

1 John Chapter 4

Verses 1 to 10

These first 10 verses of chapter 4 divide easily into two sections – from verse 1 to 6, we are asked to try the spirits. In verse 7 to 10, we are introduced again to the thought of love.

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.

2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:

3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

What does John mean here by “spirits”? There must have been men around who claimed to be speaking by the Spirit of God. Perhaps they were claiming special revelation or fresh insight into the things of God. We know from Paul’s first letter to Corinth that special spiritual gifts were in operation such as tongues and prophecy. Even Paul, in chapter 13 of that epistle, spoke of a time when these supernatural gifts would disappear – “when that which is perfect is come”. This is not heaven as some would suppose but the full revelation of God regarding His church. I believe that came when Paul made known the truth of the mystery in Ephesians and Colossians.

John is writing this epistle perhaps 25 years after Paul wrote Ephesians, so why hadn’t spiritual gifts died out by then? Men always like to think that they have something special, some special revelation. John’s readers were not to believe every spirit. They were to try the spirits for their genuineness because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

But how could they differentiate between the true and the false? They would know by applying the test of verse 2.

Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come;

The gravest error of John’s day was that of Gnosticism. These men claimed superior knowledge for themselves. One of their arguments was that all flesh is evil. Christ was not evil, hence He could not have come in flesh but in a spiritual body. They therefore denied the incarnation of the Lord Jesus. This was an error and therefore men who taught this were not speaking through the Spirit of God.

What is the spirit of antichrist? It is not the Antichrist who is yet to come but rather those who are marked by the same features as will mark the Antichrist. The Antichrist is marked by two things – he is opposed to Christ yet at the same time he is seeking to imitate Christ. That is why his other features are:

the king of the Jews (Daniel chapter 11),

the Wicked one of II Thessalonians 2 who deceives by signs and lying wonders
the false prophet of Revelation

Those who have the spirit of Antichrist also seek to deceive by teaching error as to the person of Christ. The features of antichrist have already been mentioned by John in chapter 2:

1Jo 2:22 Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.

4 Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

John's readers were "of God" ie they belonged to God – they were His little children. They had already overcome the antichrists, not because of their own efforts, but because the Spirit who was in them was greater than the devil. Every believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The spirit who is in the world is the "prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience according to Ephesians chapter 2.

5 They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. 6 We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

Verse 5 is true of every unregenerate teacher or preacher today. They are of the world, hence they speak, not the things of God, but the things that are of the world. They "keep up with the times", they follow the fashions of the day. And they find a ready audience – in the world. "The world heareth them". Paul speaks of the unsaved of this world, how he cannot perceive spiritual things:

1Co 2:14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

In the same chapter, Paul speaks of the eyes and ears of the natural man:

Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

But it is stated regarding the believer in Christ:

10 But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

In the next verse, John adds, "We are of God". By "we", I believe he is referring to his fellow apostles, prophets, and teachers who had brought them the word of God. The truth of God falls easily upon the child of God. .

he that knoweth God heareth us;

The Lord taught the same principle in John chapter 10. He is the good shepherd and the sheep hear His voice. They would not follow a stranger, for they know not the voice of strangers. On the other hand, they that know not God do not hear the voice of the true servants of God. Their words are rejected or fall upon deaf ears. This is another test between the true and the false spirit

in the world.

7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

In verses 7 and 8, we return again to the test of love. We are to love another because love is of God. Love stems from God – God is the source of love. God is our father and as His children, we ought to be showing family features ie the love of God. John does not say, “Every one that is born of God loveth”, but rather “every one that loveth is born of God”. When I see a man who has a heart of love, I have reason to believe that he is born of God because he is displaying the character of God. Love is also an evidence of knowing God. As we get to know God, we learn His character, and begin to act like Him. Paul wrote about his great ambition to know Christ and he desired that others might follow in this ambition. The same apostle also desired that we should be conformed to the image of God’s son. To know Him, is to become like Him.

The reverse is true of the unbeliever – he loveth not, and knoweth not God.

The last phrase sums up what God is. “God is love”. In chapter 1, we learned from the life of Christ that “God is light”. Now we learn in chapter 4 that “God is love”. The phrase is repeated again in verse 16. What John says hear about love reminds of what Paul writes about peace. In Philippians chapter 4, we read about the “peace of God” and also “the God of peace”.

