

Light & Love

Smart & Wise

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: 1 John 4:1-21

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Do you ever find yourself asking the question, "How did we get here? How did we end up in a world that calls wrong things right and right things wrong? How did we end up in a world where our morals and values continue in a downward spiral? Most days, it feels like evil and hate have taken root, and they're never going to let go. I find myself watching the news or reading the headlines, and I almost can't believe some of the headlines that I read are actually real.

I turn on the TV only to see programs and other things that are celebrating the very things that God tells us to avoid. Our society celebrates those things. And when I bring some of these things up to people, I get responses like, "You're just being too old-fashioned. Lighten up a little bit. Let people do what they want. They're not hurting you.

Just let others enjoy their life." And it doesn't matter how many times I have these conversations and I get these reactions, I continue to be confused because I tell those people, "I'm not bringing these things up because I want to judge others or to push my beliefs on them. That's not my responsibility." I bring these things up because what people believe will bring them happiness is obviously not working as I look at the headlines.

The United States, according to the most recent survey, is the 15th happiest nation in the world. Now, I have no idea how they come up with that. Finland always gets number one, and it's really cold there, so I don't know what those people do, but they must do some type of survey. But when I talk to most people outside of the church, they're not happy. They have done what they want to do, believing that accomplishing some task or being allowed to do what they want to do is going to bring them happiness, and it's only brought pain.

Too many people find out too late that throwing away the morals and the ethics and the values and the way of life that the Bible puts forth doesn't lead to what they want. Instead, it leads to despair. It leads to emptiness. It leads to loss. As I have the privilege of having conversations with individuals that are nearing the end of their life, I find that too many people spend their entire lives working toward a goal only to find that once they reached that goal, it wasn't what they thought.

This is because I believe as I read Scripture that you and I were created with this God-shaped hole that is in our Spirit that can only be filled by Him. And we sense that longing, we sense that something is missing, and we don't know what it is. And so we try to fill it with things that the world tells us will bring us that happiness or make it so that we don't feel incomplete anymore. But the only thing that can fill that spot is God because that's how He created us.

He created us with a void that only He could fill. As we continue in our series today on 1 John in chapter 4, John is going to share with us what it looks like to invite that Spirit into our hearts, what it looks like to invite Jesus to fill that empty spot into which He perfectly fits. As we've gone through this message that John is sharing with us, we see that that needs to be our main goal.

John has brought up several things to help us pursue that or to move in that direction. Some things that it's important for the church to know, to be on the lookout for. The first thing that he wanted to let us know was that God is light, that there is no darkness in Him at all. And he's brought that up many times. He's going to bring that up again today in chapter 4. He's shared with us that God is love and that when we invite Him into our lives, it's only natural that that love will flow through us to others.

He also informed the church to be on the lookout for false teachers or false prophets. Any individual who claims to maybe be a believer, but their life doesn't look the way that it's supposed to. Today, he's going to circle back to these points, but bring us a little deeper into them. So it's going to be the same message, but he's going to give a little different angle because he wants these to sink in into our hearts and into our lives.

So if you haven't already and you have a Bible, I encourage you to open up to 1 John chapter 4. If you don't have a Bible, there is one in the pew in front of you if you want to use that. If you want, though, you can just follow on the screen behind me as well as we start in 1 John chapter 4. And 1 John is near the end of the Bible. 1 John, 2nd, 3rd John, Jude, and then Revelation. So near the very end, 1 John chapter 4. Let me pray while you're turning there, and then we will jump in.

Heavenly Father, we come before You today. We thank You for Your goodness. Thank You for Your righteousness. Thank You for the opportunity to gather and to worship as we have to celebrate communion, remembering what our faith is all about. The death of Jesus on the cross taking my place, and then the resurrection that gives me hope for a resurrected body that I can be with You for eternity.

Lord, as we jump back into this message from John, I pray that our hearts would be open to hear from You, that You would speak Your truth to us, and certainly that we would be found obedient. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen. 1 John chapter 4, starting in verse 1, "Dear friends," John says, "Do not believe every spirit, but instead test the spirits to see whether they are from God because many false prophets have gone out into the world." This was at the very beginning of the church.

Many false prophets had already gone out into the world, and only more would come. You and I deal with many false prophets and false teachers. So John says, "This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God." So how do I know whether it's the Spirit of God or a false teacher? Here is how, John says. Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. But every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God.

He's not saying that don't acknowledge that Jesus was a man or that Jesus actually was a person that lived on the earth, but that Jesus is the Messiah. Any Spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, this is the Spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. John wants us to be aware that there are false prophets that take on different forms, false teachers, but there is one spirit that is behind them all, regardless of what different nuance they have.

