

Lesson 4 | March 24, 2024

Guarding God's Truth

Study Text: 1 John 3:19 through 4:6; 2 John 7–11

Central Truth: Christians must discern between truth and error.

Key Verse: 1 John 4:1

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world (KJV).

Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will experience the assurance of God's grace rather than depending on their feelings.
- Students will learn practices to help them discern between God's truth and the enemy's lies.
- Students will be challenged to diligently study God's Word instead of partnering with or encouraging false teachers.

Introducing the Study

Say: How can we tell when someone is telling the truth or lying? Most of the time, how well we know the individual directly impacts our ability to discern the truth of what they're saying.

Opening Activity—A Truth and a Lie

Ask: Can I have a few volunteers who will make two statements about themselves—one true and one untrue? Allow the class to vote on which statements are true and which are untrue. Exclude spouses, siblings, or parents from voting.

Say: Now we know these volunteers a little better! We didn't let their family members vote because their knowledge would have skewed the outcome. When we're close to someone, we naturally get to know them better. This is true in our relationships with each other and in our relationship with God. The more we get to know the Father, the easier it is to understand His Word and recognize His voice. In this lesson we will discover why it is so important to know and guard the truth of His Word. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In the passage we're studying today, John encourages believers to remember that God knows everything, and His truth supersedes our feelings. We are encouraged to come boldly into His presence and make our requests known to Him. By believing in God and loving one another, we remain in fellowship with God and we're able to distinguish

between truth and lies. God's Spirit dwells in us and helps us to know and walk in the truth.

Part 1—God Is Greater than Our Feelings

Come to God with Confidence

1 John 3:19–22

Say: The apostle challenged believers in 1 John 3:18 to let our actions show that we love one another. Then, in the following four verses he explained how to have confidence in God rather than depending on our feelings. We may worry that we don't love others as well as we should, causing us to experience feelings of guilt. But John reminds us that God is greater than our feelings. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

No one feels loving all of the time. But when our motives are to demonstrate our love for God by loving others, He sees our heart, even if our actions are misunderstood (1 John 3:20). When we do fall short of loving others as we should, we can ask for God's mercy and help. He understands our frailty and is quick to forgive us and to help us get back on track.

God's forgiveness is so much greater than our feelings. No matter how we feel, we can receive His mercy and come confidently into His presence and make our requests known to Him. Thankfully, love is not based on how we feel at any given moment. When someone says or does something hurtful, our feelings for them will not be positive. But we don't have to let our feelings dictate our responses. The best way to overcome negative emotions is to obey Scripture. We can respond in love (in spite of our feelings) by demonstrating kindness, giving others good things, and treating them with honor. This is how we choose to put our love in action—by obeying the “one another” passages found throughout the New Testament.

Scripture never tells us to *feel* loving; it tells us to *act* in love. However, we can be encouraged, for when we choose to act in love through obedience to the truth of God's Word, our feelings toward people usually begin to change and grow more positive. Many influential leaders have noted that, “You can't feel your way into right behaviors, but you can behave your way into right feelings.”¹

Our obedience to truly love others with our actions pleases the heart of God. “And we will receive from him whatever we ask because we obey him and do the things that please him” (verse 22, NLT). If we look at the context of this promise, we see it is surrounded by verses telling us to love one another (verses 18,23).

Our obedience to God's command to love others impacts the effectiveness of our prayers and even our ability to receive forgiveness from God. As Jesus said, “If you

1. E. Stanley Jones, *The Word Became Flesh* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1963), *Week 52, Thursday*.

forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins” (Matthew 6:14–15, NLT).

The apostle Peter challenges husbands to treat their wives with understanding and honor so their prayers will not be hindered (1 Peter 3:7). The same could certainly be said to the rest of us, no matter the kinds of relationships we have. We must not ignore the command to love others and stay in close fellowship with the Father.

Discuss

- ? What is the challenge of responding in love when your emotions are negative?
- ? How have you learned to respond biblically rather than allowing your emotions to lead your behavior?
- ? What is the importance of understanding the truth that God’s grace and forgiveness are greater than our feelings?

Dwell in Him

1 John 3:23–24

Say: The word *abide* means “to dwell, remain, or live in.” In 1 John 3:23–24, the apostle John tells us how to remain in fellowship with Jesus—believe in Him and love one another. In John 15, the apostle records Jesus’ invitation for His believers to live in Him, His Word, and His love. Jesus clearly connects living in His love with loving one another. John echoes those same commands in these two verses. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Resource Packet Item 1: Living in Jesus

Distribute the worksheet and allow time for students to read John 15:1–17 and underline each occurrence of the word *remain*. Then discuss the questions or encourage students to use them for personal study and reflection.

