

**WALKING IN THE LIGHT- First John and the Path to Living Deeply in Christ - Part sixteen**  
**Sunday, May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021 - 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2099**  
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## **“DO NOT BELIEVE EVERY SPIRIT”**

**1 John 4:1-6** - "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. [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. [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. [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."

There is a verifying, validating imprint that the Holy Spirit stamps into our beings. John introduced this subject in the last verse of chapter three - "**Whoever keeps his commandments abides in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, *by the Spirit whom he has given us***"(3:24).

The Spirit ties the work of Jesus to our minds and hearts at a deep internal level. "**We know....**"(4:6) certain things - truth and error - in a way we didn't know them before. The Holy Spirit establishes truth in our minds and exposes the emptiness of "***desires of the flesh,***" the "***desires of the eyes,***" and the "***pride in possessions***"(2:16). If those things don't look ***ridiculous*** to me it's only because I'm not full of the Spirit of Christ. He doesn't have my ***attention***.

John gives ***two tests*** of the Spirit's presence and activity in the first six verses of chapter four. The ***first*** test has to do with recognizing the Holy Spirit's presence at ***source*** - in the ***message*** of the teacher. The ***second*** has to do with recognizing the Spirit's work in the ***hearer*** of the message. How can I know if I'm ***responding*** to God in a ***spiritual*** manner rather than an ***empty*** manner? You can see John thinking these two themes through as these six verses split right down the middle:

### **A) FIRST, IS THE HOLY SPIRIT BEHIND THE MESSAGE BEING SOWN INTO MY MIND THROUGH TEACHING?**

**1 John 4:1-3** - "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. [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.”

**B) SECOND, IS THE HOLY SPIRIT AT WORK IN THE HEART OF THE HEARERS OF THE MESSAGE? IS IT BEING HEARD IN A WAY HONORING TO THE HOLY SPIRIT?**

**1 John 4:4-6** - “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. [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.**”

So the first test looks at the Spirit behind the *teacher*. The second looks at the Spirit behind the *hearer*. And both have important lessons for us today.

**1) IF THE SPIRIT OF GOD IS AT WORK IN ANY TEACHING, HE CONFIRMS THE PROPER PLACE OF JESUS CHRIST COMING “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...”

John says the Spirit confirms specifically that “**Jesus Christ has come in the flesh**” (4:2). Take note - **not** just that Jesus **existed** in the flesh on earth, but that He **came** in the flesh from somewhere else. That short phrase tells us a great deal. It dispels myths. John is **zooming in** not **panning out**. God has worked His saving will not **generally** in **many** revelations, but **specifically** and **decidedly** in one. Jesus Christ has **“come in the flesh.”**

***There is something in all of us that likes to think we are better people for being willing to listen to more options on our spiritual journeys.*** John disagrees. He says we need to **delete** competing voices. In other words, there is nothing virtuous or godly about just being open to every voice claiming divine truth.

The clear command of God's Word in our text needs to be heeded by all Christ's followers - **“Don't believe everything you hear! Don't expose yourself to everything that uses**

**spiritual lingo. Don't think that you're pleasing God because you just let God be the judge and you be the sponge. There is nothing humble or wise about refraining from judgment in spiritual matters"** John says, "Listen, ***you*** test the spirits. God doesn't do this ***for*** you. And don't believe until you've tested!"

"That seems too big a job for me, Pastor Don. How am I to test everything? I never even went to seminary. What am I looking for?"

When the Spirit of God is at work there is brought to your heart a ***confessing*** that "**Jesus Christ has come in the flesh**" (4:2). This is not just a ***knowledge*** of this truth, but a ***confessing*** of it. John says the first thing the Holy Spirit does is ***fortify a bolder ownership - a more pronounced fleshing out*** - of commitment to the ***implications*** of the coming of Jesus, God the Son, in the flesh. Here are some of the important ones:

#### **A) I RECOGNIZE THE UNIQUE NATURE OF JESUS AS GOD THE SON**

John says He "**came in the flesh**" (4:2). Notice that word "***came.***" ***Came*** from where? Before you were conceived in the womb of your mother you weren't anywhere else. But Jesus was. He ***came*** in the flesh. He didn't ***originate*** in the flesh. John says before He came to earth, "**....the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] He was in the beginning with God. [3] All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made (John 1:1-3).**

Why is John making so much of this? What is at stake here? There are two cornerstone issues involved in John's phrase, "***Jesus has come in the flesh.***" The Spirit always points out the ***uniqueness*** of saving revelation in Jesus Christ and the ***finality*** of saving revelation in Jesus Christ.

