

20. The Epistle of 1 John—4:6-8

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1 John 4:1-6 (NKJV)

¹ Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ² By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, ³ and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the *spirit* of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. ⁴ You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. ⁵ They are of the world. Therefore they speak *as* of the world, and the world hears them. ⁶ We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

That last statement by John is a general truth with regard to the people of God and the Word of God that—true Christians have the Holy Spirit inside of them and ‘**hear**’ God’s truth (they believe and receive it), whereas unbelievers embrace Satan’s lies (false doctrine, but also other false and demonic ideologies like—communism, humanism, evolution etc.

Now, that doesn’t mean true Christians never get deceived by false doctrine or that unbelievers never believe God’s truth.

Remember the context (verses 2-3) is those who believe in and embrace the truth of God and in particular the true Jesus (Whom He has sent).

These, John says, are true Christians while those who believe and embrace a false Christ based on the devil’s lies are proving themselves to be counterfeit Christians (Mormon’s, Jehovah’s Witnesses).

But let me stop here and use verse 6 to ‘springboard’ into something important based on this idea that true Christians will know and embrace God’s Word because the Holy Spirit (Who wrote it) lives inside them. We know that all Scripture is inspired by God—something Paul affirmed:

2 Timothy 3:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

“**Inspiration**” is a translation of the Greek word *theopneustos*—which literally means “*God-breathed*.”

The idea is that God breathed “life” into the Scriptures—very much like He breathed life into Adam:

Genesis 2:7 (NKJV)

⁷ And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

So, God breathed life into the Scriptures that same way He breathed life into Adam—even as the book of Hebrews declares, *“The Word of God is living and powerful...”* (Hebrews 4:12)

Just as Adam was a direct creation of God—so too are the Scriptures which were written down by human instruments but ***inspired by the Holy Spirit***. (2 Peter 1:20-21)

So, the Holy Spirit writing through Paul the apostle told us that the Scriptures were inspired by God or ‘God-breathed.’ But here was the problem for those early Christians—they believed the Scriptures were inspired by God—but knowing just what writings were Scripture—what writings were *from* God and therefore inspired posed a problem for them.

You see, there were many ‘spurious’ or ‘apocryphal’ writings that were circulating around the early church. Some of these were forged in the name of Thomas, Barnabas, and even Mary Magdalene.

So, how could the church determine *what* writings were really from God—or in other words, what books belonged to the New Testament Canon of Scripture?

The word **canon** comes from a Greek word that means—*“a measuring rod or reed,”* and signifies *“a rule”* or *“a standard”*.

So, the Canon of the Bible (Old and New Testaments) consists of those books (66 in all) considered to be inspired by God and therefore worthy to be included in the Holy Scriptures.

Many people harbor a misconception about how books were chosen for the New Testament canon—

- *“Sure, I know about the canon, the church leaders got together in a council and decided which books best helped them stay in power and control the people and then they forced the early Christians to accept them.”*

That is absolutely untrue and reflects a lot of the ignorance with regard to how the books in the New Testament we have today came to be known as the New Testament Canon of Scripture.

First of all, why did the Church need to choose which books were inspired by God and therefore part of the New Testament Canon?

It was because of 3 primary reasons:

1. ***Marcion*** (a heretic, 140 AD) developed his own canon and began to promote it. The Church needed to counteract his influence by determining what the real N.T. canon of Scripture was.
2. ***Many Eastern churches*** were using books in services that were definitely spurious which called for a decision concerning the N.T. canon.
3. ***The Edict of Emperor Diocletian*** (303 AD) ordered that the Scriptures be burned. It became necessary that a determination be made as to which books were “Scripture.” Christians needed to decide which books were really inspired by God and therefore worth suffering and dying for.

The Criteria for Canonicity

1. **Written by a recognized prophet or apostle**

2. **Written by someone who associated with a recognized prophet or apostle (Mark, Luke and Jude—half-brother of Jesus)**
3. **Truthfulness (Deuteronomy 18:20-22)**

If anything was found in a writing that was not true, it would be dismissed as not from God. God himself said in Deuteronomy 18:20-22 that if a prophet claims to be speaking from me, and what he said is not true, then he has not spoken from me. It is not from the Lord if that is the case.

4. **Faithfulness to previously accepted canonical writings**

This is where the Book of Hebrews shines, in terms of the Church's acceptance of it. Hebrews not only agrees with, but helps explain and bring to greater clarity, what has been taught in the Old Covenant (Old Testament); it is now seen anew in Christ and the New Covenant is so beautifully displayed.

5. **Doctrinal Soundness**

Were the contents of the book doctrinally sound? Any books containing heresy or that which was contrary to the already accepted canonical books were rejected.

The sixth criteria for N.T. canonicity is the one that dovetails with what John said in 1John 4:6—

1 John 4:6 (NKJV)

⁶ We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

6. **Church Usage and Recognition**

Was the book universally recognized in the churches and was it widely quoted by the church fathers. Did the book contain the power to transform and edify lives?