9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. 10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

In verses 9 and 10, we see examples of divine love. Love is seen in action – it is more than a mere sentiment. God showed His love to us by sending His only begotten Son into the world. Jacob displayed love for his sons when he sent Joseph to Shechem to see how they fared. Despite their rejection of Joseph and his subsequent stay in Egypt, Joseph later stood before his brethren as the provider of the corn that would save their lives. God had only one Son but He sent Him into the world that we might live through Him.

What moved God to act thus? It is not that we loved God but that He loved us – His love was as causeless as it was unilateral. We needed a mercy seat for our sins and therefore God sent His Son.

Verses 11 to 18

It is a fairly obvious statement to say that this epistle of John has to do with love. The idea of love is mentioned no less than 46 times in a brief epistle of only 105 verses. Yet this does not mean that this epistle is a treatise on the subject of love. Though John the writer describes himself as the “disciple whom Jesus loved” and who is himself described as the “disciple who leaned on Jesus’ breast”, this does not mean that the epistle is a sentimental, emotional, or even devotional handling of love on its own. John rather uses the idea of love to prove far more vital things in the Christian’s life. How do we know that we are saved? We might resort to the old cliché of the time when, the manner

how, the place where. But if John were present at our testimony meetings, he wouldn't want to confine himself to these details. Rather he would want to see the evidence of our faith not by works as in James' epistle, but by our love – love towards God and keeping His commandments, and by love towards our brethren.

Apart from the repeated mentions of the word "love", what other word is used throughout the epistle? There is a word which occurs no less than 38 times in this brief letter and that is the idea of "to know". John is constantly asking us how do we know that we love God, how do we know that we have eternal life. How do we know that we have passed from death unto life?

In our little portion here between verse 11 and verse 18, the verb "to know" is mentioned twice only while love is mentioned no less than 11 times - 11 times in the space of 8 verses. And yet while love is here prominent, I don't think it is the main thrust of John's thoughts in this section. There is another common thought and that is the idea of dwelling. No less than eight times in eight verses do we have the idea of abiding or dwelling - four times it is God dwelling in us, three times it is us dwelling in God, and once we read of us dwelling in love. John wants us to be assured of the fact that God dwells in us and we in Him. He therefore brings before us the evidence of five different things :-

1. The evidence of our hearts
2. The evidence of the Spirit
3. The evidence of the apostles
4. The evidence of our words
5. The evidence of our minds

If we can show the evidence in our lives that we can meet the 5 tests above, we can say that we have the assurance born out of these things. And knowing that God dwells in us and we dwell in Him, John goes on to tell us that we are free from fear.

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6. Free from fear in the future
- 7 Free from fear in the present

We will endeavour to look at each of these seven things in turn.

1 The evidence of our hearts

John writes in verse 11, " If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another".

The phrase "God so loved" would remind us immediately of John 3:16. Indeed in this epistle John seems to quote directly from his gospel on several occasions. We all know John 3:16 begins, "For God so loved the world...". It is the best known and best loved verse in the Bible yet do we really understand it? We say it proves how **much** God loved the world yet why is it that in I John 2:15, John tells us, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him". So, is it all right for God to love the world yet not for us? We know that the Bible doesn't contradict itself so we must look for another explanation. We find the answer in the meaning of the little word "so" in our two verses. It does

not measure how much God loved the world but rather **the way** in which God loved the world. The word "so" means "thus" or "in like manner". In John 3:16, the Lord is therefore making a point of comparison with a previous incident which He has just referred to in the Old Testament. In Numbers 5:21, we read, "The people spake against God and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness, for there is no bread and no water". In response to this murmuring, God sent a plague of fiery serpents among them and many died. In mercy, however, God said to Moses, "Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole". And as we know, whoever looked upon this serpent of brass lived. It was a strange thing to put on the pole. The serpents at their feet were an evidence of God's judgement against sin. The brazen serpent surely meant the same thing. But of course the Lord draws the comparison between Himself and that brazen serpent. "Even so must the Son of man be lifted up." In like manner, God loved the world and gave His only begotten Son to be the serpent of brass lifted up on the tree. God acted in the past in mercy, despite Israel's sin. God has acted in love, despite the world's sin. God loved the world, not because of what it was, but in spite of what it was.

