

Testing the Spirits (Part 2)

Jesus Christ Has Come in the Flesh

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Apart from Revelation 1, the New Testament is silent about the apostle John's later years. Early Christian tradition tells us that he left Jerusalem in 70 AD, probably not long before its destruction. John ministered in and around Ephesus.

The seven churches in the Roman province of Asia Minor mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3 were evidently a part of this ministry. It is likely that the apostle John directed this epistle to the churches in Asia Minor that were within the realm of his oversight and also to the church as a whole that followed down through the centuries.

Since the vast majority of us have been associated with God's church for a long time, we should be able to relate to what the apostle John tells us in his first epistle. He was talking to people much like us. The members of John's congregations were well established in Christian truth, and John wrote to them not as novices, but as brethren grounded in apostolic doctrine.

I John 2:18 Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour.

The apostle John does not mention his own affairs, but his use of such terms of address as "beloved" and "my little children" gives his letter (I John) a personal touch that reveals his close relationship to his congregations. It was a very warm, close and concerned relationship.

Advanced in years, John wrote this fatherly epistle out of loving concern for his spiritual children whose steadfastness in the truth was being threatened by the enticement of worldliness and the cleverness of false teachers. The spirits of the antichrists were everywhere trying to undermine and distort the truth of God, especially Jesus Christ's teaching and example of righteousness and of the good news of the Kingdom.

The Gnostic heresy, which was a prominent heresy at that time, taught that matter is inherently evil and a divine being, therefore, could not take on human flesh. This resulted in the distinction between the man Jesus and the spiritual Christ who they claimed came upon Jesus at His baptism and departed prior to His crucifixion.

Another variation was Docetism (from the Greek word, *dokeo*, "to seem"), the doctrine that Christ only seemed to have a human body. The result in both cases was the same—a flat denial of Jesus Christ having come in the flesh.

The Gnostics also believed that their understanding of the hidden knowledge made them a kind of spiritual elite who were above the normal distinctions of right and wrong. This led, in most cases, to appalling conduct and complete disregard for Christian moral principles. They were

intellectual elites who were religionists and who had not a moral bone in their bodies.

In his first letter, the apostle John's emphasis is on what God the Father and Jesus Christ gave up for us so that we may be able to be forgiven of our sins upon repentance, and that they are offering us salvation, abundant eternal life, and dynamic membership in their Kingdom and in their very family.

It is not enough for someone to say he believes in Jesus Christ; in testing the spirits we must know what he means by "believe." After all, the apostle John is reminding us here that there were those in the early church who said that they believed in Jesus Christ and yet were false prophets, antichrists, false teachers.

The apostle John writes in I John that there are two essential things that we have to remember to hold on to no matter what comes our way. The first is that we have fellowship with God. The main effect of the coming of Jesus Christ into this world and of His work, is that we who believe on Him, and belong to Him, and are in Him, and He in us, have fellowship with God; that we are walking with God.

The second thing is that we, as children of God, not only have fellowship with Him, but we are actively in that relationship—which makes us His children. John writes about this subject of fellowship in chapters 1, 2 and 3 and on until verse 6 of the fourth chapter. He deals with the condition and position of being children. John shows that we are sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

We should never lose sight of those two things. First, we are walking with God and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. Second, we are the children of God.

There are always certain things that try to break our fellowship with God, and there are things that will tend to cause us to be less conscious of the fact that we are children of God. It is interesting to notice that these things that weigh against fellowship are exactly the same things that weigh against being a child of God. As children of God, in fellowship with Him, there are three main things we have to watch:

1. We must keep the commandments; if we want to enjoy fellowship with God we have to obey Him. The apostle John covers that at the beginning of the second chapter of his first epistle.
2. We must love one another; we have to love the brethren.
3. We must beware of false teaching. There are antichrists and they are enemies of God bent on deceiving whoever they can. We have to be absolutely clear and certain as to what we believe, and especially about our relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ.

But just to understand and accept the teaching of Jesus Christ just as teaching or just as knowledge does not make a person a true Christian. The whole emphasis of John's first epistle, as is the whole New Testament, is on the relationship between God the Father and Jesus Christ—love is the essence of their attitudes toward each other. Love is the foundation of their

relationship.

At the beginning of I John 3, John emphasizes the essential point that because God loves us, He has made us His children, and as children of God, we have no fellowship or agreement with the world.