To remain in close fellowship with Jesus, believers need to intentionally take time to read and reflect on the truths of Scripture. God’s Word reminds us of the depth of His love, shows us His desire for righteous living, reveals our sin, and gives us clear instruction on how to love one another. God’s Word revives our soul, gives us wisdom, brings joy to the heart, and gives insights for living (Psalm 19:7–8). Reading and knowing His Word should be a top priority for every believer.

In John 15:4, Jesus said, “Remain in me, and I will remain in you” (NLT). John reminds us of this promise and celebrates its fulfillment in 1 John 3:24: “We know he lives in us because the Spirit he gave us lives in us” (NLT). God’s Spirit dwelling in us renews our minds, reminds us of truth, convicts us of sin, and encourages us to love one another. Thankfully, we do not have to rely on our own strength or wisdom to carry out His commands and live righteously. Jesus has provided everything we need to remain in relationship with Him—His Word and His Spirit.

Discuss

? How can we recognize when we are “dwelling” somewhere other than in Jesus, His Word, and His love?

? What adjustments should we make to ensure we remain in Jesus?

Part 2—Learn to Discern God’s Truth

Test the Spirits

1 John 4:1–3

Say: We can’t believe every teacher who claims to have a word from God. The Bible makes it clear there are false teachers in this world. Some of them may have positions of authority within local congregations, like pastors, teachers, or small group leaders. Others might have a large following, like popular speakers, podcasters, and authors. Some are known only in their family and circle of friends. No matter where a spiritual concept is shared—from a pulpit, a classroom, a book, a screen, or a dinner table—it’s vital we remember to test what we see and hear against the truth of Scripture. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Practice these three simple steps to assess someone’s teaching and “try the spirits whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1, KJV):

- **Read and study the Scriptures for yourself.** Pray as you read God’s Word that you would understand what you are reading. God has revealed himself to us through His written Word and has given us His Holy Spirit to help us comprehend and apply it to our lives. The Bible is the standard by which we judge all moral, ethical, spiritual, and relational ideas. Therefore, we must be students of the Word.
- **Actively participate in your local church congregation so you get to know the people you allow to speak into your life.** The character of Christ will be seen in believers’ lives. If a leader says they love God, yet they are cruel to their spouse or children—beware. If a friend claims to have a word from God, yet their life is marked by gossip or greed, understand the message likely isn’t from the Lord.
- **Find out more about the beliefs of the people you are allowing to influence you—particularly whether they believe the Bible is the inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God.** If they don’t believe in the authority of Scripture, avoid their teaching. Their view of Scripture allows them to pick and choose which passages to obey and which ones are supposedly irrelevant or out-of-date. Often, these individuals justify or embrace behaviors the Bible clearly defines as sin. They also may claim to have special knowledge that isn’t included in Scripture. Any teaching that does not embrace the inerrancy of the Bible is a false teaching.

John challenges us in 1 John 4:1–3 to allow God’s Word, not the culture around us, to shape our attitudes, behaviors, and responses. Many people will never read a Bible, but they will watch our lives and listen to our words. While we may never stand behind a pulpit or have a massive audience on social media, our actions and words still influence

those around us. We need to represent Jesus and the truth of the gospel correctly—even around the dinner table or in a coffee shop.

Discuss

? What are the dangers of listening to advice from someone who doesn't believe the Bible is the inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God?

? How can we engage in kind, friendly conversation with family and friends who disagree with the truth of God's Word?

Resource Packet Item 2: Culturally Accepted Lies vs. Biblical Truth

Distribute the worksheet and use it for group discussion or individual study regarding culturally accepted lies and biblical truths.

Greater Is He That Is in You

1 John 4:4–6

Say: The spread of false teaching and the hostility toward Christians in our culture can be frightening. It may seem at times that evil is prevailing, but this simply isn't the case. John affectionately reminds believers of this truth: We belong to God and His Spirit lives in us. Jesus has already won the victory. He has overcome the world and defeated death, hell, and the grave. And the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead dwells in us (Romans 8:11)! When unbelievers listen to and adopt false ideas about God, we shouldn't be surprised or daunted. The Holy Spirit will empower us to understand and obey God's Word as we follow His guidance. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Our culture continues to grow more violent and rebellious, accepting nearly every kind of sinful lifestyle. If we focus on these trends, we will grow increasingly discouraged. It is important to remind one another God will judge all sin and conquer all evil. As believers, our future is secure, for we stand complete in Jesus. His blood covers our sins and removes our shame and punishment. Those in the world "speak from the world's viewpoint, and the world listens to them" (1 John 4:5, NLT). However, because we belong to Jesus, we should set our "sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth" (Colossians 3:1–2, NLT).

