a prophet is - a category I don't have a great definition for
  - a. John introduces false prophets here in I John 4:1, and tells us how to tell the difference between a true and a false prophet - but first we need to know what a prophet is
  - b. A modern understanding of prophet is one who speaks the word of God - in other words a preacher or teacher, someone who teaches the word of God publicly to the people of God
  - c. But, as I look at the New Testament, sometimes I think we've lost the meaning of the word in our attempt to fit it into our experience and understanding - we start with our experience and force the word to fit
  - d. So, the first thing I want to do this morning is look at the New Testament to define a prophet
2. A prophet is similar to a teacher because a prophet is one who speaks the word of God
  - a. So, Peter makes a connection between false prophets in the Old Testament with false teachers in the New
  - b. II Pet. 2:1 - *But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you,*
3. But, as we keep looking, prophecy is not merely teaching, there must be a difference between the two concepts
  - a. Notice that prophecy and teaching are consistently differentiated by Paul
  - b. I Corinthians 12:28-29 - *And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles?*
  - c. Ephesians 4:11 - *And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,*
  - d. Paul understood that the teaching ministry of the church and the gift of prophecy were not exactly the same, they may overlap at times, but there is a difference - prophecy is not merely teaching out of the Word of God, saying what God has already said, there must be another dimension to it
4. It seems that the mark of a prophet was that the prophet speaks directly by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit
  - a. The promise of the Spirit is tied to prophesy in Acts 2:17 - *"And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,*
  - b. And Paul affirms that prophecy is a gift of the Spirit in I Corinthians 12:8-11 - *For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, ... All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.*
  - c. Paul builds on this truth in I Corinthians 14:29-33 - *Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.*
  - d. Paul says that prophets receive revelation from God, revelation that may come from the Holy Spirit instantaneously, and the prophet speaks the word from God to God's people
  - e. So prophecy is not merely teaching the Word of God, but a special gift from the Spirit of revelation - a word that God is speaking to His people right now through the Holy Spirit
  - f. This makes a lot of sense, because this is the same role the prophets had in the Old Testament, those to whom God revealed the Word of God by the Spirit and who then spoke the Word of God to God's people
  - g. II Peter 1:21 - *For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*
5. But there is a difference between the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament prophets, in the Christian era, a prophet is no longer uniquely authoritative
  - a. In the Old Testament, a true prophet was always to be obeyed, but the New Testament is different
  - b. I Thessalonians 5:20-21 - *Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good.*
  - c. I Corinthians 14:29 - *Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.*
  - d. Paul tells us not to despise prophecies - the Holy Spirit is speaking through prophecies
  - e. But, prophecy is not our ultimate guide, prophecy is not our ultimate authority, so we are always to be testing prophecies, testing them against the ultimate authority

**B. Which brings us to our problem: there are many false prophets**

1. John tells us that many false prophets have gone out into the world
  - a. People are going to claim to be speaking according to the Holy Spirit's revelation, but they are liars
  - b. False prophets are going to lead people astray, lead them away from Christ, and seek to destroy the church
  - c. But, it is not always easy to tell who the false prophets are, especially if we want to be sensitive to prophecy and the ability of the Holy Spirit to speak by direct revelation
2. This problem was specifically promised by Christ
  - a. Matthew 7:15 - *"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.*
  - b. Matthew 24:11, 24 - *And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray... For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.*
  - c. Christ tells us that false prophets will come and they will look good - like they are in sheep's clothing
  - d. He tells us that false prophets will be so subtle that, if possible, they would lead even the elect astray
3. This problem is a continuing problem for God's people
  - a. II Pet. 2:1 - *But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you,*
  - b. Peter tells us to expect that false teachers will come into the church because this has always been the reaction of the world to God's people - the world wants to corrupt God's message and to distract from God's message by introducing competing messages
4. This problem will only grow until Christ returns
  - a. I Timothy 4:1 - *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,*
  - b. The mark of the last days, the later times, which in my understanding is everything from the time of the Apostles to the return of Christ, will be an infiltration of the church by false teachers who are following other spirits - in fact following the teachings of demons

**C. So, if we are to listen to the prophets we need to be able to distinguish between true prophets and false prophets**

