

## **1 John 3:24- 4:1-6 (NKJV)**

**24 Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.**

**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.**

I discovered a few more things about last week's text this week that I wanted to share before we went further.

## **In Verse 21- 1 John 3:21 (NKJV)**

**21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.**

"This word rendered **confidence** stood in ancient Greece for the most valued right of a citizen in a free state, the right to 'speak his mind'... unhampered by fear or shame." (Dodd, "Johannine Epistles," p. 93) This is interesting. This **confidence** that we have to speak our minds to God, without fear, has a **condition**. In other words there are times when we should **not** presume to confidently speak our minds to God. And there are times when **we can**. And what is the condition? The condition is that we are **living obediently**, loving our brothers and sisters in Christ and obeying and believing what Christ says. We need to keep in mind who this God is who we stand before when **we live** and when **we pray**. It is an incredible grace that we can have an honest open relationship before Him, with Him **welcoming us** to speak to Him about those things that are on our hearts. He invites us to bring our cares and anxieties freely to Him. He invites us to call upon Him with boldness to fulfill His promises in our lives. Those things are very true.

But we had better not presume on His goodness by coming into His presence while living in a known sin. We should not have **any boldness** at that point. At that point there is only one avenue open for communication with God. There is only one communication that God welcomes. It is repentance and confession. It is walking in the light, calling our sin exactly what it is. The prayers of false worshippers, from the beginning of the Bible to the end, have always been an affront to God. He despises them. To obey is better than to sacrifice. To confess is better than to ask God for those other things we might think He wants. A commitment to evangelism or discipleship or missions or any kind of church service is meaningless unless we are, first off, walking in the light before Christ, submitting our lives to His will.

That was the first point. The second from last week's text is this.

### **1 John 3:23 (NKJV)**

**23 And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.**

The word for believe in this text is **aorist**. I did not catch that last week. Essentially it is a belief that is **once and done**. So this is not referring so much as **living by faith** as much as it means being **IN THE FAITH**. The first command a human must obey is to **come to Christ in faith** and receive what Christ **did for us** by faith. We must place our faith in Christ for salvation. There are plenty of places where we are told to live by faith, so no application appealing to us **to do so** will be far off the mark. But this use of **believe** is specific. It is referring to a person **coming into a relationship with Christ** through initially believing in Christ, in its best and fullest sense. So to have confidence, to have assurance, we must first come to Christ in faith. Then we must love Christ's people and obey Christ commands.

OK, now we can continue with our text.

We have two questions that are answered in our text.

How do we know if we abide in Christ?

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**24 Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him.**

**And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us**

John has been spending extensive ink on how to know if we abide in Christ. We know because we have a changed life. We do things **now** that we would have never done if left to our own devices. We fight sin and we embrace truth. We, quite simply, to a great degree, obey. And in particular we obey where the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life would take us in a different direction.

But look at the answer to the second question. How do we know if Christ abides in us?

**And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us**

Romans tells us something similar.

**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.**

**Romans 8:14-16 (NKJV)**

**14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.**

**15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."**

**16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,**

This is the first time the Holy Spirit is mentioned in 1 John. But we can tell by how little explanation is given that John knew these people understood who the Holy Spirit was.

Where it says- **by the Holy Spirit who was given to us**, this is probably referring to Pentecost and the eyewitness testimony talked about in Chapter 1.

Now we know that every believer has been given the Holy Spirit. It is impossible that a person comes to Christ apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. We **can know** the the Holy Spirit abides in us. The million dollar question is- **how do we know?**

It is very important how we answer this questions because our choices can take us in very different directions.

Many people believe that the Holy Spirit's presence is primarily known by supernatural occurrences that are obvious and very experiential. Some depend on speaking in tongues, dreams, crowd dynamics, feelings, visions, and the like to know if the Spirit is present. The more dramatic, the more assurance. The less dramatic, the less assurance.