I John 3:1 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

He then goes on to say, in effect, that if we want to live in full enjoyment of that family relationship, there are certain things we must be aware of. We must obey the law.

I John 3:4Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.

So John emphasizes the all-importance of obeying the commandments and not sinning. Having done that, he goes on to remind us of brotherly love.

I John 3:10-11In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another,

Part of what it means to confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is to practice righteousness, and an essential part of that is to love one another.

I John 3:24 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.

Then in the first verse of chapter four we come to a continuation of the theme which John had started at the end of the previous chapter:

I John 4:1 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.

That was the subject that we discussed in the last sermon. Here we see that we are face to face with one of the most important issues in the whole sphere of our faith and obedience.

I John 4:2-3By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, 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.

There are a lot of people in mainstream Christianity who confess that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. Is that all that is necessary?

The apostle John emphasized the important test in the matter of trying and testing the spirits. The emphasis is not merely whether we believe that Jesus existed, but what was the significance of His life, what did He accomplish, how did He live His life, and how does all of this affect us?

It is possible for people to take up certain parts of the teaching of Christ and to praise it. Many politicians do just that to get elected. Their personal lives are full of lying, stealing, adultery, Sabbath-breaking, idolatry, and many other flagrant and habitual sins. Some seemingly religious politicians praise the teaching of Christ and tell people that they ought to practice it. Merely to praise the teaching of Christ does not make them Christians.

The Greek word translated "confesses" and "confess" in I John 4: 2-3 is a very interesting and dynamic word. Generally when we read this verse we miss the depth of the implication of this word "confess." We usually think of it as an admission or acknowledgement that Jesus Christ came to earth as a human being, which is correct, but to stop at that is too limited in scope and depth.

Barnes' Notes comments on the phrase "that confesses" in verse 2 in this way:

[That confesses] That is, that makes a proper acknowledgment of this; that inculcates this doctrine, and that gives it a due place and prominence in his instructions. It cannot be supposed that a mere statement of this in words would show that they were of God in the sense that they were true Christians; but the sense is, that if this constituted one of the doctrines which they held and taught, it would show that they were advocates of truth, and not apostles of error. If they did not do this (I John 4: 3) it would be decisive in regard to their character and claims.

Barnes emphasizes that it is not enough to merely say that Jesus came in the flesh. Here is a carnal man in the world who had written this from his analysis, and he saw very clearly that that was not all that it means. That statement alone (to say that Jesus came in the flesh) made by a person, does not prove that he is a Christian. It does show that he is an advocate of truth if he believes and teaches it. But the question is: "Does he live it?" Remember the general subject is testing the spirits.

The New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance states that the Greek word *homologeō* (*hom-ol-og-eh'-o*), from which the English word "confesses" is translated, implies "to assent, that is, covenant, acknowledgement." In light of this, the original Greek word implies not just

agreement and acknowledge of this truth, but it implies a much more intimate relationship bound by covenant—by a promise.

Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words has something to add:

The Greek word *homologeō* (*hom-ol-og-eh'-o*), from which the English word "confesses" is translated, literally means "to speak the same thing" [homos, "same," lego, "to speak"], "to assent, accord, agree with," denotes, ..." to confess by way of admitting oneself guilty of what one is accused of, the result of inward conviction."

We see that this word "confess" can be expanded into a far deeper relationship.

I John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Vine's also says that it means: "to declare openly by way of speaking out freely, such confession being the effect of deep conviction of facts."

I John 2:23 Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who [has a deep conviction of facts and] acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

The word "acknowledges" is the same Greek word that "confesses" comes from.

I John 4:15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

Christ and God will only abide in someone that they have an intimate relationship with. In a similar vein, turn to Matthew 10.

Matthew 10:32-33 Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.

This issue of confessing has a profound and substantial meaning to us and will affect us wonderfully and abundantly, or very detrimentally. Regarding Matthew 10:32, *Vine's* has this to say:

"...the construction of this verb has a special significance, namely, to "*confess*" in a person's name, the nature of the "*confession*" being determined by the context, the suggestion being to make a

public "*confession*." Thus the statement, "whoever confesses Me [lit. "in Me," i.e., in My case] before men, him [lit., "in him," i.e., in his case] will I also confess before My Father..." conveys the thought of "*confessing*" allegiance to Christ as one's Master and Lord, and, on the other hand, of acknowledgment, on His part, of the faithful one as being His worshipper and servant, His loyal follower."