1. If we aren't going to despise prophecies, we need to be able to distinguish between true prophecies and false prophecies and react accordingly
2. So John tells us to test the spirits to see which of them are from God - we need to figure out who is speaking by the Spirit of God and who is speaking from the spirit of the world
3. This is John's focus here in these few verses - when someone claims to have a prophecy, a new revelation from God, how can we tell whether we need to obey it or not? How can we tell if it really came from God?
4. So, John is going to give us a couple of tests to determine if a prophet is speaking from God, and he is going to show that the gnostic prophets who claimed a special anointing of the Holy Spirit are really imposters

### III. Interlude - Why does John deal with this problem now?

#### A. John has been discussing the wonder of being called Children of God in the last chapter

1. He called us to stand in awe of the great love God showed to us in calling us children
2. And he showed us the two characteristics of God's children - obedience and love
3. He's going to return to the love theme in verse 7, so why does he pause here to discuss false prophets?

#### B. The relationship of the Spirit to being Children of God

1. John finished chapter 3 with this - *And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.*
2. In fact, chapter 3 has a nice mirror image pattern to it, in fact, is almost a chiastic pattern
  - a. John starts by rejoicing in the truth that we are abiding in Christ and children of God in 2:28-3:3 (A)
  - b. In 3:4-10, John then discusses the first attribute of the children of God, obedience (B)
  - c. Then, in 3:10-20, John discusses the second attribute of the children of God, love (C)
  - d. In 3:21-24, John returns to the first attribute, obedience (B)
  - e. In the second half of verse 24, John makes His statement about God abiding in us through His Spirit (A)
3. So, in the chiastic pattern, the indwelling of God's Spirit in us is equivalent to us being the children of God
  - a. John is saying that we are the children of God, therefore God's Spirit dwells in us and vice versa
  - b. And if we are the children of God, if God's Spirit dwells in us, we should be marked by love and obedience
4. "But," one of John's listener's might say, "the other side claims to be speaking by the Spirit of God too!"
  - a. Why should we listen to you and not to them? Why should we believe you?
5. And this brings us to I John 4:1-6 - how do we tell the difference between the Spirit of God other spirits?
  - a. John introduces this section to assure his listeners that they really are filled with the Spirit of God and that the opposition are imposters by demonstrating how to tell the difference

#### C. The relationship of love to prophecy

1. The purpose of prophecy is to fuel love
  - a. Matthew 24:11-12 - *And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.*
  - b. Notice that false prophets show up and lead people astray and the ultimate result is that love grows cold
  - c. This tells us something about prophets - true prophets stir our love for Christ and Christ's people while false prophets work to extinguish that love, to turn that love to other, lesser things
  - d. Prophecy is rooted in love - true prophecy pushes us to love Christ, false prophecy points us at other things
2. Therefore prophecy is nothing without love
  - a. We've already spent some time thinking about I Corinthians 12-14 this morning where Paul is talking about the spiritual gifts, especially tongues and prophecy, and Paul says that prophecy is a greater gift
  - b. But, in I Corinthians 13:2, Paul turns to love - *And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.*
  - c. And Paul concludes that love must come before prophecy, I Corinthians 14:1 - *Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.*
3. Prophecy is about love and must be rooted in love, therefore prophecy must be spoken in love
  - a. We've already visited Ephesians 4:11 this morning, where Paul talks about the various gifts to the church,
  - b. But, only a few verses later, Paul tells us how these speaking gifts must work, Ephesians 4:15 - *Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,*
4. Thus, a true prophet is marked by true love and encourages real love, a false prophet is marked by false loves
  - a. II Peter 2:15-16 - *Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.*
  - b. Peter says that Balaam failed as a prophet because he had a false love, as do all false prophets
5. So, John's excursion to the topic of true and false prophets isn't random when it appears here in the center of a section talking about the love of God's children
  - a. True prophets are marked by love and encourage love in God's people; false prophets are not marked by love, at least love for God and love for the brethren, nor do they encourage love between God's people
  - b. The gnostic teachers are obviously not true prophets because they don't have love and they aren't encouraging love; the gnostic prophets are encouraging disunity, superiority, pride, things opposed to love



## IV. Identification 1 - What do they say?

### A. Now we are going to return to our verses and listen to how we can distinguish between true and false prophets

1. John is going to give us two tests in our passage this morning - two ways of distinguishing between the Spirit of God and the spirit of the world
2. The first test comes in verses 2-3 - *By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.*
3. The first test is by listening to what they say - especially what do they say about Jesus Christ

