

BIBLE SERIES: "EXPLORING OUR AWESOME BIBLE"

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1 JOHN 4-5 TESTING THE SPIRITS; AGAPE LOVE; 1 JN. 5:7-8 FALSE SCRIPTURE



We now begin with chapter four, where John continues to advise the brethren on how to avoid being deceived by false teachers. It is clear that the Church, in the latter part of the first century, was being invaded from within, as John said in 1 Jn. 2:19. Since Simon Magus arrived in Rome in A.D. 45 with his counterfeit Christianity, according to 2nd century "Christian" writers, he and other false leaders quickly spread, filled with a satanic spirit of deception. Thus, John identifies them as having the "spirit" or attitude of the Antichrist.

John warns them: "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" (1 Jn. 4:1, emphasis added throughout). He knows these fraudulent ministers are influenced by a wrong spirit from Satan and his demons. These deceptive leaders disguise themselves as followers of Christ and what to be known as "ministers of righteousness."

Yet, as Paul said, "And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if *his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness*, whose end will be according to *their works* [breakers of God's laws]" (2 Cor. 11:14-15). Notice these false preachers will "pretend" to be "righteous" and preach from the Bible, but will distort God's truths by going against His laws and won't truly keep them. Remember, the biblical definition of *righteousness* is found in Ps. 119:172, "My tongue shall speak of Your word, for *all Your commandments our righteousness*."

So, how can a spirit or attitude be tested, whether it comes from God or from demons? John gives practical answers on how to do so by applying the three key tests he has already presented in the previous chapters. These tests, as used here in different order, first, have to do with understanding *God's true nature*, secondly, having a *genuine love towards the brethren* and thirdly, recognizing *the need to keep God's holy laws*.

He begins with the first test: knowing God's true nature, which includes that of Christ. He says: "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*. 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" (1 Jn. 4:2-4). So here we have the important point of understanding who God truly is, for John is refuting a concept that existed in his day, of which Cerinthus, a false prophet, according to the early church writers, taught that Jesus only "appeared" to have suffered and only "seemed" to be in the flesh, but was an apparition. This belief is called Docetism and had several variations.

Eventually, some of this belief became part of the Trinity, what traditional churches now teach. According to this false doctrine, the Word, who became Christ, is a "hypostasis" (or manifestation) of God. They teach that the "Son" as God, actually remained in heaven while His emanation (or projection), in the form of Jesus Christ, was here on earth. Trinitarians don't truly believe that the Word actually descended and *was separate* from God the Father by coming here "in the flesh." They do not believe that Jesus was really dead three days and three nights, for they claim that His "hypostasis," or presence, was still existing in heaven by the Father's side. This is one way of denying the true nature of the Father and Son.

As Wikipedia says about the Trinity: "As a member of the Trinity, God the Father is one with, co-equal to, co-eternal, and consubstantial with the Son and the Holy Spirit, each Person being *the one eternal God* and *in no way separated*: all alike are uncreated and omnipotent."

They also don't believe Christ, as God, actually came in the flesh and felt pain. As a Presbyterian pastor writes in his website, *Crossway.org*, "...We might remember that God *cannot suffer*. He is impassable. While it's not straightforward to proof-text this doctrine with a couple of Bible verses [notice this great admission!], it grows out of Scripture's teaching on God's unchangeable nature and His self-sufficiency." As Calvin [the founder of Presbyterianism] puts it, "Surely God does not have

blood, does not suffer, cannot be touched with hands" (*Institutes of the Christian Religion* II.XIV). What confusion and a clear contradiction of what the Scriptures say. John said, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory..." (John 1:14). He truly suffered, as Hebrews 5:8 says, "...though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered." (For more on this topic, see our doctoral study paper, "The Nature of God and Christ" at ucg.org/study-papers).

John also knows that those brethren who remain in the Church will recognize his apostolic authority and follow only these teachings based on God's Word as explained by Jesus.

He warns about these illegitimate teachers, "They are of the world. Therefore, they speak as of the world, and *the world hears them*. 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" (1 Jn. 4:5-6). Here it says "the world," meaning the great majority of human beings, including traditional Christians that are deceived by Satan, hear and follow their false teachings. It is truly, as Christ says, very few who find and follow God's truth path. He said, "Enter by the *narrow* gate; for *wide* is the gate and *broad* is the way that leads to destruction, and there are *many* who go in by it. Because *narrow* is the gate and *difficult* is the way which leads to life, and there are *few* who find it" (Mt. 7:13-14).

The second test now shows whether or not they were truly "listening" to John or not. He says, "Beloved, let us *love one another*, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 Jn. 4:7-11).

Hence, everyone who is truly converted will show this love towards the brethren, since God's main characteristic is love, or in the Greek, *agape*, which is sacrificial love. God the Father showed the

ultimate example of this sacrificial love when He gave up His Son as a payment for our sins.