We can now carry this thought of "in like manner" into I John 4:11. "If God thus loved us, we ought to love one another". So where is the comparison being made in our verse? It is surely the love of God as it is expressed in the previous verse, number 10. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins". We learn two things about the love of God in this verse. Firstly, it is unilateral: and secondly, that it is sacrificial. It is unilateral, or one-sided, in the sense that it was not dependent upon our love to Him. It is not that we loved God, but rather that He loved us. Naturally speaking, we love those who love us. Our love tends to be bi-lateral. But God's love didn't need a cause. Romans chapter 5 tells us, "But God commendeth His love towards us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us". Ephesians chapter 2 also says, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins." God loved us, simply because He loved us. It was not for any good in us. We, on the other hand, love God because He first loved us. That is exactly what is said in verse 19 of our chapter.

God's love is also sacrificial. He sent His Son to be the mercy seat for our sins. John 3:16 also tells us that He gave His only begotten Son. The Lord Jesus was willing to be our "mercy seat". In Galatians chapter 2:20, Paul says about the Lord, He "loved me and gave Himself for me". In Ephesians 5 we read, "Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it". In the same chapter, we read, Christ "loved us, and gave Himself for us". Divine love is both unilateral and sacrificial.

We can see now the weight of the expression in verse 11. "If God thus loved us, we ought also to love one another". The verb "ought" conveys the idea that we are bound to love, that we owe it as a debt to one another, to love them. We might say, "We should love one another", but the Bible tells us that we are bound to love one another. It is our duty so to do. Our love towards our brethren is not based upon the love which is common to mankind, which is often superficial and short-lived. In His prayer in John 13, the Lord said, "A

new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another, as I have loved you". When we consider the love of the Lord Jesus towards us, we are to show the same love towards one another.

Our love to our brethren ought to be the same as divine love. Our love is therefore to be unilateral. It should not require a cause. We do not only love those who love us. We should love the brethren because they are our brethren. And our lives should be sacrificial. Elsewhere in this same epistle, John says, "He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren". This does not have to mean martyrdom of course, but could be seen in dozens of little ways as we put our brethren before ourselves, be it at the expense of time, of energy, or of money.

Verse 12 continues, "No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us". The first expression in this verse would seem to be totally irrelevant to the subject in hand ie the evidence of God dwelling in us and we in Him. Again, it is part of a verse written by John in his gospel, chapter 1:18. The whole of that verse reads, "No man hath seen God at any time: the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him". What men could not see of God in time, they could see expressed outwardly by the Son who was then present with them. The Son amongst them was the revealer of God. So why is part of this verse repeated in I John 4? Could it not be the same principle, that "no man hath seen God at any time", but that God is being revealed now, not by the Son who has gone back to heaven, but by us the children of God who are here still. And how can we reveal God today – by our love, one towards another. If we display such love, it is the first proof of our relationship with God. His love is made perfect in us.

We might perhaps digress slightly by looking again at our phrase, "No man hath seen God at any time", and ask ourselves the question, "Does this mean that we shall never see God? Some would quote, "We shall never see God in essence, but only in the Person of His Son". John 1:18 would of course be cited as proof of this statement. "No man hath seen God at any time. The only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him". This may indeed suggest at first sight that we shall never see God, but surely there is a qualifying statement in the verse – "at any time". No man in the flesh could ever hope to see God and live. But what if we were no longer in the flesh? – what if we were beyond the limitation of time? Let us look at various facts on both sides of the argument.

1.1 God is spirit (John chapter 4)

Does this mean therefore that God is invisible? Well, in Heb 1:14, we read there of angels who are ministering spirits, and the Bible is full of angelic appearances, during which they were seen by men.

1.2 The invisible God (Colossians chapter 1)

Col 1 says that Christ is the "image of the invisible God". So is this not conclusive? God is invisible. Well we look at the Greek word for invisible and discover that it is simply the opposite of the word "seen" ie the unseen God.

Christ is the image, not of a God who cannot be seen, but of a God who is unseen.