### B. A true prophet will be centered on the truth about Christ

1. John says that a true prophet led by the Spirit of God will confess the truth of the incarnation
  - a. The true prophet will confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, that Jesus is truly God and man
  - b. Earlier in our study of I John, we saw that the incarnation was at the center of John's theology and how the incarnation is important to every aspect of salvation
  - c. So, a true prophet will always affirm this fact, any prophet who doesn't is obviously not a true prophet
  - d. This is similar to what Paul says in I Corinthians 12:3 - *Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit.*
  - e. And Paul says another similar thing in Romans 10:9-10 - *because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.*
2. All three of these references tell us that speaking truth about Christ is very important, but none of these passages mean merely speaking the words
  - a. In Romans 10, Paul doesn't mean if the words 'Jesus is Lord' escape your mouth once you are saved
  - b. And, in I Corinthians 12, he doesn't mean that anyone who says 'Jesus is Lord' is being guided by the Spirit
  - c. In both of these passages, speaking is merely the external action of a deeper truth - to say something to Paul is to affirm it wholeheartedly and follow the truth of the statement
  - d. For Paul, to say 'Jesus is Lord' means that we confess that truth and live according to that truth - it is not mere verbal assent or verbal confession
  - e. The same thing happens when John says that true prophets confess the truths of Christ
  - f. He does not mean that anyone who says, Jesus has come in the flesh is telling the truth - if someone comes and says, 'Jesus has come in the flesh so you can lie to your neighbor as much as you want,' obviously he is not a true prophet
  - g. For John, to confess the truth of the incarnation is to live according to the truth of the incarnation, to root oneself in the incarnation - anyone who confesses that Jesus has come in the flesh is going to live in light of the incarnation
3. We can see this clearly when we see the negative half of John's statement
  - a. I John 4:3 - *and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.*
  - b. Notice that John doesn't say that every spirit that does not confess Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not from God, he leaves that phrase out
  - c. Now, we could say John is just using shorthand so that he doesn't have to repeat himself, but John has shown us throughout this letter that he is not afraid of repeating himself, he does that quite often
  - d. John is actually saying that the opposite of confessing the truth of the incarnation is not confessing any truth about Christ
  - e. To deny any central truth about Christ is to deny who Christ is and therefore to deny the incarnation

### **C. This is because the Spirit is the Spirit of Truth**

1. Remember that a prophet is one who is speaking by the power and revelation of the Holy Spirit
  - a. So a prophet is going to speak in accordance with the characteristics of the Holy Spirit
  - b. And one of the most important characteristics of the Holy Spirit is that He is the Spirit of Truth
2. Jesus makes this point clearly and it is recorded by John in his gospel several times
  - a. John 14:16-17 - *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.*
  - b. John 16:13 - *When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.*
3. If the Spirit is the Spirit of Truth then those who speak by the power of the Spirit must be telling the truth
  - a. Someone who gets the truth about Christ wrong cannot be speaking by the Spirit because the Spirit will always tell the truth
  - b. So, the gnostic prophets cannot be true prophets because they got the truth about the incarnation of Christ wrong, they deny that core, central truth and therefore cannot be speaking by the Spirit of Truth

### **D. And this is because the Spirit testifies to Christ**

1. John records this clearly in his gospel as well
  - a. John 15:26 - *"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.*
  - b. John 16:14 - *He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.*
2. The Holy Spirit not only always tells the truth, the Holy Spirit always points to Christ
  - a. The message of the Holy Spirit is always so focused on Christ that Paul calls the Holy Spirit the Spirit of Christ, Romans 8:9 - *You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.*
  - b. Or again in Philippians 1:19 - *for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance,*
  - c. The Holy Spirit's purpose is to display the truths of Christ, He will always work toward this goal
3. A prophet who claims to be speaking by the Holy Spirit must be pointing us to Christ!
  - a. If a prophet isn't pointing us to Christ, then that prophet cannot be a true prophet because he is not communicating the sole message of the Holy Spirit to God's people
  - b. The Holy Spirit testifies to Christ and gives the things of Christ to Christ's people
  - c. A true prophet will speak according to this Spirit

### **E. So, a prophet who is led by the Spirit of God will always point to Jesus Christ and affirm the truth about Christ**