John says if we have that kind of love toward the brethren, we can have *confidence before the judgment seat of Christ*. He says, "Love has been perfected *among us* in this: that we may have *boldness in the day of judgment*; because *as He is, so are we in this world*. There is *no fear in love*; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us. If someone says, 'I love God,' and *hates his brother, he is a liar*; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: *that he who loves God must love his brother also*" (1 Jn. 4:17-21).

John also reminds the brethren to use the third test: "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome [grievous]" (1 Jn. 5:2-3). Here, the term "burdensome" comes from the Greek word *barus*, which means "heavy," the same word Jesus uses when saying of the Pharisees: "they bind heavy burdens that are hard to bear" (Mt. 23:4).

In contrast, John says that to God's people, His commandments are not heavy, but light, enjoyable and profitable to keep. As Christ said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is *easy* and My burden is *light*" (Mt. 11:28-30).

John returns to the first proof to refute those who deny Jesus really came in the flesh to pay for our sins. He says, "This is Jesus Christ, who came by water and blood; not by water only, but by water and blood" (1 Jn. 5:6). What does he mean?

As mentioned previously, some false teachers denied Jesus really "suffered in the flesh." They believed that His "hypostasis" or presence was still in heaven, but this was not the case. The Word, Christ, actually died a complete death for three days and had to be resurrected by God the Father. It refutes this aspect of the Trinity.

Next, we have the only false verses the Bible, (parts of 1 Jn. 5:7-8) which were added centuries later than the original, as virtually all scholars recognize today. Verses 7 and 8 say: “For there are three that bear witness **[in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. And three are they that bear witness on earth]**: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.” The words in brackets are bolded and not part of the original biblical text and should be disregarded. How did such an egregious error arise in the Bible?

As the website, *Wrested Scripture* says, “The reference to the three ‘witnesses’ in heaven does not appear in a single early Greek manuscript. It was added to the Latin manuscripts, probably first in North Africa, being mentioned by *Cyprian of Carthage* in 258 and *Augustine* about the year 400. The passage was not known to any of the early Church Fathers, who would have had plenty of reason to quote it in their Trinitarian debates of the 4th century (for example, with the Aryans), had it existed then.

“Erasmus, in the first two editions of his Greek translation of the New Testament, omitted the corrupt passage relating to the ‘three witnesses’ (1 Jn. 5:7). He did this for sound critical reasons. But the *Vulgate*, the Bible of the Roman Catholic Church, included the passage, and immediately the cry arose that Erasmus was tampering with the Scriptures. Thinking he was safe, he rather rashly said he would insert the passage in his next edition if a single Greek manuscript could be found that contained it. Surprisingly one was found, and he kept his word and inserted the disputed passage, much against his will and judgment, in the third edition of the Testament. But it turned out that the ‘discovered’ manuscript (the Montfort manuscript), now in Trinity College Library, Dublin, which was the document submitted to Erasmus, is but a 15th century production of no critical value, and the disputed words are taken from some corrupt Latin manuscript. Erasmus added the passage to his 1522 edition, ‘but he indicates in a lengthy footnote his suspicions that the manuscript had been prepared expressly in order to confute him.’ Indeed, the manuscript was written after Erasmus’s request by a Franciscan from Oxford. It was this third edition

which became a chief source for the King James Version, thereby fixing the passage firmly in the English-language Scriptures for centuries.”

These false verses do not even fit the context, for how can they bear witness to Jesus Christ—namely, the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit, since the Word is Jesus Christ Himself? Actually, those who bear witness to Jesus Christ, as the original says, are God’s Spirit, the water and the blood. John witnessed when God the Father spoke to them in a cloud (Mt. 17:5); the second testimony was during Jesus’ baptism, when God the Father said He was pleased with Him, and the third testimony was by the blood He shed when He sacrificed Himself and gave His life for us.

As John explains, “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may believe in the name of the Son of God. And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us” (1 Jn. 13:14). So, we must ask not according to our will, but according to God’s will.

Furthermore, John makes it clear that if we do not continue to fulfill the three tests of a true Christian, we can be rejected by committing the sin of death. He says: “If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not unto death, he shall ask, and God shall give him life; this is for those who commit sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death, for which I say not to ask. All unrighteousness is sin; but there is sin not unto death” (1 Jn. 5:16-17). The sin unto death (or the sin that will lead to the second death) is caused by intentionally rejecting God’s way and, like the false teachers, opposing Him. This is also called “the unpardonable sin” in Mt. 12:32 by rejecting the Spirit of God. As Paul explains: “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and have fallen away, to be renewed again unto repentance, crucifying to themselves the Son of God afresh, and putting Him to an open shame” (Heb. 6:5-6).

Let’s avoid this at all costs! Thus, we end this wonderful first epistle of John for our edification.