While no one can deny that the Holy Spirit often did very dramatic invisible things in the New Testament, I believe the the preponderance of scripture points to **very different evidences** to gain assurance of the Holy Spirit's presence. In fact, 1 John has been **giving us** the evidence of the Holy Spirit's presence. Do we believe Christ, do we obey Christ, do we love one another? If so, the Holy Spirit is giving us **evidence** of His presence. We know the Spirit is present if we do those things. And who is that Spirit? It is the one given at Pentecost. He is the one God has given us.

## **Galatians 5:22-26 (NKJV)**

**22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,**

**23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.**

**24 And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**

**25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.**

**26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.**

Look how Paul tells us how to know if the Spirit is present. He does not talk about something that is couched in dramatics. But he does talk about a **dramatic change** in attitude and behavior. A person who lives out this list will be dramatically different from those who don't. But not because of spiritual ecstasies and theatrics. No it is because of a changed heart, a changed mind, and a changed disposition.

Can you see how **what you expect of what the Spirit normally does in a believers life** changes the whole way you view **true spirituality**? One seeks spiritual experiences to keep ones self in the process of renewal. There is an expectation that God must keep providing the dramatic events. The other view seeks to incorporate God's word into every thought and action to keep one's self in the process of renewal. This requires no dramatic events. But it is normally a **gradual process of change** in common day to day events. And we know that we always have this opportunity to grow, even when nothing unusual seems to be happening in our circumstances.

I like how Martyn Lloyd Jones describes what happens when the Spirit begins His work on a person. He lays out, from the Word, several things the Holy Spirit does. In that context he says this.

**We experience a disturbance, something, someone interfering in our lives. We are going along, we're arrested and pulled up, and we find ourselves different. That is the beginning; that is what happens when the Holy Spirit begins to work in a human being. There is a disturbance, an interruption to the normal ordinary tenor of life. There is something different, an awareness of being dealt with- I cannot put it better. That is the essence of the Holy Spirit dealing with us.**

**Then it leads to this, that we find ourselves beginning to take an interest in these things, in a spiritual sense. Paul says that they who are carnal "mind the things of the flesh", but the Christian, he says, is the one who minds "the things of the Spirit" Rom 8:5 he is interested in them.**

That does not look dramatic. But that is the most common practice of the supernatural miraculous work of the Holy Spirit. And this leads to **conviction of sin** and **belief in Christ** and **submission** of one's will to His will. And it is something that, if we are believers, we have all experienced.

Again to verse 24

**And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us**

I believe the best way to understand this reference to the Holy Spirit is to look at what John has told us up to this point about evidence that assures our salvation. It is like the first three chapters have been building up to this pronouncement. This is not a different topic. This is a **summary** of the work that produces assurance. It puts a name to the **cause** of the change in us. This Holy Spirit, when indwelling humans, has very specific aims that God will always, over time, accomplish when He is present. The Holy Spirit is a driving force. He can be grieved when we resist His work. But the work is predictable. He will convict of sin. He will drive us to Christ. He will drive us to God's Word. He will cause us to remain in Christ. And He will cause a conformity to God's will.

The Holy Spirit's purpose is not **sensational** as much as it is **functional**. He helps us. He comes along side us. Because we need help and we need someone close to us. And He helps us be what God created us to be. He is creating people who better reflect the image of God, as Jason told us at camp. He is creating people who better glorify God. If the sensational is **needed** in the process, God will provide it. But most of the changes needed in our lives require the still small voice of God in our lives as God drives us to believe what His word says, not the sensational events.

Now it is very likely that the Holy Spirit is introduced here to make the transition into what John wants to talk about next. As we enter Chapter 4 we are introduced into distinguishing the true Spirit from false spirits 4:1-3, and receiving the Spirit's witness. 5:6-7

As such the topic of the Holy Spirit is very important. We already know what the Holy Spirit produces. John told us about it. Now we get to compare it to the alternative.