1.3 The form of God

Does God have a body that we can see? In Matt 18, we learn of the angels that they “do always behold the **face** of the Father who is in heaven “. In Rev 5, John sees a book in **the right hand** of Him who sat upon the throne. Moses saw His back in the cleft of the rock. So, God has a body just like us, and this shouldn’t surprise us for we are made in the image and likeness of God. (Gen 1)

1.4 Sightings of God

There are a number of times when men were able to look upon God though it was not in the flesh but in visions ie not in the realm of time.

In Rev 4 and 5, John looks and sees Him who sat upon the throne and speaks of Him in both chapters. In chapter 4, John sees Him who sat on the throne and describes Him as being like a jasper stone and a sardine stone. In chapter 5 of Revelation, John again sees God on the throne and describes a book in His right hand. In Daniel Ch 7, the prophet sees the Ancient of Days sitting upon His throne as the Lord, the Son of Man, approaches Him. Our hymn books sometimes refers to the Lord Jesus as being the Ancient of days but He cannot be so and also be the Son of man who approaches the One who sits upon the throne. Daniel sees God in his vision.

Job, too, no less than 3 times over speaks of his great expectation that one day he would see God – “yet in my flesh shall I see God”. “Whom I shall see for myself....mine eyes shall behold Him and not another”.

1.5 Our nearness to God

In Luke Ch 1, Gabriel says of himself “I am Gabriel that stand in the presence of God”. Gabriel is one of the very few angels named in the Bible. He appears on 4 special occasions – once in Daniel chapter 8 to reveal certain truths regarding the great empires that would arise among the Gentiles and once in Daniel chapter 9 to announce to Daniel the great prophecy of the 70 weeks. Then in the New Testament in Luke chapter 1, he comes to Zacharias to announce the birth of John the Baptist, then to announce to Mary the birth of the Lord Jesus. Gabriel says about himself in Luke 1, “I am Gabriel that stand in the presence of God”. Gabriel uses a Greek word ENOPION to describe his position - in the presence of God.

But in Eph 1:4, Paul says of us Christians that we are before Him in love. Before is KATENOPION which means “hard up against” or “in His immediate presence.” We are nearer to God today than even the highest angels in heaven. What we are positionally today, we shall be in reality in a day to come. This particular Greek preposition is used on only three occasions in the New Testament. Apart from Ephesians 1, it is found only in Colossians chapter 1 and in Jude. In Colossians we read that God is going to present us “holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight”. “In his sight” uses katenopion.

Then in Jude 24, we read of "in the presence of His glory". Thus the Christian today enjoys a unique position before God, we are seated as sons in His immediate presence, nearer to God than angels.

2 The evidence of the Spirit

Verse 13 says, "Hereby know we that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit".

What other evidence do we have that we are dwelling in God and that He is dwelling in us? Verse 13 gives us a second reason – "Because He hath given us of His Spirit. A divine Person has come to dwell in us, sent to us by God. Romans chapter 8:14-16 has several things to say about this special position which the Christian has. In verse 14, we read, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God". This is presented to us as a statement of fact, but is it nothing more than a fact, to be grasped no doubt by faith alone? If that alone were true, it would be a great truth to hold on to. But the Spirit gives us more. He gives us the inner conviction of who we are. Verse 15 of Romans 8 continues, "Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, "Abba, Father". Family feelings have been implanted. We feel we are children, and we have the desires of children towards our Father. So how does this feeling come about? Verse 16 adds, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God". The Spirit is whispering to us constantly, "You are a child of God. God is your Father". An unsaved man might think it is presumptuous for us to make such a claim, but the Spirit within tells us that it is true.

Apart from producing family feelings, we also have divine instruction from the Spirit of God. I Corinthians 2:9 and 10 contrast the enlightenment available to the unsaved man and that available to the child of God. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him". Such is the position of the natural man. Spiritual things remain a mystery to him. "Neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned". But the same is definitely not true of us. Verse 10 continues, "But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit. For the Spirit searcheth all things, yea the deep things of God." This is one of the great "But God"s of the New Testament. We find one in Romans 5 – "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us". This is in contrast to the possible sacrificial giving of men. Another is in Ephesians 2 – "But God who is rich in mercy..."

The Spirit's work in revelation is hardly surprising, given what the Lord said about the Spirit of truth in John's gospel.