To praise God's name is to confess Him. Also, to declare one's sin is to confess it. The Greek word *homologeō* means "say the same thing." It means to "agree." The context gives an indication of the depth of agreement. These verses that we have been reading about confessing, agreeing and acknowledging, give an indication of a very great depth of meaning and commitment.

Let us look at a very negative example of what this Greek word *homologeō* (*hom-ol-og-eh'-o*) translated to the English word "confess" implies. In this case the same word is translated "promised."

Matthew 14:6-9 But when Herod's birthday was celebrated, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod. Therefore he "promised" with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. So she, having been prompted by her mother, said, "Give me John the Baptist's head here on a platter." And the king was sorry; nevertheless, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he commanded it to be given to her.

The same word is used there (as far as the commitment) that that word implies.

To please a reckless girl, Herod called the Eternal God, by the way of an oath, to witness his willingness to give her half his kingdom. In the parallel account in Mark 6, the same word is translated "swore."

Mark 6:23 He also swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half my kingdom."

In the case of Herod, he confessed, he "promised his dedication" to the daughter of Herodias, and he followed it up with action. The word is not something to take lightly. Herod did not take it lightly in a human way.

In Stephen's address in which he spoke about God delivering Israel by Moses, the same Greek word is translated "sworn."

Acts 7:17-18 But when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt till another king arose who did not know Joseph.

Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary says the word "sworn" can also be translated "agreed." The wording of the phrase could be "which God had agreed to Abraham" or "promised to Abraham."

"Sworn" in English means "uttered or taken solemnly," (an oath) and "asserted or promised emphatically, or earnestly." Again we see that this original Greek word, regardless of how it is translated in the King James, or New King James Bible, as well as other translations, means something with a lot more depth than we normally think that the word "confess" means. When we apply these inferences to the meaning of the same Greek word translated "confesses" and "confess" respectively in I John 4:

I John 4:2-3 By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, 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.

We become to see the real significance of the apostle John's message. There are elements of emphatic agreement, earnest promise, absolute allegiance, confession as to the effect of deep conviction of facts, and sincere covenant, all within that meaning in I John 4: 2-3.

To confess that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" is no light matter. It requires great commitment, dedication, devotion, and loyalty! When a person is said to confess, the contents of the confession are distinguished in various ways. All can be grouped under two categories: confession of faith and confession of sin.

Confessions of faith are public acknowledgments of fidelity to God and to the truth through which God is revealed. They are unqualified declarations of unqualified confidence in Christ and of surrender to His service. Confessions can be verbal and/or action.

In Philippians 2:11, confession is the acknowledgment of the sovereignty of Jesus Christ and it is to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The word "confession" stands for agreement with everything contained in God's inspired written word. It means total agreement with, and adherence to, God's truth. In reality, and in practice, confession means "living God's way of life." We must not be ashamed to state it verbally, and live it in an open way.

Confessing Jesus Christ is the same as living by every word of God. Living God's way of life is equal to practicing righteousness and having loving concern for others. By this, we are able to test the spirits.

We read earlier in I John 3:10, "In this the children of God and the children of the devil are

manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother." The emphasis is not merely whether we believe that Jesus existed, but what was the significance of His life, and what did He accomplish? How did He live His life? How does all of this affect us?

It is possible for people to take up certain parts of the teaching of Christ, and to praise it. As I mentioned earlier, many politicians do that just to get elected. Their personal lives are full of flagrant and habitual sins.

Some seemingly religious politicians praise the teaching of Christ. Merely to praise the teaching of Christ does not make them Christians and never will. It is the same situation within the Church of God. People come and go within the church, and they will praise God. They will appear and seem very religious. But if you were able to be a fly on the wall and look at their personal lives 24/7, you would find that they are probably not applying God's way of life, other than on the Sabbath, or when they are in front of others in God's church.

I John 4:2-3 By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, 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.

What is the significance of the phrase "Jesus Christ has come"? It implies that He was before; He has come from somewhere. This can be said of no one else that He has come into this world and into this life. You and I are born, but He *came*.

The first phrase of the apostle John's first epistle says, "That which was from the beginning," referring to Jesus Christ.