Those who belong to Christ will agree with sound teaching because God's Spirit dwells in them. But those who belong to the world will not agree with sound teaching because they have the spirit of deception and agree with one another (1 John 4:5). As believers we live in the world and have relationships with many people who are not serving Jesus, yet we will be at odds with them on some level. This is one reason we need relationships with other believers. People who listen to, believe, and obey the truth can encourage us and remind us to do the same.

Discuss

- ? Why is it important to remember that “the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world” (1 John 4:4, NLT)?
- ? How are we at odds with those who do not believe scriptural truth?
- ? Why is it important to build relationships with other believers?

Part 3—Hold to the Truth about Christ

Remain in the Teachings of Christ

2 John 7–9

Say: In 2 John, the apostle warned believers to be careful not to wander from the teachings of Jesus—because people who don’t walk in obedience to Him have no relationship with God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

When we aren’t faithful to read and meditate on God’s Word, our hearts are prone to wander. Knowing this tendency and the benefits of living by Scripture, Paul challenged the younger minister, Timothy, in this way:

You must remain faithful to the things you have been taught. You know they are true, for you know you can trust those who taught you. You have been taught the holy Scriptures from childhood, and they have given you the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work. (2 Timothy 3:14–17, NLT)

Discuss

- ? Describe the practices of a diligent student of God’s Word.
- ? How does it encourage you to know that “anyone who remains in the teaching of Christ has a relationship with both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9, NLT)?

Resource Packet Item 3: Remain in the Teaching of Christ

Distribute the worksheet, read aloud the two passages of Scripture, and use the questions to prompt discussion.

Don’t Partner with Deception

2 John 10–11

Say: We all have relationships with people who don’t believe God’s Word is true. We’re encouraged to share the good news with those in our families, workplaces, and communities who have yet to believe and to live out the gospel through relationship with them. However, believers are instructed not to partner with people who teach false doctrine. We shouldn’t be hostile or unkind, but we must make sure we don’t listen to or provide a platform for their false teaching or encourage them in any way. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Many passages of Scripture address how we should interact with false teachers. Paul was very straightforward in his words to the churches of Galatia:

I am shocked that you are turning away so soon from God, who called you to himself through the loving mercy of Christ. You are following a different way that pretends to be the Good News but is not the Good News at all. You are being fooled by those who deliberately twist the truth concerning Christ. Let God's curse fall on anyone, including us or even an angel from heaven, who preaches a different kind of Good News than the one we preached to you. I say again what we have said before: If anyone preaches any other Good News than the one you welcomed, let that person be cursed. (Galatians 1:6–9, NLT)

Paul's words may seem extreme, yet we must understand the seriousness of twisting the truth concerning the teaching of Christ. God has no tolerance for those who lead people away from salvation. We must be diligent to know the truth, recognize the lies, and not partner with false teachers.

Discuss

? How do you recognize when someone is teaching false ideas?

? How can we partner with false teachers—whether intentionally or unintentionally?

According to this passage, what are we doing when we encourage false teachers?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: We can be confident before God if we know and obey the teaching of Christ. But we must guard that truth. Not everyone who claims to know God speaks the truth, so we must test what we are taught against the standard of God's Word. Those who belong to the world are being deceived and will agree with one another. As believers, we have the Spirit of God dwelling in us, so we can understand and obey His Word. We must be diligent to remain in His Word and be on guard against all false teaching.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Read Psalm 119. Note all the benefits of knowing and obeying God's Word.
- Memorize 2 Timothy 3:14–17. Consider what you learn about God in this passage and how He intends for you to interact with His Word.
- Meet someone in this class for coffee or a meal. Encourage one another by talking through your commitments to knowing and guarding the truth of God's Word.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Pharaoh's Lack of Integrity.

Exodus 9:25–35

Tuesday:

Discerning God's Way.

Job 34:1–12

Wednesday:

Judgment against False Prophets.

Jeremiah 23:25–32

Thursday:

Revelation from the Father.

Matthew 16:13–17

Friday:

Let No One Deceive You.

2 Thessalonians 2:1–4

Saturday:

Be on Your Guard.

2 Peter 3:14–18