

INTRODUCTION

1. Please take God's Word and turn with me to 1 John chapter 4.
2. Today we are picking up where we left off last time.
3. John having mentioned the Holy Spirit in the last verse of chapter 3, now goes into detail on testing the spirits.
4. Notice what he says beginning at verse 1.
5. Read 1 John 4:1-6.

6. Jesus said in Matthew 7:15, “Beware of the false prophets.”
7. Why did He say that?
8. Because “they come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.”
9. The words “sheep’s clothing” may refer to the woolen attire that was the characteristic garb of a shepherd.¹
10. They pretend to be harmless when in reality one is dangerous and destructive.²
11. Lenski says, “The “pseudo-prophets,” are sham prophets who pretend to be true

¹ MacArthur, John, Jr., ed. [The MacArthur Study Bible](#). electronic ed. Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997. Print.

² Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) 1996 : 766. Print.

prophets of God but are not.³

12. That's why the church has always been warned about false teachers.
13. In Acts 20:28-31 (NASB) Paul told the elders at Ephesus to "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease

³ Lenski, R. C. H. [*The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*](#). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961. Print.

to admonish each one with tears.”

14. All teachers and preachers must be tested.
15. This is the command John gives to his audience in verse 1.
16. He says do not believe every spirit but be discerning.
17. John understands how important it is to realize that you can't believe everything you hear, you can't believe everything that is purported to come from God, you can't believe everything that is supposedly biblical. Cannot believe all teachers of religion, you cannot believe all Christian preachers, or Christian evangelists or teachers. You cannot

believe all who came...who claim to speak for God and claim to have a prophetic voice there is set loose in the world.⁴

18. Some think discernment is only the job of the pastor but as Gordon Clark said, “The fact that faithful pastors and orthodox professors are better able to evaluate does not excuse those in the pews from doing their own evaluating.”⁵
19. Earl Palmer agrees and says, “Neither the duty, nor the ability, to “try,” or “test,” the spirits is restricted to any ecclesiastical or educational groups. John calls upon his readers “to use their heads and to examine closely the theologies and doctrines of all their teachers. There

⁴ MacArthur, John. Sermon on 1 John 4:1.

⁵ Gordon H. Clark, *First John, A Commentary* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, n.d.), p. 123.

are no benefits to ignorance or to sloppy thinking.”⁶

20. So as we concluded in our last look at 1 John 4:1, I want to begin today with the statement by the puritan preacher John Flavel who said, “By entertaining of strange persons, men sometimes entertain angels unaware: but by entertaining of strange doctrines, many have entertained devils unaware.”⁷

John now comes to...

LESSON

- I. The Command (v.1a)
- II. The Reason (v.1b)

⁶ Earl F. Palmer, *1, 2, 3 John, Revelation, The Communicator's Commentary* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1982), pp. 59–60

⁷ The Golden Treasury of Puritan Quotations.

III. The Test (vv.2-6)

A. Examine the Man's Confession (v.2)

The Lord gives us one safe test, the confession.”⁸

The test centers on the confession made concerning the person of Jesus Christ.⁹

John says in verse 2: “By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.”

This is the 3rd time that John uses “By this” (3:19, 24; 4:2).

⁸ Lenski, R. C. H. [*The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude*](#). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966. Print.

⁹ Hiebert, D. Edmond. [*The Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary*](#). Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1991. Print.

John says “By this,” “this” referring to the test that follows in verses 2-3.

How were John’s readers to “know” the Spirit of God?” By what he “confesses.”

The test centers on the confession made concerning the person of Jesus Christ.

The verb “confesses” (*homologeí*, literally, “is saying the same thing”) denotes not mere verbal acknowledgment but an open and forthright declaration of the message as one’s own position. The present tense marks it as an ongoing acknowledgment, made whenever appropriate.¹⁰

¹⁰ Ibid., Hiebert.

How are you going to know the Spirit of God in a man who purports to proclaim the Word of God?

Is he confessing Christ?

Is the message of Christ his message?

When he says “As coming in the flesh,” that is a direct appeal to what the gnostics denied.

There were two groups of gnostics: docetic and cerinthian.

Docetists believed that Christ was divine but only seemed to become human (cf. 4:2); Cerinthians (followers of Cerinthus) believed that the Christ-Spirit merely came on Jesus, but denied that he was

actually the one and only Christ (cf. 2:22).¹¹

Both were wrong and so John gives 3 questions to ask concerning each preacher and teachers confession.

B. The Confession Itself

1. Do they confess that Jesus came in the flesh and is God?

Barna did a survey asking “What do Americans believe about Jesus?”

Here’s his findings:

Most adults—not quite six in 10—believe Jesus was God (56%),

¹¹ Keener, Craig S. [*The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*](#). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993. Print.

while about one-quarter say he was only a religious or spiritual leader like Mohammed or the Buddha (26%). The remaining one in six say they aren't sure whether Jesus was divine (18%).