I John 1:1-3 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

John is saying by his own hearing and his own words that he has that authority to relay to us what he saw, and what he heard, and what the truth is, and what Jesus taught him. So he is a reliable source of God's truth, as are the other apostles.

This eternal life has been manifested. He is talking about the eternal Son of God who has come into this world. He is describing the whole miracle and marvel and wonder of Jesus Christ having come in the flesh. The theme in John's first epistle is that Jesus Christ has come.

We read this in so many other places in the Bible:

Luke 19:10 for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Hebrews 7:14-16 For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life.

I John 5:20 And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, 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.

All these phrases are pointing in the same direction so that as we look at the person of Jesus Christ we must be absolutely confident, and sure, that we do truly believe that that person is the one who has come from the realms of glory—no one else, none other. "Jesus has come" and He has entered into the world. He was a visitor from another realm. This is something else that no other human being could say.

In I John 4:2-3, John was not using a casual phrase when he said, "Jesus Christ has come." At the time of the apostle John's writing of this epistle, there were already people denying Jesus Christ's part in the Godhead, His unique and eternal Sonship.

To deny the reality that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" has certain definite devastating consequences.

1. To deny that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" is to deny that Jesus can ever be our example. If He was not in any real sense a man, living under the same conditions as men, He cannot show people how to live, having not lived it Himself and overcome the sin that living in this world brings upon us.

2. To deny that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" is to deny that Jesus can be the High Priest who opens the way to God. The true High Priest must be like us in all things, knowing our infirmities and our temptations, as Paul relates in Hebrews 4:

Hebrews 4:14-15 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

. So to lead people to God, the High Priest must be a man, or else he will be pointing them to a road that it is impossible for them to take. He

has done it by example.

3. To deny that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" is to deny that Jesus can, in any real sense, be Savior. To save people he had to identify Himself with the people He came to save.

4. To deny that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" is to deny the salvation of the body. Christian teaching is quite clear that salvation is the salvation of the whole man. Mind and body cannot sin separately or be saved separately. To deny that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is to deny the possibility that the body can ever become the temple of the Holy Spirit. Remember the Gnostics believed that a person could sin in the body, but not necessarily sin in the spirit. Therefore they felt intellectually that they could have that relationship and be in God, and still sin in the body, because they separated out the two.

5. To deny that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" is to deny that there can ever be any real union or fellowship between God and man. If Spirit is altogether good and the body is altogether evil, God and man can never have an intimate relationship so long as man is man. To deny that Jesus has come in the flesh is to say that here and now there cannot be real communion between God and man. Christ did have communion with His Father as a man here on earth with the full measure of the Holy Spirit.

The source of this denial is seen to be the spirit of the antichrist. John reminds us that Jesus had warned that antichrists would come. It is the painful duty of John to announce that in the false teachers the spirit of the antichrist is already present. By this the church was warned that the conflict between the false teachers and John was not a leadership or personality issue.

The gospel itself was at stake. The struggle in the controversy was not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers. So, whatever success the false teachers had within the church, resulted from satanic influence.

The test itself hinges on the words "Jesus has come in the flesh." The false prophets may well have believed that Jesus Christ was the Savior of the world, but they denied the connection between the divine Christ with Jesus of Nazareth.

The clause, "Jesus Christ has come," reflects the pre-existence of the Son who came from the Father and from the moment of His earthly conception and birth was Jesus Christ in the flesh.

John says, "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh." In other words, the eternal Son did not have a mere phantom body. People had taught that some of those antichrists, those first heretics, agreed that the person described as Jesus is the Eternal Christ, the Eternal Son of God. But they taught that He took upon Himself a kind of phantom, ethereal, ghostly body. They did that to justify sin in their own lives.

They tried to convince people that what happened to Jesus was something similar to when the

angel of the covenant suddenly appeared to Abraham, a temporary appearance of the eternal Son, not a real coming in the flesh. The apostle John warns us to avoid that heresy. It was not the same thing. The inspired written word of God is very clear on what happened.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Jesus' humanity was absolutely real; we must never lose sight of that. Jesus Christ came in the flesh. The apostle John made the statements:

Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God.

The light has come into the world.

The Son of God has come.