This is ***always*** the case. Any time you have ***anyone else*** or ***anything else*** brought along side Jesus, or supplementing the Biblical revelation about Jesus, you are listening to the spirit of antichrist.

#### **B) IF THE HOLY SPIRIT IS AT WORK, HE WILL HELP TO ESTABLISH THE PURPOSE OF JESUS' COMING IN THE FLESH IN MY CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.**

I'm not just talking about **recognizing** Jesus came and died for our sins. Most Christians understand that. But there is an ongoing, continuous **application** of Christ's death and resurrection to the believer's life.

In his great, old commentary on First John, **Robert Candlish** explains it this way: "**His coming in the flesh is His consenting to be crucified for us; the Spirit in us confessing Him as come in the flesh makes us willing to be crucified with Him. The Spirit can be seen to be at work as you identify yourself with Him in His coming in the flesh. The Spirit acknowledges - or better - unites me with the same purposes and heart of the Savior....He was 'of God' - supremely on the side of the interests of God. It was the zeal of God's house that ate him up. It was the doing of God's will, and the finishing of God's work, that was his meat. It was the glorifying of his Father, and the finishing of the work which his Father gave him to do, that ministered to his satisfaction in his last farewell prayer."**

That's how you **witness** the Spirit of God in any teaching. This is **bearing witness** with perceived truth. The **goal** of spiritual truth is to reproduce in my life the demonstration that every molecule in my body is captivated by the truth of Jesus come in the flesh. It's not just that my **mind knows** it. My whole being **points** to it.

Ponder what Jesus **did** when He "**came in the flesh.**" It's not **one** thing, but **several tied together**. Jesus **came** in the flesh to **live** in the flesh and **die** in the flesh and be **raised** in the flesh and **ascend** back to heaven in the flesh.

What does Paul **mean** when he says he was crucified **with** Christ? Paul was **alive** when he gave us those words, not dead. What does Paul **mean** when he says we have been **raised** with Christ. How could Paul say we have been **raised** when we haven't yet physically died? We need to **think** this through. We need to think deeply about these things because these truths are the **turf** where the Holy Spirit operates in a saving way.

And fortunately, Paul **tells** us what he means with those words. About being crucified with Christ he says this:

**Galatians 2:20-21 - “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. [21] I do not nullify the grace of God, for if justification were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.”**

So, Christ “**came in the flesh**” to be crucified. You can’t pound nails through a spirit. Paul says he is so deeply united with Christ’s crucifixion that **he too** experiences crucifixion every day. He knows only Jesus’ death **saves**. He doesn’t lean on the keeping of the Old Testament law. He knows he can’t earn heaven by wearing a uniform or handing out tracts or doing penance. In Christ, Paul died to the works of the sacrificial system to earn God’s favor.

Paul also said he participated in Christ’s **Resurrection** in the flesh:

**Colossians 3:1-6 - “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. [2] Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. [3] For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. [4] When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. [5] Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. [6] On account of these the wrath of God is coming.”**

Remember where we are in this study. John tells us we can see the Spirit’s presence when the glorious truth of **Jesus come in the flesh** is given full weight and honor. Jesus came in the flesh. That flesh was **crucified**. And that flesh was **raised** from the dead. That flesh **ascended** into glory. Then Paul tells us the **meaning** of these things.

Our lives have been “**raised with Christ**.” But what does this **mean**? We are still here. We haven’t even experienced physical death so far. Yet, says Paul, because Jesus was raised in the flesh, and because He has ascended in the flesh, there is the manifestation of another kingdom that is just as **real** as this earthly one.

The Holy Spirit works to make that **mean** something to me. Because I have been raised

*with* Christ, I look for and live for that other kingdom *literally*. The *world* isn't interested in this at all. Its hearts salivates for the *“desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of possessions”* (1 John 2:16).

But the Holy Spirit *trains* me in this like the police train dogs to sniff for drugs. I become *oriented* to another kingdom. My hope isn't just for some inner peace or some mystical tranquility. I am united with Christ in His resurrection and ascension. And as I walk in the Spirit I live and act like I'm a *pilgrim - on my way somewhere else*.

Make sure whatever someone says he or she has had revealed from God - make sure these things are central. Jesus, God the Son, has come in the flesh. This is central because John says the Holy Spirit works uniquely through this saving revelation.

You and I can only come to God *savingly* through the events *tied to Christ's physical body*. There are no other saving *“conversations with God,”* no *secret messages from angelic beings*, no *other religions systems*, no *inner silence and space - nothing apart from Jesus come in the flesh* - that can mediate God's saving grace.