Millennials are the only generation among whom fewer than half believe Jesus was God (48%). About one-third of young adults (35%) say instead that Jesus was merely a religious or spiritual leader, while 17 percent aren't sure what he was.¹²

The Bible teaches that Jesus was both God who came in the flesh from heaven to earth.

¹² <https://www.barna.com/research/what-do-americans-believe-about-jesus-5-popular-beliefs/>

a) John 1:1, 14

b) 1 Timothy 3:16 (NASB) By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He (Christ) who was revealed in the flesh, was vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

If any teacher or preacher says that Jesus didn't come in the flesh, he is "not from God."

But if he does confess (homologeo) that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, he is from God.

Jesus not only came in flesh but He is the God-man.

The Bible teaches that Jesus is God!

c) When Jesus appeared to the disciples after His resurrection, Thomas was present and Jesus told him in John 20:27-28 (NASB) Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.” 28 Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”

Some may say “Well that was Thomas’ personal view.” The Scripture doesn’t teach that

Jesus is God.

- d) In Matthew 1:23 (NASB) Joseph was told in a dream, “Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which translated means, “God with us.” This is a quotation of Isaiah 7:14.

- e) In Isaiah 9:6 (NASB) Isaiah says, “For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.”

- f) When Paul wrote to Titus, he told him in Titus 2:11-13 (NASB) “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12 instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.”
- g) The writer of Hebrews records a conversation between God the Father and God the Son in Hebrews 1:8 (NASB) But of the Son He says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter

of His kingdom.

- h) Peter said in 2 Peter 1:1 (NASB) Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

- i) John concludes his letter 1 John 5:20 (NASB) by saying, “And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.”

If a teacher or preacher does not confess Jesus has come in the flesh and that he is God, he is a false teacher

John says in verse 3, “And every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that is coming, and now it is already in the world.

Specifically John says he is “not of God” (v.3)

Kenneth Copeland, one of the major proponents of the word of faith movement said, “Pray to yourself, because I’m in yourself and you’re in My self. We are one Spirit, saith the

Lord. You need to realize that you are not a spiritual schizophrenic--half-God and half-Satan---you are all God. Man had total authority to rule as a god over every living creature on earth, and he was to rule by speaking words. You don't have a god in you. You are one! I say this and repeat it so it don't upset you too bad...When I read in the Bible where he [Jesus] says, 'I Am,' I say, 'Yes, I am too!'"¹³

Kenneth Hagin teaches that we are "as much the incarnation of God as Jesus was."¹⁴

John says "this is the spirit of the antichrist"

¹³ Kenneth Copeland. Believer's Voice of Victory, February 1987, p.9, March 1982, p.2, The Power of the Tongue, p.6, The Force of Love, tape BCC-56).

¹⁴ Kenneth Hagin, Word of Faith, December 1980, p.14.

2. Do they possess the Spirit of God?
(v.4)

John says, “You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.”

a) Jude says false teachers do not have the Holy Spirit - Jude 1:19 (NASB) These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit.

b) All believers possess the Holy Spirit - Romans 8:9 (NASB)
However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if

anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

- c) You do not need to ask for the Holy Spirit, you receive Him at regeneration - Ephesians 1:13-14 (NASB) In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

3. Do they speak the Word of God?
(vv.5-6)

John says, “They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them. 6 We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.”

a) True teachers speak God’s Word following apostolic doctrine

The OT and NT are the sole standards by which all teaching is to be tested. In contrast, demonically inspired teachers either reject the teaching of God’s

Word or add elements to it (2 Cor. 4:2; Rev. 22:18, 19).¹⁵

(1) Ephesians 2:19-20 (NASB)

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone.

(2) Galatians 2:9 (NASB) and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right

¹⁵ Ibid., MacArthur.

hand of fellowship, so that we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

b) A false teacher speaks as of the world -- they are worldly (v.5)

(1) Peter says in 2 Peter 2:14 (NASB) having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children.

(2) In 2 Peter 2:18-19 (NASB) For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, 19

promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.

CONCLUSION

1. If you're born-again you will affirm the truth of Scripture.
2. You will affirm the deity of Jesus Christ and the deity of the Trinity.
3. You will affirm that Jesus physically came in the flesh and physically rose from the dead.
4. You will possess the Spirit of God.

5. You will confess Jesus Christ as Lord.
6. If you do not affirm this and teach otherwise you are a false believer and false teacher and in danger of God's judgment.
7. 2 Peter 2:4-9 (NASB) For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment; 5 and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; 6 and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter; 7 and if He

rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men 8 (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds), 9 then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment.

8. Jude 1:5-11 (NASB) Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe. 6 And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of

the great day, 7 just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire. 8 Yet in the same way these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties. 9 But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" 10 But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed. 11 Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay

they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.

9. Do you truly know Jesus?
10. Or have you been listening to those who say they know Him but deny the truth of His Word and make up lies?
11. You can come to know Him right now by denying yourself, taking up your cross and following Him.
12. In short that means repenting of your sin and turning to Jesus who alone can save you from God's wrath.
13. Turn to Him now as we pray.