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FEAR NOT!



What are some of the most unusual phobias you've heard about?

QUESTION #1

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THE POINT

*We don't need to fear evil forces
when we're in Christ.*



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

She missed over 10,000 sunsets.

For nearly 30 years, Marjorie Goff never left her apartment. She suffered from severe agoraphobia, an anxiety disorder in which a person fears open spaces and crowds. Driven by fear, Marjorie created a self-imposed prison out of her apartment. Only after a caring friend patiently coaxed her into therapy did Marjorie experience the beauty of the outdoors again.¹

Marjorie found freedom and healing when she accepted the truth. She stopped believing the lie about herself and her circumstances. She acted on the truth and stepped outside.

We all know what it is to fear. And when we consider the evil in the world, we can truly feel afraid. Satan and the spiritual forces of darkness are real. They seek to do us harm. That's scary.

Fortunately, as we'll see in 1 John 4:1-6, Christians need not fear the work of Satan or demons, because the One in us is greater than the one in the world.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

1 John 4:1-3

¹ Dear friends, 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. ² This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

Because God's people encountered false prophets in the Old Testament, God revealed two standards through Moses that enabled His people to distinguish between true and false prophets:

1. If a prophet announced a special sign or wonder that came true and then encouraged the people to follow other gods, he was a false prophet. (See Deut. 13:1-5.) True teaching never steers us away from the one, true God.
2. If a prophet announced something that did not come true, he was a false prophet. (See 18:22.) God is all-powerful and cannot lie, so His words will always come true. No exceptions.

Many centuries later, the apostle John was still dealing with false teachers—this time as a leader in the early church. “Do not believe every spirit,” John wrote, “but test the spirits to see whether they are from God.”

Satan had updated his tactics at the launch of the church to include distortions of the truth about Jesus Christ. That's because Christianity rises or falls based on what we believe—and what we teach others—about Jesus.

John gave us a Christ-centered test by which to evaluate a person's beliefs and teaching. Stated simply: “Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.”

Who comes to mind when you hear the word “discernment”? Why?

QUESTION #2

There are two key elements to this test:

- ▶ **The full humanity of Jesus Christ is affirmed.** Note the emphasis on the phrase “come in the flesh.” Christ was not a spirit being; He was a human being. John used the name given at His birth: Jesus. He was fully a man.
- ▶ **The full divinity of Jesus Christ is affirmed.** John also used the title given to Jesus: Christ. He is the Anointed One from God, the Messiah. He is God.

The Jesus revealed in the Gospels is clearly the Son of God who lived among the Jews, was crucified, and died a real death. Jesus also experienced a physical resurrection on the third day after His crucifixion. This resurrection confirmed everything He taught and showed that His life and death were approved by God.

Therefore, when you want to test the validity of a group, find out what that group teaches about Jesus. For example:

- ▶ **Mormonism** teaches that Jesus was the first spirit-child born to humanity's heavenly parents.
- ▶ **Jehovah's Witnesses** teach that Jesus was a spirit-creature created by God who later came to earth as a man.
- ▶ **Islam** teaches that Jesus was a highly revered prophet, but He was not the Son of God.
- ▶ **Hinduism** teaches that Jesus was a man who reached “god-consciousness.”

The Scriptures are clear: *Jesus is both fully human and fully God.* Any religion, philosophy, or individual that rejects that foundational truth did not originate with God.

Satan is a master at corrupting the truth. But when we remain discerning and keep our eyes open by continually testing what we see and hear against God's Word, we will not be caught in error.

What are some distortions of the nature of Jesus we still hear today?

QUESTION #3

ALWAYS

Listen to the song "Always" by Kristian Stanfill. As you listen, record your thoughts on the following questions:

What comes to mind when the song references "foes," "storms," and "war"?

What comes to mind when the song references help coming from the Lord?

What emotions do you experience when you hear this song?

*"If God declares that all is well,
ten thousand devils may declare it to be ill,
but we laugh them all to scorn!"*

— CHARLES SPURGEON

1 John 4:4-6

⁴ You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. ⁵ They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶ 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.

So far in this study, we've seen what Scripture says about the evil work of Satan, demonic forces, and paranormal practices. The "dark side" truly is dark. Indeed, Christians may look at the different enemies arrayed against us and think, *What chance do we have?*

Thankfully, John reminded us of two great truths in verses 4-6.

First, you are from God. Believers—those who have a relationship with Jesus Christ—are brought into God's family. Therefore, we are secure in Him:

- ▶ "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:28-29).
- ▶ "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38-39).

What emotions do you experience when you read this passage?

QUESTION #4



Second, you have conquered those who have the spirit of the antichrist. Our relationship with God is not just a secure, defensive position; it's an offensive position. We don't conquer evil by cowering in a corner. Because we are in Christ, we can boldly step out, test the spirits, and represent Christ in the face of any and all evil we encounter.

Of course, we don't conquer in our own power. Because we are from God and rest in Him, He has given us His own Holy Spirit. And it's only through the presence and power of that Spirit that we can conquer. At the moment we trust Christ as our Redeemer and Lord, the Holy Spirit indwells us.

A relationship with Christ and the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit go hand in hand:

- ▶ "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ" (Rom. 8:9).
- ▶ "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?" (1 Cor. 6:19).

John reminded us about the incredible difference the Holy Spirit makes when facing the forces of Satan that oppose Christ: "The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." Satan may be powerful, but God's Holy Spirit is infinitely more powerful. The false teachers and false prophets may sound wise, but our God's wisdom is boundless. The world can have great pull and persuasion, but the indwelling Spirit is immeasurably greater.

When we live under the lordship of God, leaning on Him and filled with His Spirit (see Eph. 5:18), He helps us to test the spirits we encounter. We don't need to fear being deceived by a powerful enemy. Why? Because we're resting in a greater power: the indwelling Holy Spirit who enables us to "recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood."

In Christ, we're placed in a great position to recognize evil and falsehood—and to stand against it. We truly have nothing to fear.

Jesus is greater than those who oppose us. How will this truth influence your life today and in the days to come?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

How will the truth that you have nothing to fear in Christ make a difference in your life this week? Consider these suggestions:

- ▶ **Memorize.** If you're prone to fear, memorize 1 John 4:4. Place cards with this verse in various places where you will see them throughout the day. Recite it whenever you feel afraid.
- ▶ **Be filled.** God has placed His Holy Spirit in your life. Stay focused in prayer so you can continually rely on that Spirit to fill you, lead you, and give you discernment.
- ▶ **Be discerning.** Regularly evaluate the different "voices" you encounter in books, sermons, studies, online devotions, and articles. Determine what they believe about Christ and to what degree they lift up and honor the name of Christ.



Severe phobias aren't the only factor that keeps us from experiencing the life we were meant to live. Yes, evil is real. But so is God—and He is far superior to any force or opposition that might move against us. So don't be afraid!

My thoughts

1. Stephanie Mansfield, "For 30 Years She Was a Prisoner of Fear," *The Washington Post* [online], 25 October 1981 [cited 17 November 2016]. Available on the Internet: [washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1981/10/25/for-30-years-she-was-a-prisoner-of-fear/5e69da62-eafc-4b06-88af-2952671912ae/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1981/10/25/for-30-years-she-was-a-prisoner-of-fear/5e69da62-eafc-4b06-88af-2952671912ae/)

Share with others how you will live out this study: **#BSFLdarkside**