15:26 "He shall testify of Me"

16:13 "He will guide you into all truth. He will show you things to come"

16:14 "He shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you".

All of these things said about the Spirit are a real evidence to us of our dwelling in God, and He in us.

3 The evidence of the apostles

When John wrote this epistle, he may well have been the last survivor of the 12 disciples. As such, he is able to speak of personal experience of those years spent with the Saviour. Because of what John has seen, he is able now to testify with his lips, as to why the Saviour came. The answer says John is that "the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world". Before we say any more about this verse, is it not proof of the eternal Sonship of our Lord Jesus Christ? Some over the years have said that He is the eternal word, as stated in John 1:1. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the word was God". However, they would say that the eternal Word only became the Son at His Birth. But here in I John, we read that the Father sent the Son". The Father could not be a father unless He had a Son, and the Son could not be a son, unless He had a Father. We believe the Son was always the Son, and at His incarnation, the Father sent the Son.

And why did the Father send the Son? – "to be the Saviour of the world". How would we know that God is for us today? John 3 teaches us, "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world but that the world through Him might be saved". The disciples, John included, saw much evidence of this fact, and were able to testify of it. In John chapter 4, for example, they were amazed to see the Lord talking to a woman at the well, and not just any woman – a Samaritan woman to boot. Even worse in their opinion was that this woman was soon exposed as a woman of doubtful character –she had had five husbands and was now living with a man who was not her husband. Yet the Lord offers such a woman a well of water springing up into everlasting life. Even more surprising to these 12 Jewish men was the fact that the Lord stayed 2 more days in this city of the Samaritans. And what was the result of this stay? The citizens said to the woman, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying, for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world".

The disciples were to see and hear much more evidence of Him being a Saviour in the days that were to come. They watched in the house of Simon the Pharisee as a woman of the city, who was a sinner, came and knelt down behind Him, washing His feet with her tears and anointing them with ointment. The Lord, instead of sending her away says of her, "her sins, which are many, are forgiven her". (Luke chapter 7). Later they heard the citizens of Jericho murmur concerning a man called Zacchaeus that the Lord had gone to be guest with a man that is called a sinner. That same day however the Lord said about this man, "This day is salvation come to this house". Then of course in Luke 23, we read of a common thief asking the Lord to remember him, when He came into His kingdom. How did the Lord respond? "Today thou shalt be with Me in paradise". Truly, the evidence of the apostles was a strong one, reinforcing the fact that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. The God who took such an interest in men is the same God who is for us today and who dwells in us.

4 The evidence of our lips

Verse 15 gives us the evidence of our lips. "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus

is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God". Many then and since have denied the deity of the Lord Jesus. They would say that He was just a man after all. In John 20:31, John tells us why he has selected but a few of all the Lord's miracles. "But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through His name." We have the evidence of the scriptures to know that Jesus is the Son of God. Again, we have the evidence of divine revelation. When Peter confessed in Matthew 16 that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Lord replies, "Flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven". If we today confess that Jesus is the Son of God, it is evidence of the fact that God dwells in us, and we in Him.

5 The evidence of our minds

Verse 16 says, "We have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him". This is the fifth and final witness or evidence that is brought to us by John to prove our relationship to God. Only 2 of these testimonies come from within ourselves, the other three come from God. God has given us His Spirit, the Father has sent His Son, and now in verse 16, it is because of what God is in Himself for God is love. That is His character, and if we truly belong to Him, that character must be seen in us. He that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God. Elsewhere in this epistle, John brings out the essential link between our love to God and our love to our brethren. Indeed, how can we say we love God, argues John, if we do not have love toward our brethren. The two ideas are totally linked together.

From verses 11 to 16, John has therefore brought before us five proofs that God dwells in us and we in Him. These again are :-

1. The evidence of our hearts
2. The evidence of the Spirit
3. The evidence of the apostles
4. The evidence of our lips
5. The evidence of our minds

For John then, the proof of our salvation is not in a past experience of being saved, but in the present reality of these things in our lives.

So, what are the effects of this evidence in our lives, both in the future and in the present. In verse 17, we are told how these things dispel all fear for the future, and in verse 18, how that all fear is dispelled in the present.