### **1 John 3:24- 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.**

Have you ever met a person who treated doctrine as if it was not spiritual enough for them? I have. They do not want to delve deep into the actual words of the Bible. They do not want to look at contexts and study whole

books for themes. All of those things are too intellectual, too cognitive to be spiritual. They are not as important as following the Spirit and hearing from God mystically. The Word becomes a type of Ouija board. This is a dangerous mindset. Because it keeps us from obeying the very command we have in verse 1.

Test the spirits.

First we need to see that John is warning us, again, of something that could draw us away from walking in Christ and the joy that is to **accompany** walking in Christ.

He is essentially saying that there are dangerous messages, dangerous thoughts, dangerous spirits. In this case the spirit is combined with the message that this spirit conveys. There is **content** to what the Spirit is communicating. And the **content** is what is to be evaluated and tested. What this means is that it is **every believer's job** to know scripture well enough to use it to test for what is true and what is false, what aligns with scripture and what conflicts with scripture.

It also implies that all messages are **TESTABLE**. They can be subject to scriptural scrutiny. This does not require a special gift of the Spirit. Any believer with a Bible can do it. The test can be done and the results can be trusted if done properly. This passage was written to the church members, not the leadership. We are all responsible to do this. We all need to do whatever we must do to become proficient with the **testing** tools. And the best place to start is to read it over and over again.

It also implies that we ought to **welcome** this testing, especially if we are teaching or counselling. This testing is not a bad thing or a threatening thing. It is a **necessary** thing and it should be happening every week if there is anything that I say that you don't remember being scriptural. And sometimes we might be embarrassed to be wrong. But that is a million times better than having someone go astray because of something we have said.

I have heard church goers say that they would not question what a preacher said because they would not go against the Lord's anointed, as if everything he said from the pulpit was given directly by the Holy Spirit. That is very wrong. Everything should be subject to test, because only the Word is infallible, not the messenger.

Note here too that there are two **sources** of things being proclaimed as truth from God. It is from God. Or it is from anything else. There is the true. And there is the false. There is that which represents God well. And there is that which misrepresents God. Remember that the first false doctrine was presented to Eve. It did not deny God's existence. But it questioned the truth

of what God said. It misrepresented God. And by doing so it led Eve astray. Remember what Jason told us. Our theology determines what we will do with our lives. What we believe about God is the most important thing about us because everything else stems from there. So we must make sure that what we believe about God is **true**. We must test that. We must know the **source** of what we believe. We must know that it truly did come from God. So we see that Christians are not supposed to be people who are so nice that they never question what someone who claims to be speaking for God says to us. No. We are commanded to question it. We are required to question it. There is little more sad than a congregation of suckers, being taken advantage of by their leadership. We are commanded not to be suckers. And if our spiritual leaders do not allow questions about what they are teaching, we should not be under them. Christians are not supposed to be gullible. They are not supposed to be defenseless. They are not to allow themselves to be victim's of wolves. I think if we were to look back at ways that we have been misled by so called Christians into evil paths, we can often see our own culpability. We blindly trusted. Or they were offering something we really wanted so we didn't **want to know** what God really said. We can often see that we were not willing to **take the effort it would take** to find out how to test that leadership, that spirit, nor to do the work of testing it. But that was not God's fault. That was our fault. John commands us here- test test test before you believe anything.

And it is easy to see from verse 1 that the greatest danger is from those who have **come out** from us. They understand the message. They understand what we believe. And they know the best ways to misrepresent the true. A traitor is often the greatest danger to a country because they know that country's inner workings. The same is true of the church. The anti-Christs are coming out with a message that **looks** true, it **looks** Christian. But it is not. OK we are not to be suckers. We are commanded and expected to test messages in order to know where they came from. We are to be suspicious until proven otherwise. We are responsible for who we follow.

But how do we **perform** this test? Is it the **feel** test? Oh that felt too negative. That felt too offensive. That felt too unforgiving. That felt too forgiving. That message was too meddling. I did not experience anything spiritual when I heard that message. That message was too boring to be spiritual. Do you see what I mean. Those might be tests. And I would venture to guess they are the kinds of tests most applied by church goers on Sunday Mornings. But they are not the correct tests. They are not the tests we are told to apply.