Don't squabble over secondary things. Don't major on minors. Don't just look for the biggest crowd or the best music or the most miracles. John says if the Holy Spirit is to be in it, it's all about *Jesus come in the flesh*.

Let's look at the *second* lesson in this passage: Remember, the *first* test has to do with recognizing the presence of the Spirit in the teaching. The teaching must give full weight to Jesus come in the flesh. The *second* test has to do with recognizing the presence of the Spirit in the *hearing*. *What marks a spiritual hearing of the truth?*

2) **SPIRITUAL TEACHING WILL BE EMBRACED BY SPIRITUAL PEOPLE. WORLDLY TEACHING WILL BE EMBRACED BY WORLDLY PEOPLE.**

**1 John 4:4-6** - “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. [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.”**

Whether on the side of **godliness** or **worldliness**, message and audience will always find each other and fit together. If people want to dance around a golden calf, there will always be an Aaron to build it. Like attracts like.

The world devours its own kind of message. John has already identified its content - **1 John 2:16** - **“For all that is in the world— the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world.”**

The world’s message centers around **getting things** and **having things** and **enjoying things**. Power and image and pleasure and comfort are worshiped above the Creator of all.

O, how we need caution here! The church has learned to market these themes with great success. The message is a highly tailored, highly catered one. It centers on the immediate gratification of temporal needs and self-fulfillment. Keep my attention and I'll attend. Meet my needs and I'll be happy. Don't make me work too hard. Don't demand too much of my time. Don't tell me I'm a sinner. And, above all, don't tell me what to do. The spirit of antichrist thrives in religious environments like that.

Then John tells us something very striking about another **kind** of people - people who know and love the voice and work of the Holy Spirit. He says they're very different from those who embrace the world. And I want you to pick out something very unusual in the closing moments of this teaching:

**1 John 4:4-6** - **“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. [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.”**

The idea here isn't too complicated. There will be people, right in the church - that's to whom John is writing this letter - who desire a broader, less demanding concept of saving truth than is found in Jesus Christ. That's very common in religious circles today. Then comes the really

striking idea in **verse 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.”**

**“...for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”** I know those words. And so I'd expect John to say because the **one** who is in me is greater than the **one** who is in the world, we have overcome **him**. Only he doesn't say that. He says we have overcome **“them”** (4:4).

And what John means to say is this. If I'm going to give proper place to Jesus and the Holy Spirit in my mind and in my heart and in my decisions and in my prayers and in my finances and in my television viewing and in my video streaming and in my Bible study and in my education and in my marriage and in my business and in my worship - if I'm going to do all of that in a way that really **reveals the work of the Holy Spirit in my life** - I will have to overcome **“them.”**

And the **“them”** he means are all the people I sit with in church and go out with after church - and **pay lip-service** but don't **bow** and **honor** the Lordship of Jesus when it starts to cost - if I don't **overcome “them”** I can't honor the Holy Spirit either.

Here's why. Odds are, some of those people are not all that serious about honoring Jesus. They **say** they love Him, true enough. They sing the worship songs. But in spite of their words and their upbringing they love the world more than they love Jesus. And if you **do** want to honor Jesus you'll have to **confront them** and **overcome them**. Period.

And John says **this is the test of the work of the Holy Spirit in your heart**. That's why, in his closing sentence, John doesn't say, “This is how we know **truth** and **error**.” He says something much bigger than that - **“By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.” (1 John 4:6B)**

John is saying, “I'm not talking about one or two little issues here. The whole **tone of your life** - it's **comprehensive direction** - the whole **spirit** of your being - is revealed in whether or not you pay the price of overcoming **“them.”**” Think deeply about that.

I don't have to **proclaim** error or **subscribe** to some false doctrine to be **in** a totally wrong **spirit**

of error. The spirit of error (small “s”) claims my heart by **default**. I **drift** into it rather than **choose** into it. I can lose simply by the rubbing off of the values of those around me - even in the body of Christ. Listen, it’s not by accident that Paul speaks deep into the heart of would-be followers of Jesus and tells them, not just to refuse intellectual or doctrinal error, but heightens their awareness of the **relentless pressure** - the **squeezing power** of the values of antichrist on their minds - **Romans 12:2** - **“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind....”**

Let the beauty and Lordship of Jesus set your soul against all else. What or who is the power of Christ **overcoming** in your circle of influence and friends? Relish the power of deeply applied Biblical truth. **Don’t be shaped by the spirit of error**. There is far too much at stake. And the Holy Spirit labors to help us see it.