6 Fear in the future

Verse 17 says, "herein is our love made perfect that we may have boldness in the day of judgement". This is the end result of our love – the fulfilment of it. We may have boldness in the day of judgement. The Christian has no need however to fear the future. "That we may have boldness in the day of judgement: because as He is, so are in this world". The believer has no need to fear in the day of judgement. In the day of the Lord, mens' hearts will be failing them for fear. And just think of the dread of the Great White Throne.

Why will we be exempt from such fear? "As He is, so are we in this world". If the phrase had said, "As He was", I might have cause for fear, for on the cross He was under the reproach of men and under the judgment of God because of our sins. But it is not as He was, but as He is. What is He today? He is the risen, glorified, exalted Saviour - beyond the reproach of men and the judgment of God. Ephesians chapter 1 tells us that He is in the heavenlies, seated at the right hand of God. And so are we. We too are seated in those heavenly places, although He has that special place at God's right hand, which only He can fill. Still, "as He is", so are we. The expression "as He is" has already been mentioned in John's epistle. In chapter 3, verse 2, we read, "we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is". This has to do with our external appearance, with our bodies of glory which shall be fashioned like unto His body of glory (Phil chapter 3). But in I John 4, it has to do with our position. I John 4:2 says, "Now are we the sons of God". We are that presently - we have no need to fear the judgment of God in a day to come. "As He is, so are we in this world". Again it is the present tense that is used. "So are we" - it is what we possess and enjoy right now, in this world. We are the sons of God, we are beyond the judgment of God, we are in the heavenlies, we are accepted in the beloved One.

Another reason is that we know what the future is for this world. The word of God has revealed the future to us - the Spirit too will show us things to come. Ignorance brings fear. Fear of the unknown grips many a heart, but the Christian has no fear of what lies ahead.

But will this still be true in the day of judgement? We know that we shall not stand at the great white throne of judgement described for us in Revelation chapter 20. That is for those whose names are not written in the Lamb's book of life. The Lord said to His disciples in Luke 10, "Rejoice rather because your names are written in heaven". Paul also writes about "other my fellow labourers whose names are in the book of life".

Other proof of our security is found in John 10. Says the Lord, "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish". The word for "never" in this verse is a very strong one. It is indeed a triple negative, literally "no, by no means, not unto the ages". There is no possibility that we shall ever perish. We also learn in John 6 that divine hands are holding ours - one hand is in the hand of the Son, the other is in the hand of the Father. We are also part of the family of God, and we know from earthly relationships, once we are part of a family, we can never lose that relationship. Hence we have no fear of ever losing our salvation.

But do we, as some would tell us, have reason to fear the day of the Lord, otherwise known as the Great Tribulation? Several verses in I Thessalonians would tell us that we shall not participate in this awful period of time.

I Thess 1:9,10

"Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come"

In verse 10, we have 3 occurrences of the preposition "from", but it is not

always the same Greek word that is used. In the first 2 instances, the word is EK, "out of", but in the 3rd instance, the word is APO meaning "away from". We can see the suitability of these words as we look back at the verse. We are waiting for his Son "out of" heaven, whom He raised "out of" the dead. The Lord is in heaven presently, so the saints wait for Him to come "out of" heaven. The Lord has been dead, and was amongst the dead, but God raised Him "out of" the dead. Hence we get the idea that EK is used when it means to take someone out of their prevailing circumstances.

But, in the expression dealing with "wrath" to come, it is APO "away from" that is used. JND translates the final phrase as "our deliverer from coming wrath". So the deliverance is future. He is our deliverer away from coming wrath. The word "wrath" is used no less than 13 times in Revelation – the wrath of God in the Tribulation. We even read there of "the wrath of the Lamb". It is this wrath that Paul has in mind in I Thess 1:10.

It is also useful to look at other occurrences of EK and APO, when used in conjunction with "to deliver". EK is used in the following :-

Acts 7:10. "And delivered him (Joseph) out of his afflictions" – The Lord delivered him out of prison.

Acts 12:11. "The Lord delivered me (Peter) out of the hand of Herod" – The Lord took Peter out of the jail.

Gal 1:4 "Who gave Himself for our sins that He might deliver us from this present evil world" – We were once in this present evil world and the Lord delivered us out of it.