Why is the apostle John so concerned about our knowing this without a doubt? Why is he so careful to define what he knows to be true about Jesus Christ in such detail and in such minute accuracy as he does throughout his writings? It was because of the false teachings that were then current and have been current ever since. All these false teachings were detracting from Christ. False teachings detract from the wonders of His works. False teachings about Jesus Christ were designed by Satan to cloud and distort the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the gospel that He brought as God's Messenger. The gospel that He proclaimed is the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is not man's gospel about the person of Christ. It is Christ's gospel—the gospel Jesus preached—the gospel God sent by Him, and therefore it is also called in scripture, by Peter and Paul, the gospel of God. In the King James Version, New King James Version, and the English Standard Version, the term "gospel of God" is used seven times—a very significant number—the number of completion and perfection.

I Peter 4:17 For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?

The gospel of God is God's gospel—His Message—His good news which He sent by Jesus. Also, the gospel of Jesus Christ is Christ's gospel—the gospel Christ brought from God—the gospel He proclaimed. Let us read three parallel accounts.

Mark 1:14-15 Now after John [the Baptist] was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.

Repent, and believe in the gospel."

Matthew 4:12-17 Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee. And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned." From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Luke 4:14-15 "And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just." Now when one of those who sat at the table with Him heard these things, he said to Him, "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!"

The phrase "of the kingdom" in verse 14 is not in the original Greek text, but it is implied. The *New King James Version* and the *King James Version* both insert that in, but the *English Standard Version* did not. The *New International Version* has modernized the word "gospel" to read "the good news of God," and it also does not insert the phrase "of the kingdom." The point is it is the gospel, the gospel of the Kingdom, the gospel of Christ, the gospel of God, the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God, the gospel of the way of God's life, and the gospel of the inspired written word of God. All of those things, in one sense, are synonymous.

So the most accurate rendering is "Jesus came to Galilee preaching the gospel [or good news] of God." The English word "gospel" comes from the word "God spell," and means "good news."

Mark says that the content of Jesus' preaching is "the good news of God." God is both its source and object; it is from God and about God. It is the very best news ever to come to the ears of mankind because it contains the message of forgiveness, restoration, and new life in Jesus Christ, and an eternal, abundant way of life.

II Corinthians 5:16-19 Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

Mainstream Christianity speaks mostly a gospel of men. It preaches about the person of Jesus Christ, confining the message solely to the things about Jesus. As a result, millions believe on

Christ, but do not believe what He says. Jesus' gospel is His message. It was not only His good news, but His Father's who sent Him. Jesus Himself said this:

John 12:49-50 For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak.

The Father sent Jesus bearing a message, which is the good news of the Kingdom of God. Jesus is God's Spokesman—the Word that was made flesh and lived, and taught, on this earth.

John 14:24 He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me.

Luke recorded Jesus' reference to the religion of the Old Testament, and the gospel of the New Testament.

Luke 16:16 The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it.

Christ was not saying that the authority of God's law and the teaching of the prophets ended with John the Baptist's ministry. He was revealing that there was a definite time for the beginning of the gospel to be preached, and that was since John the Baptizer.

The law and the prophets were until John. Since John's special preparatory ministry, the Kingdom of God has been preached. There was a definite time for this true New Testament gospel to begin. And, after John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, saying, "The time is fulfilled," and preaching the gospel.

Everyday we are bombarded with the bad news of the events of this world. We live in a troubled, chaotic world. The greatest news we could possibly hear is the good news of the Kingdom of God.

The one and only true gospel of Jesus Christ is the gospel of the Kingdom of God. The problem is that even when someone hears that the true gospel is the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God, without God's Holy Spirit, without His help and without Him dwelling in us, there is no way that we can do what it takes to prepare ourselves for that coming Kingdom. That, of course, is to live a life of righteousness, overcoming sin, Satan, the world, and our own human nature.

People who say that they are not interested in doctrine are not only unscriptural, they are ignorant of what Jesus taught, and they are denying the scriptures. To put this in perspective, consider that the antichrists of John's time did not completely deny the existence of Jesus Christ. That was not the trouble with them.

A teaching which denies the whole of the teaching of Jesus Christ is self-evident and is to that extent not a danger. This is why such beliefs as Buddhism are not as dangerous, being

obviously anti-Christian, as something within. These antichrists were within the church, and they seemed to be Christians, teaching and preaching, or even telling in general conversation, heresies that appeared to be part of the truth. As we know, Satan always mixes a little truth in with the error, which makes it all a lie.

