

1 John Chapter 4A

At the age of 17, my youngest Son decided to buy a car online for only \$600.

- He asked if I would drive him to Green County PA to pick it up. (That was a 5 hour ride 1 way)
- When we finally arrived, the seller didn't show up. (I thought for sure something is wrong) and then HE texted my son saying that the title was signed and waiting in the car for us.
- Well we did find a title in the glove box unfortunately it was for a Cadillac, and we were picking up a Chrysler. (OK that was strike 2)
- Well the keys were in the car so Jesse started it up and a huge plume of white smoke blew out of the tailpipe. And when HE put the car in drive it didn't move. Not at all! You see, it had no transmission fluid in it.
- IN the add Online, the car looked great and the seller gave a detailed description of how it had been cared for. (only driven by an old woman to church 1x week)
- As it turns out my son was deceived. He paid for the car up front and there was no way to get a refund. For Jesse, that was an expensive life lesson.

Well my friends, fraud in a \$600 business transaction is really nothing when you compare it to the kind of spiritual fraud that John describes in his epistle.

- My son Jesse learned not to yield to the lies of false advertising. And today the Apostle John will tell us not to yield to the lies of false teachers. You see:
- Not everyone who claims to follow Jesus truly knows Jesus and not every church that bears the name of Christ actually holds to the Biblical revelation of Christ.
- One of the shocking realities as you read through the last six books of the New Testament is how often the writers, warn their readers about false teachers and corrupt doctrines. Remember the words that Peter wrote:

2 Peter 1:20 **knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.**

2 Peter 2:1 **But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. 2 And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.**

- Peter reminds us, that just as deceiving spirits troubled the people of God in the O.T. we must be aware of their schemes in the N.T.
- You may remember the warning that Jesus gave to his disciples as he sat with them on the Mount of Olives just before he died on the cross.

Matthew 24: 3 **As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" 4 And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray.**

5 For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray.

- Today, many who call themselves "Christians" worship idols they have created in the name of Jesus who champion social justice, and set aside the moral law of God in order to welcome immoral people into the Body of Christ without having to endure the painful discomfort of repentance.
- In these Last Days, AS followers of the Lord Jesus, WE need to grow in discernment and practice John's exhortation to "Test the Spirits."

Friends, there are many people today claiming to speak by the Holy Spirit, who promote extra-biblical practices based on erroneous dreams and visions.

IN the 1820's a False Prophet named Joseph Smith supposedly received new revelation for the "Latter Day Church." That new revelation presented a false Christ a different Jesus who is not the eternal Son of God as the Scripture teaches, but rather a spirit being who worked his way up to become a god. And so the Mormons teach that you too can become a god and rule your own world.

- Well in the forefront of John's mind AS he writes this letter, is a group of false teachers who were accosting the church in his generation..
- Claiming to speak by the Holy Spirit, these early Gnostics promoted a False Christ, a different Jesus who came to earth in spirit but not in the flesh.

Today, as we enter into Chapter 4 John provides sound practical help for believers in every generation to recognize false doctrine and the false teachers who promote it. Here is our outline for the morning:

1. A Command to Test
2. A Reason to Test
3. Guidelines for the Test.

Let's look at the command:

1 John 4:1 **Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God,**

- When it comes to essential spiritual truth, God does not want his children to be gullible so John says, "DO not believe every spirit, but test the spirits."
- Again, because there are true and false prophets seeking to influence the church, we must have the discernment to distinguish between them.

John tells us there are two spirits behind the teachers who seek to inspire and instruct the people of God. Namely, they are the Holy Spirit and deceiving spirits.

- IF the Holy Spirit is the inspiration behind a man's words then his teaching will align with the Scripture and we can safely assume he is a true prophet.

- IF God is not the source behind a man's teaching, his words will not align with Scripture and regardless of the fanfare or phenomena that accompanies his teaching he is a false prophets.
- Now we need to understand that the presence of false prophets among God's people is nothing new, we see it in both the Old and New Testaments.
- One of the best examples is found in 1 Kings.

In 1 Kings Ch. 22, King Ahab of Israel was trying to persuade King Jehoshaphat of Judah to join him in battle against Syria in order to annex a parcel of land that was known as Ramoth Gilead, but Jehoshaphat was skeptical.

- He wanted to know whether the Lord was behind such a venture so Ahab summoned the prophets: (those men in the court of the King who purportedly spoke for God)

We pick up the story in 1 Kings Ch. 22 when Jehoshaphat met with Ahab.

1 Kings 22:6 Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said to them, "Shall I go to battle against Ramoth-gilead, or shall I refrain?" And they said, "Go up, for the Lord will give it into the hand of the king."