Col 1 :13 "The Father.. who hath delivered us from the power of darkness" – We were under this power, and the Father delivered us out of it.

The above verses reinforce the idea of being delivered from prevailing circumstances.

But now look at how APO is used with "to deliver" :-

Luke 12:58 "When thou goest with thine adversary to the magistrate, as thou art in the way, give diligence that thou mightest be delivered from him, lest he hale thee to the judge" ie Settle the dispute now before your enemy brings judgment upon you.

Romans 15: 30,31 "Strive together in your prayers to God for me.... That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea" ie pray for me now so that I will not in the future come under the affliction of these men - that I may be saved from them.

II Thess 3:12 "Brethren, pray for us.... That we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men" The same thought as Romans 15.

These verses again illustrate how APO is used, not of past or present circumstances to be delivered out of, but of future or potential circumstances to be saved from. Hence, in I Thess 1:10, the Lord is our deliverer away from coming wrath, not out of it.

Romans 5:9

"Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from

wrath through Him"

If, like Joseph and Peter, we were to be saved though and subsequently out of wrath, we would have expected Paul to use here EK for "from" in above verse, but he chooses rather to use APO "away from" ie away from future or potential circumstances. The One who died to justify us will see to it that we shall be saved "away from" wrath.

I Thess 5 The contrasting pairs

There are a number of contrasting pairs in this chapter

"They" and "we"

We read of "they" and "them" in verses 3 and 7. "They" are those who will be overtaken by the events of the day of the Lord. "They shall not escape". In contrast to this, we also have "ye", "we", and "us". "But ye, brethren" (verse 4). Also verses 5,6,8, and 9. It seems inconceivable that "they" shall not escape, but Christians will if they are passing through the same tribulation. Rev 6:8 says that a fourth part of the earth will be killed, and verses 9-11 add that saints too will be slain. But these saints in Rev 6 are crying out for vengeance upon those who dwell upon earth. Hardly the language of Christians today. That is why we believe that they are part of God's remnant in that day – of Israel, and not the Church.

"Darkness" and "light"

To the Christians, Paul says "But ye are not in darkness. Ye are children of light"

"Night" and "day"

"They" sleep in the night. "We" are children of the day.

"Sleeping" and "waking"

"They that sleep" is in contrast to "Let us not sleep, let us watch and be sober". Sleep/wake are here in a moral sense of being careless or careful in our lives. This section of the chapter tells the lie to any thought of a partial Rapture. Whether watchful or slothful, we shall live together with Him, Regardless of our state on the day when the Lord comes, we will go up for it is not dependent on ourselves but on Christ who died for us. So too with salvation – Christ died for our sins.

Wrath. I Thess 5:9

"For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ"

This is the key verse of this chapter. Again we ask, "Is Paul simply educating the saints here, or is he telling us that we will be exempt from tribulation ?". Surely it is the latter. Wrath must be seen here as Tribulation wrath and

salvation as physical preservation. Why else would Paul bring in the idea of eternal salvation. The context is all about the day of the Lord. God has not appointed us to this wrath.

7 Fear in the present

Verse 18 concludes our section by adding, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear.". We see this perfectly illustrated in the actions of Mary Magdalene at the garden tomb. She sees two angels sitting inside the tomb but turns her back upon them. She didn't come to meet angels, she came to see the Lord. But the striking thing is that there is no fear spoken of on Mary's part. Contrast this with Zacharias and Mary in Luke chapter 1, or with the soldiers in Matthew 28. Why was there no fear on the part of Mary Magdalene? "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear".

The same is true of us today, and we see this especially in the epistle to the Hebrews. As far as worship is concerned, we have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus". In Israel, only one man had the right to enter the holiest – the High Priest only had that right, only once a year, and not without blood. Even then I am sure that Aaron must have had a tremor of fear each time he entered. In Hebrews chapter 4, we also have boldness to approach a throne in heaven, the throne of grace. In the book of Esther, we read of how even Esther the queen had no right of access to the throne. Had the king not extended to her the sceptre, she would have died. But we can come boldly to the throne of grace, and obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Also in Hebrews 13, we have this confidence – "We may boldly say, the Lord is my helper. I will not fear what man shall do unto me".