What is the teaching of the antichrist? It is not a denial of Christ; it is a misrepresentation of Christ. It is a teaching that either does something to Him, or detracts something from Him.

The antichrists had risen within the Christian church. They said that they believed in Christ, and yet their teaching was such that it can be proved that they did not truly believe in Him.

For people merely to say "I believe in Jesus Christ" is not enough until we have tested them further. The apostle Paul said that these people preach "another Jesus." They were preaching about Jesus, but it was another Jesus. It was a different Jesus than John and Paul preached.

II Corinthians 11:3-4 But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!

They preached about a Christ, but what kind of Christ? What gospel message? Well, it was one that distorted and disfigured the real Jesus.

How can we decide whether the teaching concerning Jesus Christ is true or false? Our ultimate authority, our only authority, is the inspired written word of God—consisting of the Law of Moses, the writings of the prophets of God, the written words of Jesus Christ, and the apostolic teaching.

II Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

In a sense, throughout the apostle John's first epistle he is saying, "Continue to believe what I [John] and my fellow apostles have taught and told you." There were others who claimed wonderful gifts; they seemed to be doing extraordinary things; they had some sort of spirit in them; and they were claiming authoritative teaching.

But John emphasizes that he and the other apostles declare things that they have seen with their own eyes, and heard with their own ears. The apostles did not make anything up. Whereas these false teachers, these Gnostics and Docetists, were making things up. They could not make the same claims that the apostles made.

I John 1:1-3 That which was from the beginning, which we have

heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

Again, I am reading and re-reading this to emphasize the authority of the apostles and the strength of their writing. The claim of the New Testament scripture is that it is authoritative in these matters. It teaches us that the apostles and prophets were the people to whom God, by and through the Holy Spirit, had revealed spiritual truth, and He meant them to teach it in word and to write it.

The apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 2 that the Christian church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets."

Ephesians 2:19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,

In one sense, if you were to relate the church as being this temple in a physical sense, Jesus is the foundation, and the church is part of the walls, the lights, and the structure of the building. But those who are the anti-Christ are the roaches running around behind the walls and coming out occasionally.

All teaching must be derived from the apostles, the prophets and Jesus Christ Himself. These men claim a unique authority. Listen to the apostle Paul putting it again in writing to the Galatians; he uses strong language.

Galatians 1:8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.

So, if anyone is teaching heresy in the church of God and convincing others of it, then there is a curse set on that person—if it is deliberate. None of us are perfect, and we all make mistakes. As hard as the ministry prays to get things right and to preach to you the truth, there are times that we inadvertently say something that is not quite right, and for that we apologize. But we try.

In Galatians 1:8, we see the claim of a man who had been commissioned by God. God set him apart and He had given him the revelation. Paul and John emphasize throughout their letters that what they preached was also the message that was preached by the other apostles. They

preached it in unity.

The apostle Paul, the apostle John, and all the other apostles do not hesitate to say that they exhort the members of the church to test every teaching by their own God-inspired teaching. They emphasize that we should test the spirits.

The apostle John says it is not enough to name Christ. The question is, does the teaching conform to the teaching of the New Testament concerning Jesus Christ, or does it not? That is the test.

If Jesus did not come in the flesh, if it is not an actual fact, if Jesus really has not been made in the flesh and dwelt among us, then there was no real humility involved in His coming into this world. If He really did not, in a sense, limit Himself to the position of a man dependent upon God, then there is no true humility.

Philippians 2:5-11 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

That sounds like something extremely exciting. We will someday be glorified as a result of what Jesus Christ has done.

If He had not actually come in the flesh, there would have been no real suffering. If the Eternal Christ left the physical Jesus on the cross, as some false teachers were espousing, the Eternal Son of God would not have suffered for the sins of mankind. In one sense, He would not have suffered at all. It would have been all appearance. It would have been play-acting if Jesus Christ had not come in the flesh.

If Jesus Christ had not completely died on the cross, then there would be no atonement for sin and it would not be true to say that He tasted death for every human being, as Paul states, in the book of Hebrews.

Hebrews 2:9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.

If we are not clear that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh," then we cannot believe that Jesus Christ has tasted death for us. No imperfect man could die for our sins.

I say my next statement with reverence and with a lot of thought. God alone could not die for our sins. God cannot die. It was absolutely essential that the Christ, the Son of God, become Jesus, the Son of Man.