- Watching all of the Prophets of Israel shake their heads together like a line of bobble heads Jehoshaphat questioned their sincerity and said:

7 "Is there not here another prophet of the LORD of whom we may inquire?"

- And Ahab answered reluctantly, "Well there is one more guy but frankly, I really don't like him, because he never prophecies anything good for me."
- Jehoshaphat said, "Don't say that Ahab!" and they sent a messenger to get the prophet Micaiah.
- The Messenger who went to get Micaiah told him: "Listen, all of the other prophets have told the king what he wants to hear, SO DON'T rock the boat!"

15 And when he had come to the king, the king said to him, "Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we refrain?" And he answered him, "Go up and triumph; the LORD will give it into the hand of the king."

- And Ahab said, "How many times do I have to tell you Micaiah, tell me ONLY what the Lord is telling you!"

17 SO Micaiah said, "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And the LORD said, 'These have no master; let each return to his home in peace.'"

- Then Ahab turned to Jehoshaphat and said, "Didn't I tell you he never says anything good about me."

Then God did something that is relevant to our study in 1 John, He showed Micaiah the prophet what was happening behind the scenes.

1 Kings 22:19 Micaiah said, "Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left; 20 and the LORD said, 'Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' And one said one thing, and another said another. 21 Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, saying, 'I will entice him.' 22 And the LORD said to him, 'By what means?' And he said, 'I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And he said, 'You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so.' 23 Now therefore behold, the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; the LORD has declared disaster for you."

- What we see here is that the words of the false prophets originated in the spiritual realm and they were designed to deceive Ahab. BUT Jehoshaphat had the wisdom to test the spirits to see if they were from God.
- Tragically neither Ahab nor Jehoshaphat listened to the counsel of Micaiah and they went to battle together. Ahab thought he could circumvent the will of God by disguising himself in common garments, but an archer shot an arrow up into the air, where it lands he did not care. That random arrow killed Ahab just as the prophet Micaiah had spoken.
- Friends, we must test the spirits to see whether they are from God. At the end of verse 1 John gives us the reason why we must test the spirits.

2 A Reason to Test

1 John 4: 1 **Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.**

- When you stop to consider the sheer number of false prophets and their pervasiveness within this fallen world, it is absolutely imperative that we know how to effectively test the spirits.
- Remember from our story in 1 Kings, there were 400 false prophets in the court of Ahab compared to only 1 true prophet.

In the Gospel of Matt. Jesus warned His disciples about False Prophets when he said Matthew 7:13 **"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. 14 For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. 15 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves."**

- There is a WIDE gate through which many throngs of people pass headlong into destruction.
- And the false prophets, who teach doctrines of demons are more than happy to lead the way, Like the Pied Piper they accompany great hordes of people along the path of destruction.

For instance, many of the religious philosophers and gurus of our day teach that ALL paths lead to God, ALL religions are essentially the same. These demonically inspired professors teach that Jehovah, Allah, Krishna, Buddha ARE all different names for the same god. This my friends is the spirit of Antichrist.

According to Jesus, who is the image of the invisible God, there is only one way, one narrow gate that leads to eternal life and only a few will find it.

John 14:6 **Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**

- Outside of the church, there are multitudes of false religions and false teachers promoting doctrines of demons.
- Inside what we would call the visible church there are many false teachers who corrupt the Gospel. Focusing on the efforts and works of men rather than the grace of God.

The false prophets that John refers to here in Chapter 4 are spoken of as those who, **"Have gone out into the world."**

- This is yet another allusion to those individuals who embraced the Philosophy of the World and abandoned the Apostolic Gospel.
- Separating themselves from the Orthodox Church, John tells us that they went out into the world, which is only right since their teachings are worldly and perverse. Remember from Chapter 2:

1 John 2:18 **Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. 19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.**

- By their stout opposition to the Truth these false teachers proved themselves to be "Antichrists." (I mean, they were against or in opposition to Christ)
- BUT there is NO reason for true believers to live in confusion or fear, because the Holy Spirit lives in us and HE leads us into all truth. Remember John said:

20 **But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge.**

- The indwelling Holy Spirit leads and teaches true believers, giving them the knowledge of the truth so that they will not fall into deception.
- So we understand John's command to test the spirits now we consider the guidelines for that test. HOW do we test the spirits?

3 Guidelines for the Test.

IN verses 2 – 6 John gives us 3 pertinent questions that will help us determine whether a teacher and his teaching come from God or the spirit of Antichrist.