One Christian historian summed it up this way—

“The New Testament canon is believed to have been developed by the mid-to-late second century – by then the early church fathers had quoted from all 27 books of today’s New Testament. It was established not by a single meeting or by a pronouncement by a group of Christian leaders, but by the progressive, unhurried acceptance of those 27 books by Christian congregations in the era of the early church. Historically, Christianity has attributed the emergence of the New Testament as an act of the Holy Spirit. By the time the famous church councils began meeting in the 4th century A.D., the New Testament canon was already well-established by the use of those 27 books within the early church. So, the councils did not actually pick books and declare them to be the Bible; instead, they recognized or acknowledged the canon that already existed.”

Another had this to say—

“Ultimately, what happened was that these letters circulated, and more and more groups of Christian people were edified by these writings and came to witness together that these writings were from God. The Church used these writings and was deeply edified by them; they were believed over time that they were from God, and so the final acceptance of the recognition of the 66 books of the Bible as Scripture took place at the Senate of Carthage in A. D. 397. That is not to say that prior to that there was not wide recognition of most of the Bible (we are talking here mostly about the New Testament...”

One pastor sums up this section with a warning—

“In a world rife with demonic false teaching, believers must constantly test the spirits to discern what is from God and what is not. Using the tests that John has outlined here, they can discern true spiritual gems from doctrinal “fool’s gold.” Like the noble Bereans, today’s saints are called to compare every spiritual message they encounter to the revealed standard of Scripture (Acts 17:11). Only then can they obey Jude’s admonition to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 3). By faithfully guarding the truth in the present, believers will preserve it in purity both for themselves and for future generations.”

1 John 4:7 (NKJV)

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

In verse 7, John gives us the third of three statements he presents in his writings about God that helps us understand His nature—**“God is Spirit”** (John 4:24); **“God is light”** (1 John 1:5); and **“God is love”** (1 John 4:7).

Warren Wiersbe—

“God is spirit. [This refers] to His essence; He is not flesh and blood. To be sure, Jesus Christ now has a glorified body in heaven, and one day we shall have bodies like His body. But being by nature spirit, God is not limited by time and space the way His creatures are.

God is light. This refers to His holy nature. In the Bible, light is a symbol of holiness and darkness is a symbol of sin (John 3:18–21; 1 John 1:5–10). God cannot sin because He is holy. Because we have been born into His family, we have received His holy nature (1 Peter 1:14–16; 2 Peter 1:4).

God is love. This does *not* mean that “love is God.” And the fact that two people “love each other” does not mean that their love is necessarily holy. It has accurately been said that “love does not define God, but God defines love.” God is love and God is light; therefore, His love is a *holy* love, and His holiness is expressed in love. All that God *does* expresses all that God *is*. Even His judgments are measured out in love and mercy (Lamentations 3:22–23).”

Of course, these statements don’t define the nature of God completely—but they do help us to better understand who He is without being a *complete* revelation of His Person.

The most complete and comprehensive *revelation* of God was, of course, the *incarnation* of God in the Person of Jesus Christ.

John 1:14, 18 (NKJV)

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth....¹⁸ No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared *Him*.

Colossians 1:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

Hebrews 1:1-3 (NKJV)

¹ God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ² has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; ³ who being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

1 John 4:7 (NKJV)

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God...

We have talked numerous times about God's love during the course of our study in 1John since it is a foundational concept in why John is writing this epistle (he uses the word 'love' 46 times).

As we have said, the word '**love**' is the Greek word *agape*—a word most often used in the New Testament in relation to *God's* love.

God's love (**agape**) **isn't just words and feelings—it's actions** (the definition of God's love in 1Cor.13 contains all verbs).

Agape love is *action* based not *feelings* based—“for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son”. (John 3:16)

John says that true Christians love other Christians—but not just verbally—they love them tangibly.

1 John 3:16-18 (NKJV)

¹⁶ By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. ¹⁷ But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? ¹⁸ My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

As we have already said, loving people as God commands with His agape love is *impossible* for us—it is beyond our ability because it's a supernatural, divine love!

This is not a love I can *generate* or *imitate*; it is not in me to love like this—God's love has to be *given* to us.

Romans 5:5 (NKJV)

⁵ Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

It is through our abiding in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit flowing through us that this kind of love can become a reality in our lives to touch others around us.

1 John 4:7-8 (NKJV)

⁷ **Beloved, let us love one another, for [agape] love is of God; and everyone who loves [agapes] is born of God and knows God.** ⁸ **He who does not love [agape] does not know God, for God is love.**

So once again, John uses the love of God as proof or as the 'litmus test' that we truly belong to Him and that His Holy Spirit is living inside of us. How do we know the Holy Spirit is truly living inside of us? —by the fruit that starts growing in and through our lives.

Which, according to what Paul said in Galatians 5:22-23—the first on the list is God's agape love!

After John tells us that “God is love” and unless we manifest His love towards others, we really don't know Him—

He then, starting in verse 9, he goes on to tell us how God's love was manifested towards us and how we need to demonstrate it to those we come in contact with.

1 John 4:9-11 (NKJV)

⁹ In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

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