

Introduction
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1. Dustin's done a great job so far walking us through 1<sup>st</sup> John and addressing some of the issues that faced by his readers
2. It's a rather challenging letter because of how it's written—John goes back and forth between a handful of topics like the nature of Christ, love, the claims of the false teachers, sin
3. I think one of the reasons for that is the passion John had for the well-being of his readers
4. We don't know a lot about his readers, but he clearly addresses them as believers
5. We know that false teachers had come into the church and were disrupting the faith of his readers:
  - a. They were claiming that Jesus was NOT the Messiah (2:22)
  - b. They denied the incarnation—that Jesus came in the flesh (4:2)
  - c. They denied that Jesus was the Son of God (4:15)
  - d. They also appeared to deny that they were sinners, and probably by extension denied that John's readers needed a savior (1:8-10)
  - e. Read **2 John 1:7-10**
6. So, John wrote to counter these false teachers and encourage the believers—in fact, he told his readers 12 times why he wrote:
  - a. 1:4
  - b. 2:1-2
  - c. 2:12-14
  - d. 2:21
  - e. 2:26
  - f. 5:13
7. So, we have a group of Christians who had been taught the truth, but were now being challenged, by false teachers
  - a. It appears some may have fallen prey to these men
  - b. It appears their confidence may have been shaken
  - c. Who was right—John on the one side with his doctrines and teachings about Jesus, or the teachers in their midst who were teaching something different?
  - d. How could John's readers know who was truly from God?
  - e. How could they know themselves whether they were—in John's words from earlier—“Children of God” (3:1ff)?
  - f. John answers this throughout his letter, but 3:23-24 are probably the most succinct answer to this question

A. How to know who is from God and who is not (3:23-24)
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1. In 3:23-24 John gives us a rather simple answer to the question:
  - a. God commanded us to do two things (23): **“This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us.”**
    - 1) Believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ
    - 2) Love one another

- b. John then says that if we obey God in these two things then we can be assured of two things (24a): **"The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him."**
      - 1) We abide in Him—this is a reference to God because all the pronouns in these two verses refer to God
      - 2) He abides in us—again, this is a reference to God
    - c. John then gives us the proof for this (24b): **"We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us."**
      - 1) In John 14:15-18 Jesus promised us that God the Father would send us the Holy Spirit and that He would indwell us and abide with us forever
      - 2) One of the roles that the Holy Spirit carries out in our lives is to help us determine what's true and what's not true (John 16:13)
      - 3) John even reminded his readers of this in 2:27
      - 4) However, there is another role that the Holy Spirit plays in our lives—he is there to bear witness that we are children of God (Romans 8:16-17): **"The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him."**
2. There's also something else in these verses--we also find a test of sorts for determining who is of God and who is not:
  - a. The first test is doctrinal: **"that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ"**
    - 1) Notice that John didn't just say, **"believe in Jesus"** but **"believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ"**
    - 2) Many people believe in Jesus, but not everyone believes He is the Son of God nor in His name
    - 3) What does it mean to believe in His name?
      - a) Acts 4:12 says that **"there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."**
      - b) The name Jesus is actually an English rendering of the Greek name jesus, which is a translation of the Hebrew name Yehoshua (English Joshua)
      - c) It literally means Jehovah is salvation
      - d) Look at Matthew 1:20-21: **"But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."**
      - e) So, believing in His name means that one recognizes that Jesus Christ is God with us and is the only one who can save us from our sins
  - b. The second test is practical or behavioral: **"and love one another just as He commanded us"**
    - 1) Another key test for determining whether someone is from God is whether they express love for God's people
    - 2) According to John, we cannot separate loving God from loving His people, our brothers and sisters in Christ (1 John 5:2)

- c. John actually expands upon both this doctrinal test and the practical tests in the next chapter

B. The doctrinal test (4:1-6)
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In the first six verses of chapter 4 John expounds upon the doctrinal test, and this is where we will spend the rest of our time today. In 7-21 he expounds upon the behavioral or practical test.