1. Theological, Does the person confess Jesus Christ has come in the flesh?

2. Relational – Does the H.S. bear witness that their teaching is true?
3. Fruitful, Does the person hear and obey God's Word?

1 Theological – DO they confess Christ has come in the flesh?

1 John 4: 2 **By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.**

- The First place that I look to evaluate an individuals or organization's theology is in what they believe and teach about Jesus Christ.
- DO they believe that Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God, humbled himself and put on human flesh? DO they believe that He lived a sinless life and died as the only atoning sacrifice for the sins of his people? Did God come in the flesh?
- Remember the opening statement of John's Epistle.

1 John 1:1 **That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life 2 the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us**

- From the very beginning, John clearly portrays Jesus Christ as a real man. One who could be seen with our physical eyes, touched with our physical hands.
- John's strong emphasis on the humanity of Christ comes as a response to a specific false teaching that was being promoted in John's home town.

A man named Cerinthus (early Gnostic) taught that Jesus was the natural son of Mary and Joseph. Although he was more righteous, more prudent and more wise than other men, he was only a man. At his baptism, the Christ descended on Jesus in the likeness of a Dove providing him with miraculous powers. And just before his death, the Christ departed from him so that it was only the man Jesus who died and rose again. (These my friends, are all lies!)

- Gnosticism teaches that the physical realm is entirely corrupt and the Spiritual realm is holy, and Christ being holy could NOT Have possessed a real physical body.
- John's Epistle confronts this demonic doctrine of Gnosticism. In Vs 3 John says:

1 John 4:3 **and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist,**

When Teachers (every spirit) do not confess (they do not agree with the Biblical revelation of Jesus Christ) we can be certain that they are not from God; instead they are driven by deceiving spirits, the spirit of the antichrist.

- This would include the Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses who claim that Jesus was a created being. It includes the Muslims who teach that Jesus was only a prophet.

- In 2001 the Dalai Lama made this statement, "Jesus Christ lived many previous lives" and he added, "So, you see, Jesus reached a high state as an enlightened person, through Buddhist practices."
- This my friends is the spirit of the Antichrist.

2 Does the Holy Spirit bear witness that their teaching is true?

1 John 4:4 **Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. 5 They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them.**

- Seven times in this letter, John addresses his readers as “**Little Children**” and every time he speaks to them in this way, he is passing on an essential truth regarding their new life in Christ.

Like a parent, stooping down, getting face to face with a precious child, cupping his hands around the child’s face John says, “**you are from God and (you) have overcome them.**”

- By their confession of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, they have shown that they are from God; they have been born of God; they have become partakers of the divine nature through the indwelling Holy Spirit.
- And now, by virtue of their living union with Christ they are more than Conquerors through Him who loved us.

Certainly John is remembering the words that Jesus spoke to his Disciples on the night that he was betrayed: John 16:33 “**In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.**”

- Now in living union with Christ, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth we can live with confidence knowing that:

1 John 4:4 (the one) **who is in (US) is greater than** (the one) **who is in the world.**

- It is the Holy Spirit who leads us into all truth and teaches us to reject the error of false teachers. John already told us that in Ch. 2.

1Jo 2:27 **But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie — just as it has taught you, abide in him.**

Finally we can tell true believers because they LISTEN to God’s Word

1 John 4: 6 **We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.**

- Whoever knows God – those who are Born of God those who enjoy fellowship with God; those who abide in Him and have His word abiding in them –

- THEY are the ones, John says, who listen to us – they give heed to Apostolic teaching. They hear the truth and reject the lies.

Speaking to the Jews who did not believe, Jesus said:

John 8: 47 **Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God."**

- EVEN new believers, have a HUNGER for the pure milk of God's Word. Peter compares them to newborn babies

1 Peter 2: 2 **Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation** 3 **if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.**

So I have to ask: HOW is your hearing? Do you truly listen to the Word of God?

- There are times when Sharon tells me that I am not hearing well.
- I have to admit, sometimes my hearing problem is physical, other times my hearing problem is Sinful.
- Sometimes my ears don't work very well but sometimes I just turn them off.
- How about YOU? When it comes to God's Word:
- DO you love IT? Do you listen to IT?

The writer of Hebrews confronted his readers about their hearing problem:

Hebrews 5: 11 **About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.** 12 **For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food,**

- These Hebrew believers had stopped growing because they were dull of hearing. They might say, I heard all that before, don't need to hear it again!

13 **for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child.** 14 **But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.**

- Friends, the continual handling of God's Word produces Wisdom and Discernment in the lives of those who hunger for it!
- The more we read, the more we study the more our spiritual senses are trained to recognize the truth from a lie.

John 8: 31 **So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."**