1. In Revelation 19:10 this connection is made particularly clear - *Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God." For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*
  - a. The spirit of prophecy is the testimony about Jesus, there is no other focus of true prophecy other than to point us back to Christ and what He has done
2. So, the true prophet is going to be centered on who Christ is
  - a. The true prophet is going to point us to Christ, somehow
  - b. The true prophet is going to affirm the truths revealed about Christ
  - c. The true prophet is going to encourage us to love Christ
  - d. The true prophet is going to command us to run after Christ
3. The false prophet is going to be focused on something else, either a falsehood about Christ or something else
  - a. This is an excellent test, when we listen to prophets or to teacher - are they pointing us at Christ?
  - b. Does that teacher or prophet found his message on the truths about Christ?
  - c. Is that teacher or prophet encouraging us to center ourselves in Christ?
  - d. Or is that teacher or prophet pushing a falsehood about Christ or ignoring Christ entirely?
  - e. The answer to those questions will tell you whether he is a true or false prophet

## V. Identification 2 - Who are they aligned with?

### A. In verses 5-6, John gives us a second test to determine who is speaking by the Spirit of God

1. I John 4:5-6 - *They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.*
2. John's second test is who are they aligned with?
3. John divides those who prophecy into two groups - those aligned with the world and those aligned with 'us'

### B. To understand this test, we need to figure out who 'us' is, those who speak by the Spirit of God are aligned with 'us'

1. 'Us' could mean two things here - it could mean John and his listeners, or it could mean John and his associates
  - a. John often uses 'we' and 'us' to refer to his listeners, aligning himself with his listeners - *'Beloved, let us love one another,' 'See what kind of love the Father has given to us,' 'we have an advocate with the Father'*
  - b. But, the message of John's letter is also coming from a group, so John says, *'the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life,' and 'that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you,' and 'we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.'*
  - c. So, does 'us' mean John and his listeners or John and his associates - those testifying to Christ
2. I think the 'us' here, means John and his associates, particularly, John and the other apostles
  - a. John and the other apostles were commissioned by Christ to testify to the truth of Christ
    - i. Jesus tells the apostles this in John 15:26-27 - *"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. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.*
    - ii. And Jesus reiterates this in Acts 1:8 - *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*
  - b. So, those who claim to be prophets must be aligned with the apostles testimony
    - i. Paul says this explicitly in I Corinthians 14:37 - *If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord.*
    - ii. Anyone claiming to be a prophet, to know what the Spirit is saying, must acknowledge the apostles authority and align themselves with the apostolic witness, otherwise they are false prophets
3. So, the test is: is the prophet aligned with the apostles who testify to Christ, or are they aligned with the world and the things of the world?
  - a. A true prophet will be aligned with the teaching of the apostles, the New Testament apostolic witness will be their ultimate authority and they will point to that authority
  - b. When we tried to define a prophet earlier, we said one big difference between the Old Testament and New Testament prophets is that the New Testament prophet is not a unique authority
  - c. This is why, the New Testament prophet has a unique authority already - the New Testament prophet operates under the authority of the New Testament, the apostolic witness to Christ



### C. False prophets will be aligned with the things of the world

1. I John 4:5 - *They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them.*
2. False prophets will teach things that appeal to worldly desires, to worldly pursuits - so the world listens to them
  - a. Paul says this clearly in II Timothy 4:3-4 - *For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.*
  - b. The false prophets and teachers will merely hold things out that the world wants to hear, they won't teach the hard truths about Christ
3. Now, this doesn't mean that false prophets will always call us to blatant lawlessness
  - a. In fact, the false teachers Paul is talking about in II Timothy are those who have the appearance of godliness, II Timothy 3:5 - *having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.*
  - b. In I Timothy, Paul says that the false teachers he is worried about are those preaching asceticism, I Timothy 4:1-3 - *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, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.*
  - c. False prophets and false teachers might call us to rigid asceticism, they might even appear to be calling us to godliness
4. But, in the end, they are speaking from the world and the world will listen
  - a. Even the ascetics are appealing to worldly desires - they will appear to pride, to self-sufficiency, to superiority - things that satisfy the flesh through the appearance of godliness
  - b. So, whether they appeal to lust and desire or are more subtle and appeal to pride and perfection, a false prophet will always call us to something that our flesh desires
  - c. All of these desires are things of the world, as John said earlier, I John 2:16 - *For all that is in the world---the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in of life---is not from the Father but is from the world.*
5. So, we can identify a false prophet based on what he calls us to love
  - a. We talked about this earlier, a true prophet will call us to love Christ and Christ's people, a false prophet will try to make us love other things, whether it is the love of things or pleasure or the love of pride, the false prophet will point us to the things of the world
  - b. The false prophet is of the world, therefore he speaks from the world and the world will love it

