

Session 4: 1 John 3:24–4:16

OPEN

What’s the worst (or best) April Fools’ joke you’ve ever fallen for? What about the best one you pulled on someone else?

What does it feel like to be deceived? Even as a joke?

In this session, we’re going to look at the danger that creeps around in churches, taking the form of slick deception. We’ll see not only what kind of damage deceivers can do to our faith, but what we, in turn, can do to avoid falling for the joke.

Read 1 John 3:24–4:16.

WATCH

Show Session 4: *1 John 3:24–4:16* (12:30 minutes).

DISCUSS

We've been looking at John's instructions to believers on how to grow in their relationship with God. His argument is rather simple:

1. Allow God's light to convict you of your sin, acknowledge it, and confess it.
2. Love the things God loves, and reject the world that rejects God.
3. Love the people God loves, and reject the people who reject God.

If it feels like John's getting repetitive, it's because he is. **Why do you think John repeats his points so strongly?**

We learn through repetition, and John wants to make extra sure that his readers get the point. **If you had to summarize the message of 1 John so far to someone who'd never read the book, what would you say?**

Leader: *It may be worth taking the time with your group to dialogue on this question. The book of 1 John offers one of the most concise answers to the question, "What does it mean to be a Christian?" Take some time to walk your group through the main ideas, and help them distill a summary.*

In this session, Dr. Tony Evans zeroed in on two main ideas: the role of the Holy Spirit in discerning false teachers, and the important role we have as conduits for God to love the people around us.

How did Tony introduce the chapter? What did the illustration of the alarm system represent? (The role of the Holy Spirit in helping

us understand the truth in the midst of false teaching.)

What was the “test” Tony highlighted from 1

John 4:1–6? (Whether or not someone confesses Jesus as the incarnate God.)

Re-read 1 John 4:1–6.

John has already introduced us to the problem of “antichrists,” or deceivers trying to pull God’s people away from close fellowship with Him. **Why do you think being able to identify these deceivers is so important to John?** (They threaten believers’ fellowship with God.)

What does John explain as the simple difference between those who come from God and those who don’t? (Those who come from God confess that Jesus came in the flesh from heaven.)

Why do you think the incarnation is so crucial? What difference does it make if Jesus came as a full human?

Tony said, “It is absolutely critical that we are clear about the incarnation. The incarnation is God becoming a man. It is God entering into time and space, and entering into a cradle, who was exactly the Creator of the universe. Jesus is the means by which God, who is spirit in His essence, is revealed to mankind. It is in the person of Jesus Christ that God and man come together, 100% God, 100% man, in order to reveal God to man.”

How does Jesus reveal God to us in a way we otherwise wouldn’t have known? (He is God-

we-can-see, and He shows us how to live as humans the way God intended us to live.)

GO DEEPER

Learn more about how Jesus reveals God to us in human flesh in these passages:

John 1:1–18, 14:8–17, Heb. 1:1–4.

According to these passages, what is significant about Jesus's incarnation?

Why is the incarnation of Jesus important? How did the incarnation change how we're able to understand God? What about ourselves?

What's different about Jesus's revelation of God versus the "prophets" as Hebrews points out?

What difference does it make to you that we have God-revealed-in-flesh through Jesus?

This image shows a vertical sheet of white paper with horizontal grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

[illegible]

Throughout this letter, “love” is a running theme and reaches its climax here in the fourth chapter with John declaring that God is love (v. 8). As we’ve seen already, God has made His love visible by sending of Christ as a “propitiation” for our sins (v. 10). The term John uses for “propitiation” is *hilasmos*, which here describes Jesus turning away the divine wrath aimed at sinners through His death. While we walked in disobedience and rebellion, God demonstrated His love for us by sending His Son to satisfy our debt through Christ’s death. He spared no cost in His pursuit of us and as recipients of that love we should demonstrate our love for one another in the same way.