**<sup>2</sup> By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God,**

**<sup>3</sup> 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.**

Now some have taken this passage and have used it when dealing with people that they believed to be demon possessed. They use this question to test them. They ask, can you say that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh? If they can, they assume the spirit is not demonic.

I think that is an excellent example of using a scripture out of context and in a way it was not intended to be used.

Remember our **context**.

John was countering gnostic false teaching that claimed that Jesus Christ did not come in the flesh. They would say that Jesus was born in the flesh and Christ came to Jesus at some point, probably at Jesus's baptism. And then Christ left Jesus before the cross.

Now if you were testing a false teacher who was preaching Gnosticism, what question would expose them as a false teacher most quickly? The one that John proposes. When you counter Gnosticism, you only need to ask this question and you will know where they stand.

Now there are some that say this question will reveal **all** false teachers if you explore all the nuances of the question. I don't know if that is true or false. But I don't think it would violate anything if you were to find a cult that actually believes that Jesus Christ came in the flesh and then they believe some other far fetched fable about Him after that.

I do know that most cults do not believe that Jesus was fully God and fully man. So the question that John poses will expose most of them. But I think there are plenty in the prosperity gospel clan who would **not deny** Jesus Christ being the God man. But they are **false** none the less.

So let's take this fully in context. John is exposing these false teachers. Now **will they be happy** when this question is posed to them by sincere Christians who they are trying to trick? Not likely. They will probably resort to all the kinds of dishonest shenanigans of anyone who does not want their plot exposed. But the Christians were told to do it anyway, no matter how violent the response. That is the kind of courage we are expected to have.

Now we learn something here that we also see through the rest of the New Testament. And it is **good news**. We do not have to know everything that a cult teaches. We do not need to have extensive knowledge of their history or

their writings. We can focus on one thing and it will protect us from every heretical cult.

We need to understand **how does Jesus Christ save a Christian**. That is really all. Because that exposes the difference between every cult and the true church. **How Christ saves us** is a core doctrine of the Christian faith. **Who He is and what that means in our salvation** is the one thing we must know and understand. Once we understand that, we have what we need to discern the true from the false. And again, this is.... Well... doctrine. You will not understand it without **applying your brain** to understand it. It is understood cognitively. While our salvation was certainly a supernatural event, the **doctrine that God acted** on can be understood by careful study of any reasonably intelligent human being.

We all need to be able to explain how Christ saves us. We need to understand it. That includes the fact that Christ was part of the Godhead before coming to earth. He came fully God and fully man. He then was qualified to take our place and take upon Himself all the guilt of our sin. God displayed His wrath on His son for our sakes, even when we were God's enemies. And by faith in Christ we receive what He did on the cross for us and we enter a Sonship relationship with Christ. Christ died and was rose from the dead on the third day. And now He lives in heaven at the right hand of God interceding for us. When someone from a different version of a religious establishment shows up at your door, lay that out and see what they don't agree with.

Now this is the tricky part. They might agree with it all. That is often because they **use the same terms** but they **define** them differently. If they try to pull that, then invite them to our church. If **they** believe what **we** believe, then they should be able to fellowship with us. And you can explain that you certainly don't need to go to **their church** to be right with God if our church believes what their church does.

Then watch. This is where the falseness will start exposing itself. Because if they are a cult, they do not **really believe** that a person is saved by Faith alone, by Grace alone, by Christ alone, by the word of God alone. No. There will always be a **something else**. And that is where the false is hidden.

Do you want to be able to expose false teachers? It is really not that hard. Study to understand your own salvation. The more you understand **that**, the more the false will be evident to you.

OK, so we are told we live in a dangerous environment. We know there are those teachers out there trying to lead us astray. We know that their false teaching will rob us, at least, of fellowship with God and, at worst, will prove our claim of being a child of God to be false.

So we are to press the issue. We are to be competent at testing the Spirits which means to test what is being taught. And by so doing we can protect ourselves and our church members from the false and from being robbed of our joy and assurance of salvation.