## VI. Intent - Encouragement

### A. In the center of our passage this morning, between the two identification sections, John makes one more point

1. John puts his main point in the center of his paragraph and builds around it, again making a mirror image
  - a. He starts by telling them to test the spirits (A)
  - b. Then he gives the first test: what do they say (B)
  - c. The middle becomes the middle of the chiasm (C)
  - d. He then gives the second test: who do they align with (B)
  - e. And he finishes by saying this is how you test the spirits (A)
2. So, the center of this section is the center of John's thought, his purpose and intent for putting this in here
  - a. And at the center of this section, John defines a war that is happening
  - b. He defines two sides that are permanently opposed to each other
  - c. He places the believers firmly in one camp
  - d. And he tells us which camp has already won

### B. John starts by defining the two warring sides

1. The first side comes at the end of verse 3
  - a. In the beginning of verse 3, John has described the characteristics of the false prophets, and he continues - *This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.*
  - b. John says that not only is a prophet who doesn't affirm the truths about Christ a false prophet, John says that he is an enemy - he is siding with the spirit of the antichrist
  - c. The antichrist is opposed to everything that Christ is, the antichrist wants to destroy the people of Christ, to lead them away from Christ
  - d. John says that it is this spirit of enmity that fuels the false prophets - this is the first side
2. But then John introduces the second side at the beginning of verse 4
  - a. I John 4:4 - *Little children, you are from God*
  - b. This is the simple truth that John has been resting in through chapter 3, we are the children of God, we belong to God's people, we are abiding in Christ
  - c. But, this places us firmly on the other side, just as John has pointed out several times already
  - d. I John 3:1 - *The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.*
  - e. I John 3:13 - *Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.*
  - f. We are on the side opposed to the antichrist

### C. Having defined the two sides, John immediately tells us which side wins

1. I John 4:4 - *Little children, you are from God and have overcome them,*
2. John says the victory has already been won - we are from God and we have already overcome them
3. They may look like they are winning the victory - their false prophets may lead astray many, the world may embrace them as their own, we may end up the enemy of all men
4. But, none of that matters, because we have already won
5. We don't need to fear the false prophets, we need to be on guard against them, but we don't need to fear them
6. They are powerless against us - we will win in the end because we have already won

#### **D. And John tells us why we have already won**

1. I John 4:4 - *for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.*
  - a. We have already won because our victory doesn't have anything to do with us, it has everything to do with the God who dwells in us
2. We have already won because Christ has already won
  - a. Christ told us to rest in His victory in John 16:33 - *I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.*"
  - b. We can be sure of victory because Christ won the victory already, He conquered this world through His perfect life, and He conquered the prince of this world in His death and resurrection, so our enemy already stands defeated in Christ
  - c. Amazingly, it all comes back to the incarnation - the truth about Christ that is at the center of John's letter - in Christ's incarnation, Christ won the victory, so those who confess Christ's incarnation partake in His victory regardless of what opposition the world may provide
  - d. We see a beautiful picture of this in Revelation 12:10-11 - *And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.*
3. We have already won because God has chosen us in Christ
  - a. We can say, with Paul in Romans 8:31-37 - *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died---more than that, who was raised---who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*
4. So, we have already won, because God dwells in us
  - a. Yes, we have an enemy who opposes us, who sends false prophets to deceive us, who even seeks to kill us, but in all these things we are more than conquerors because Christ has already won
  - b. John wants us to be on guard against false prophets, prophets who seek to sap our love for Christ and turn it to other things, prophets who oppose God's people and are the enemies of the truth
  - c. But John does not want us to fear false prophets, instead he wants us to be confident and keep loving Christ, keep abiding in Christ and keep on loving Christ's people
  - d. Don't let the false prophet knock you off course and don't let him draw you into the argument, simply keep on following Christ
  - e. So, in the next verse, which we'll study next week, John is going to make the simple call - *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God*
  - f. If prophecy is about love, then our response to prophecy should be love - we shouldn't get drawn into loving the world by false prophets, but true prophecy should fuel our love for each other in Christ