1. We should always test what is taught (1): **“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”**
  - a. The reality is, the world is filled with false teachers—inside and outside the Church
  - b. We see that here in 1<sup>st</sup> John where false teachers had infiltrated the local church
  - c. Recently Dustin taught on Jude who described how **“certain persons have crept in unnoticed...ungodly persons who turned the grace of God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ...men who revile the things which they do not understand, things which they know by instinct like unreasoning animals...men who are hidden reefs in your love feasts...caring for themselves, clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, double dead, uprooted, wild waves of the sea, casting their own shame like foam, wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever...”** (Jude)
  - d. Paul challenged false teachers in his letters to the Colossians and Galatians, and wrote two letters to Timothy to instruct him on the dangers of such men and how to handle them
  - e. Jesus Himself warned His disciples that false prophets would come, “ferocious wolves” dressed up like innocent sheep (Matthew 7:15)
  - f. So John warns his readers here not to believe every spirit (e.g. teacher) but to test them to see if they and what they were teaching was from God
2. He then explains how to test them (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; 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.”**
  - a. John’s test was pretty simple:
    - 1) Those teachers that confessed that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh was from God
    - 2) Those teachers that denied Jesus were not from God
  - b. One thing we have to keep in mind here is that John wasn’t providing a litmus test for us today in determining whether any and all teaching or teachers are from God:
    - 1) In other words, we can’t just say because someone believes in Jesus that his or her teaching is from God
    - 2) John was addressing a particular audience and particular teachers that were denying aspects of who Jesus Christ was
    - 3) So, this test—what they claimed about Jesus—applied specifically to these teachers
  - c. We can, however, see the principle John was using—he was simply comparing what these teachers were saying to the Truth about Jesus Christ
    - 1) Look back at 1 John 1:1-3

- 2) John and his readers knew the Truth about Jesus because they had witnessed it themselves as Apostles
  - 3) And the Apostles were God's revelatory agents, His prophets, and the early church had to rely upon them for much of their understanding about Jesus, doctrine, etc.
    - a) Acts 2:42
    - b) John 13:20
    - c) 1 Corinthians 14:37-38
    - d) 2 Peter 3:15-16
  - 4) We don't have the luxury of the Apostles, but what we do have is the Word of God—and according to Paul, it is good for teaching, reproof, correct and training in righteousness
  - 5) So, the principle for us is to compare what is taught against what God has revealed in His Word
    - a) When the teaching lines up with that, we can know it's from God
    - b) When it doesn't, we can know that it does not come from Him
    - c) And when a teacher consistently teaches things that do not line up with the Word of God we must question whether that man or woman is himself or herself from God
3. John adds two more clues to determining which teachers or teaching is from God (4-6):
- a. He continues by reassuring them that **"they are from God"**: How did John know this?
    - 1) First, because they had **"overcome them"** (e.g. the false teachers)—this is likely a reference to the fact that they were no longer mesmerized by them or under their spell (so to speak)
    - 2) This was precisely **"because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world"**-- they had overcome the false teachers because they had the Holy Spirit indwelling them just as John said in 3:24
  - b. But the next clue to determining whether a teacher or teaching is from God is that false teachers and their teaching are worldly (5): **"They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them."**
    - 1) They are from the world—you can just tell when you look at them
    - 2) **"What they say is from the world"** (NIV) or **"they speak from the world's perspective"** (NET)
    - 3) And the real key is that the world listens to—or agrees with—they!—when Jesus said that in reality the world would actually hate the Truth
  - c. The last clue John gives is that false teachers do not listen to those who speak the Truth (6): **"We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error."**
    - 1) One tell-tale sign of a false teacher is how he or she handles confrontation with the Word
    - 2) How do they respond when confronted with the Truth

Conclusion
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