What is the ultimate test of the spirits? What is the vital element to whether we abide in Him?

I John 4:12-16 No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

The faithful overcome the false prophets because they resist their teaching. So the faithful establish the fact that they are from God and that the One who is in them is greater than the one who is in the world.

I John 4:4-5 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. They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them.

The false teachers do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them, because living involves fellowship, which is possible between God and His children only by the Holy Spirit. The false teachers are without this fellowship. Therefore, they do not love, because they do not know love, because they do not know God. God is love.

The antichrist can be in the world, and evil spirits can be in the false teachers, but living in God is possible only for the children of God. Unless the Spirit of Wisdom is present, there is little or no profit in having God's Word in our hearts, even if that were possible.

In contrast to the little children who are from God, are the false teachers who are from the world. The false teachers are successful in the world because their thinking, their theology, confesses the world's beliefs. Their teaching is philosophically congenial to the prevailing human reasoning of the day. That is why we see, in mainstream Christianity, an evolution of what mainstream Christianity was a hundred years ago, to what it is today. Neither of them are true Christians because they do not follow the scripture, the apostles, and the teaching of Jesus Christ, which is the same yesterday, today and forever.

It is usually not surprising when, occasionally, some members of the church are easily persuaded to forsake the truth of the gospel. Although these members appeared to belong to the church, their willingness to hear and follow the false teachers shows their true colors. They are the colors of bitterness and disloyalty. They are the colors of the world.

I John 4:6 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.

Whoever knows God (that is, has knowledge, through fellowship with Him, by loving Him, and submitting to Him, and abiding in Him and His Word), listens to the apostles and God's ministers as they proclaim the word "heard from the beginning" by the apostles, as Jesus, the apostles, and the prophets of God wrote. The argument is parallel to that of Jesus in John 8:

John 8:47 He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God.

When people confess as the effect of deep conviction of the facts, when they emphatically agree, earnestly promise, absolutely commit, and sincerely covenant, that Jesus came in the flesh, when they hear God speak to them in the inspired written word of God and are obedient to it, then the Spirit of Truth has been present and active in them.

When people deny the gospel, when they will not hear it as God's Word, and will not confess that Jesus has come in the flesh, then the spirit of falsehood and error has been at work in them.

John enlightens us that in testing the spirits, the spirit of antichrist and the spirit of error will not only deny that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, but this sinful spirit-influenced attitude also refuses to listen and obey what God instructs it to do. The spirit of error rejects the example set by Jesus Christ of how to live God's way of life. One of the main things that is lacking in our lives is true loving concern.

By their evil fruit you will know them to be against Christ and His teachings. And just as the wheat and tares grow up together, for a while, so do the false teachers—the many anti-Christ's that affect the church.

I state this because I really believe that we are getting into a period of time where we are going to be bombarded by false teachers, false instructions and anti-Christ's. I detect and feel that Satan is increasing his pressure on all of us, and that our attitudes are being affected more often. Some of you had mentioned that to me even before services. How hard it is and how many times the attitudes are going awry. This is one of the reasons I am giving this two part series on "Testing the Spirits." It is because it seems to me that Satan is more active than he has ever been. This is extremely important to us at this time in the church's history.

The definition of "teacher" is "one that teaches." To "teach" means "to cause to know a subject." Anyone may be a teacher, not just a person who instructs in a formal setting.

I John 2:19 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 they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

In sharp contrast, the Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Christ confesses that Jesus Christ came in

the flesh, and will listen to and obey those things that Christ and His apostles taught.

The righteous spirit-influenced attitude accepts and seeks to emulate Jesus Christ's life. By their good fruit you will know them to be in agreement with Christ's teachings and in covenant with Him, and will live a life that treats others with love.

Jesus Christ is absolutely vital, central, and essential to us with regard to our salvation and our understanding of and relationship with God the Father. By the Spirit of Jesus Christ we know the Spirit of Truth.

In his first epistle, the apostle John reaffirmed the core of God's Truth saying that either we evidence the sound doctrine, obedience, and love that characterize all Christians, or else we are not true Christians.

When all the basics of righteousness are working, we not only know joy, but we can live with reassurance of salvation, even though we are still far from perfect. This assurance comes especially as we find ourselves learning to love one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.