The Spirit of the Antichrist, its entire goal is to lead you on a path away from Jesus. That's the goal of any false religion, any false prophet. It could be through a false religion. It could also be through false gods or idols. Anything that would take my pursuit and my priority of God being first, anything that would take that place, this is what the Spirit of the Antichrist is.

You see, the enemy doesn't really care what is leading you away from God as long as it is leading you away from God. You see, there's a war going on for your life. John wants to make us very aware of that. It's a spiritual battle between light and darkness. He uses these analogies to help us understand there is a battle, a war that is going on. And really, the more blinded you are to that battle, the happier the enemy is.

And here in our Western culture, for whatever reason, the spiritual battle that is taking place, you and I very infrequently see anything that reminds us of that battle, any spiritual things that are taking place. Now, if you go other places in the world, those things become more obvious. But here we're blinded to them. So what can we

do in order to be aware of these false teachers and idols and prophets? The first thing John tells us is know that you're in a battle.

Don't lose focus. Don't veer off track. A quick side note here that could be a whole different message is that you and I need to understand that often this spiritual battle that is taking place takes place in our mind. It takes place in our mind. If you're like me, you may be sitting somewhere, maybe you're eating lunch or you're working or whatever else, and you all of a sudden have a thought in your mind that is just a crazy thought. You didn't try to come up with it.

You weren't thinking about it. It's a crazy thought of something and you think, "Wow, where did that come from?" I'm here to tell you that that's spiritual battle taking place. It's spiritual warfare. It's not a sin that that thought popped in your minds. Now, if you continue to dwell on it, it can be. Your goal is to throw that out. That's the spiritual battle. John tells us to test the spirits. If we don't test the spirits, we could be deceived. So how are we supposed to test the Spirit? Well, he is telling us that any Spirit obviously that doesn't claim Jesus is the Messiah, that's the Spirit of the Antichrist.

But there are other little nuances that could maybe lead us astray. And so you and I need to stand strong in the truth of God's Word. Every teacher, including me, should be weighed against what the Word of God says. Because if you and I don't stand strong on the Word, we risk believing a lie and teaching a lie, believing falsehoods that could lead us and others away from God. And so the Word will be our guide.

He goes on in verse 4, he says, "You dear children, are from God, and you have overcome them because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. For they are from the world. And therefore, of course, they speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. But we are from God. And whoever knows God listens to us. But whoever is not from God does not listen to us.

This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the Spirit of falsehood. I love that John tells us, "Stronger is he who is in you than he who is in the world." It's easy to get discouraged in the world in which we live and to think, "You know what, Pastor, there's no way that I can overcome all of the sins and temptations and things that are around me." But John says, "Do not fear. You are on the winning side. You are on the stronger side of this battle.

Not only do you have the stronger Spirit of God inside of you, but we also have wisdom on our side." John says that you and I, by having the Spirit inside of us, will be able to recognize the deception of the enemy, that that Spirit will make it clear, but that those who do not have the Spirit will be easily deceived. Have you ever had a conversation with somebody about something spiritual or about the world in which we live, and you're having this conversation, and things that are common sense to you are not common sense to them?

It seems like you're talking to an alien or you know you're just like, "We're not connecting. How do you not understand this? How does this not make sense to you?" It's easy to become frustrated. It's easy to be hurt. It's easy to just say, "You know what? I don't understand where you're coming from at all. You just go ahead and do your thing, and I'm going to do my thing." You can even get mad at that person. And so John tells us, "No, that's not our goal. Let's keep going in verse 7. Dear friends, let us love one another for love comes from God.

Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. But whoever does not love does not know God. Why? Because God is love. John has already said this many times. It is impossible to have the Spirit of God in you and still hate somebody. Why? Because God is love. And if He's inside of you, that is naturally going to ooze out of you into everybody you come in contact with. And that doesn't mean you don't have a bad day.

It doesn't mean you don't get an argument with somebody. It doesn't mean you're not frustrated with somebody. But this love will be deeper than all of that, and it will serve as a sign to the world that, in fact, we are different. It is a sign for us of our own salvation. John would say, as I said last week, if you don't have this

love or compassion for others, it should serve as a wake-up call for you to at least ask the question, "Why?" I think I'm a follower of Jesus, but yet I've got some strong hate inside of me.

You see, when we have this love, it can give us confidence that we are walking with Him. We might be challenged to love others because they've hurt us or they disagree with us. But when we know Jesus, we are able to love in a supernatural way, a way that may not make sense to anybody else, as John has talked about that. He goes on in verse 9, "This is how God showed His love among us. How did God show His love?

