

EPISTLE: 1 JOHN

4



MP3

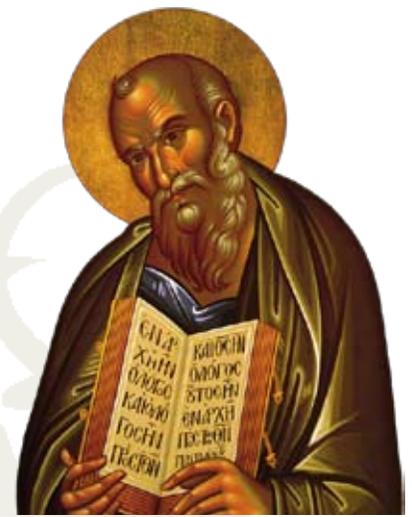
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PRACTICE QUIZ

Take a quiz to test your knowledge of 1 John chapter 4.

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The Holy Spirit confirms for Christians that—if we keep Christ’s commandments—we abide in Christ, and Christ abides in us (1 John 3:24). Are there other spirits, however, who might tell us different things? The Holy Apostle John warns that there are, but also gives us a simple but powerful test for discerning whether these spirits are of God: every spirit who is of God affirms that Jesus Christ is both God and man, whereas spirits who deny this are not (4:2-3). In fact, to deny Jesus’ humanity and divinity is the spirit of Antichrist (4:3; see 2:22-23).

Christians do not need to worry about false spirits and false prophets because, the apostle says, “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (4:4); in fact, Christians have even overcome the false! Blessed Theophylact restates the point like this, “You have overcome the false prophets because the God Who is in you is greater than the one by whom the false prophets have chosen to live.” Because we are heard by the Holy Spirit, but overlooked and unheard by those who are not of God, we can discern between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error (4:6).

A f t e r

talking about false prophets and lying spirits, St. John again returns to the subject of love. God is love: thus, everyone who loves is born of God and knows Him, whereas those who do not love do not know Him (4:7-8). Furthermore, God’s love has been manifested toward us in that God the Father lovingly sent His Son to reconcile us to Him and to give us life (4:9-10). Oecumenius says we should therefore love each other with a love that is “sincere and pure, without ulterior motives or other hidden thoughts” (see 4:11).

The apostle continues with an interesting point: no one has seen God the Father, and yet we can know that God abides in us by our love and our confession that Jesus is the Son of God (4:12-14). Fr. Lawrence Farley explains that this passage refers to the Church: “Christians can know the reality of this mutual indwelling of God in His people because of the presence of the Spirit in the Church...the presence of the Spirit’s activity witnesses to the love of the brethren for one another.”

Love is perfected when it is shared between God and His people—and among those people—and this does more than simply give us a pleasant feeling: it also gives us boldness in the day of judgment (4:16-17). We need not fear God’s judgment if we abide in His love, for this loving relationship is only possible because God first loved us (4:18-19; see 4:10). Venerable Bede says the loving believer “learns not to be afraid anymore but

to look forward eagerly for the coming of the One Who is the desire of the nations, hoping that on the strength of his good life he will be crowned among the saints.”

The chapter concludes with a simple point: it is impossible to love God when we hate others. In fact, St. John even says, “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar” (4:20). He reinforces his point by referring to our senses: if we cannot love the people around us, who we can see (and hear, and feel), then how can we claim to love God Whom we cannot see (4:20)? This is why the God Whom every Christian at least claims to love commands us to love other Christians (4:21).

LIFE TIP

St. John Chrysostom explains the difference between true and false love: “What kind of love are we talking about here? It is the true love and not what people use this word to mean. It comes from our attitude and knowledge and must proceed from a pure heart. For there is also a love of evil things. Robbers love other robbers, and murderers love each other too, not out of a love which comes from a good conscience but from a bad one.”