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Jesus's nature as the God-man that died and rose again means He has the right to make demands on the lives of those He's saved. This is why so many teachers—both in John's day and now—try to diminish Him. **Where have you seen the authority of Jesus diminished in the messaging of the world?**

As John highlights, however, God has not left us on our own. He's given us the Holy Spirit—the “alarm” that Tony described at the beginning of the session. **When and how have you felt the Holy Spirit warn against anti-Christ ideas? How did you respond?**

What steps do you take to stay connected to the voice of the Spirit? What could you do differently this week to grow in your ability to listen to His warnings?

It's the Holy Spirit's work in our lives that grows us closer in our fellowship with God. He directs us in truth, preserves us from error, transforms our sinful hearts into holy hearts, and directs our affections toward our fellow believers.

What does it mean to you to know that you're not alone in the Christian walk? That the Spirit's working inside and around you?

The Holy Spirit works most prominently by transforming our ability to love others. Read 1 John 4:7–16.

According to John, whose love is manifest in us? (God's own love.)

What reason does John give for us loving each other? (The fact that God loved us first.)

Jesus revealed God in both how He lived and what He said. He was a conduit for God's love toward unbelieving humanity. In verse 12 John points out, however, that we have the same responsibility. That in our love for each other, we show God to each other.

Describe a time where someone loved you like God. What did it look like? How did it make you feel? What difference did it make in your life?

How have you grown in your understanding of God through the love that others have shown you?

We live in a consumer society. We always run the risk of becoming what Tony called "cul-de-sac" Christians—always taking, never giving. The love and grace of God comes into our lives, and we turn the engine off and set the parking brake.

Why is the "cul-de-sac" Christian life so dangerous?

What do we stand to lose by refusing to allow God's love to flow through us?

What obstacles have you encountered that make it difficult to be a conduit for God's love, rather than just a consumer?

As John continues his letter, he keeps circling back to the idea that we must abide in God. That abiding—the slow steeping that Tony talked about in a previous session—means constantly absorbing the love that God has for us. But it doesn't end there.

Like Tony’s illustration of the water boiler meter, when our lives fill up with God’s love and kindness—often through other people pouring into us—we’ll eventually reach “full.” We can’t keep the valves cranked shut. We have to let the love that God gives us flow into others around us.

Think about one person you could love this week that you might not normally express love and kindness to. **What one thing could you do to go out of your way to share God’s love with them?**

What would your life look like if you focused on giving away the love of God each day, not just receiving it?

What risk would you run by living a life that gives love without question? What would you stand to lose? What would you stand to gain?

Loving people is inherently risky. When we’re not looking out for ourselves, but instead looking out for other people, we run the risk of not having our own needs met. We could get trampled, taken advantage of, or abused.

But the God-man who died for our sins has called us to love each other. No questions asked.

LAST WORD

We live in a world consumed with self-satisfaction. The lies the world spins around us all try to justify a life that focuses only on ourselves. But 1 John 4 challenges us to think carefully and to live purposefully.

Rather than twist the person of Jesus Christ into someone or something less than the God-man to justify our moralizing, we need to see Him as the One who demands our allegiance. God hasn't left us on our own—He's given us the Holy Spirit to guide us in truth. We just need to listen.

And as we listen, we need to allow God to work through us, not only for us. That involves risk. Loving others puts us in a position to be abused or forgotten. But that's the risk that Jesus Himself took when He came as a baby. He was rejected, abused, and killed because He chose to love those who hated Him.

Will we follow Him, and love people?

LIVE IT OUT

Pray: Spend ten minutes this week—five minutes each on two days—asking God to open your eyes to any deception that might be sneaking into your mind. As He directs you, confess and work toward truth.

Connect: The idea of “pay it forward” has become a cliché in our culture, but that’s very much what’s going on in our session today. This week, look at the ways in which God has blessed you and shown you love, and then do one thing to pass God’s love on to a fellow believer.

Write: Take fifteen minutes this week and write out a summary of 1 John so far. According to our study, what does the Christian life look like?

Memorize: Commit 1 John 4:4 to memory. Meditate on the verse this week, and remember that God has overcome the world on our behalf.

Reflect: Take ten minutes this week and reflect on those instances where God’s love was made apparent to you through other believers. Use this time as a means to grow in your confidence of God’s love for you, but also to build your testimony that God alone is the source of love.