By sending His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him." "This is love," John says, not that we loved God, but instead that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. For no one has ever seen God, but if we do love one another, then God lives in us and His love is made complete in us.

John knows as people are listening to this message, you and I, thousands of years later, are going to say, "But John, there are some people that are just hard to love, right? You guys probably have pictures in your mind. I mean, this is funny, but you have pictures of people in your mind. Maybe they're a coworker or a family member, a neighbor, somebody you just say, "Pastor, they're so hard to love. Are you telling me?"

Pastor, are you telling me that I have to love that person? It's so difficult. They're so rude. They're so mean. They never think of anybody else. They're selfish. Am I still supposed to love this person? The quick answer, John says, "Yes." Yes. Because here's the amazing truth about God that John shares with us is that God loved us first. He pursued us first. His love was shown by sending a sacrifice, and we didn't earn it from God.

We didn't earn His love. We didn't earn His forgiveness. Scripture says we weren't friends with God when He sent His Son Jesus. In fact, we were unlovable. We were evil. We were dirty. We were sinful. We were mean. This is love that God sent His Son as a sacrifice. And since God loved us at our worst, so we should love others when they are at their worst. It's not going to be easy.

It's only through God's Spirit. You see, if we somehow believe that we deserve or have earned God's love, then we will continue to try to earn it as well as teach others that they need to earn it instead of the truth of what the Word says, that God's love is a free gift that is offered to everyone. The Word says, "For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, not by works, so that no one can boast." We are all sinners saved by grace.

We don't get to walk around with our head held high and our nose in the air looking down at others because maybe they don't have the common sense that comes in the Word of God. No, we look at those people and we love those people because they are still deceived without the Spirit of Christ inside them. And so we are called to love them. Verse 13, John says, "This is how we know that we live in Him and He in us, for He has given us of His Spirit." And we have seen and testified that the Father has sent His Son to be the Savior of the world.

And if anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, then God lives in them and they in God. And so we know, and we rely on the love that God has for us. For God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in them, this is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment. For in this world, we are like Jesus.

Once again, in case you missed it the last five times that John has said it in this message, "If you love others, it is a sign that His Spirit is inside you." It's the sign. Why is this so? Because John says, "God is love." He continues to bring us back to the person of Jesus. It's all about Jesus. He was the Christ. He was the Messiah. He is God. We can have confidence in our faith because of who Jesus is and what He has done.

He goes on in verse 18. He says, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love." It's important that John would say, "Listen, we don't need to fear punishment. We don't need to fear the judgment because God's Spirit is inside of us. He has purified us.

He has made us whole." Let's wrap up 1 John chapter 4. John says, "We love because He first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command. Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

Do you think he's trying to make a point here? He has said this in so many different ways in just four chapters saying, "Listen, love and hate are incompatible. Love expels hate just like light expels darkness. If you love God, then you must also love your brother. It's not a command. He's not saying you should. If you do love God, you should love your brother or sister.

He's saying, "If you do love God, you will love your brother or sister." It's simply a truth statement, not a command. And so as John circles back again to these points over and over again, he is reminding you and I what the life of a follower of Jesus should look like. He's reminding us again, don't let the enemy convince you that a life separated from God is beneficial to you. Don't believe the lie.

Don't spend your whole life pursuing things that will leave you feeling empty, lost, drained. Instead, pursue God and fill that void that exists. Allow Him to fill what He has put inside of you. He created us intentionally, purposefully with a void that only He could fill because He wants a relationship with us.

So He said, "I'm going to put that void there and I know it's going to make them feel empty, but once they come to Me, they will feel that fullness once again." And everything else they pursue is only at the very best going to lead to temporary happiness that instantly fades. The only thing that can bring true joy is God's presence within us.

So we need to find ways to grow in our relationship with Him, spend time in the Word of God, learning about Him, hearing from Him, praying to Him, developing that relationship that He longs to have with us. Our lives should be modeled by love because God is love. And when we invite Him to come into us, it will naturally flow to those around us.

It's not always easy, but it's what we will do. Let me close in prayer. Heavenly Father, you are fully aware of everything that's going on in the lives of those that are here today. Some of them have come to the service with a heavy burden, with a weight that seems like they can't bear it anymore.

They're struggling with this thing called love. They're struggling with life for whatever reason. Father, would you pour your Spirit upon them? Would they openly invite you in again to take control of their heart and of their lives? Would we submit to you and to your authority and to your goodness so that you can flow through us to others so that we can point them to you?

May people be encouraged to take their next step towards you. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.