

Discerning False Teachers

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Preacher: Guest: Scott Rosen

[0 : 0 0] Am I good? Sounds like it. All right, well, it's good to be back here again. I thank Pastor Jeff for that kind introduction, and we always enjoy being here with you. I think we've been here two or three times previously, and it's always a blessing. This morning, if you want to turn into your Bibles, we're going to be in the book of 1 John, 1 John chapter 4. If you want to turn there, we'll take a look at the first six verses there. And as you're turning there, as Brother Jeff mentioned, I do work for Virginia Beach Theological Seminary down in Virginia Beach, of course, and I was talking to a brother earlier just about some of the programs we have. I don't want to make an advertisement, but I think it's been a blessing in many people's lives. We do have a Master's of Biblical Studies program, and we know that it's a bit of a challenge probably to come down all the way from Virginia Beach often, but it is offered remotely or online. So if the Lord is leading you in that direction, that's an option you might have. It's been a blessing to many people just as they help serve as laypeople in a local assembly. So we trust that may be a blessing to you if that's how the Lord leads. And of course, my family and I are very excited to be here. As Pastor

Jeff mentioned, we are very blessed with another little one, Benjamin Mark. It's been a real joy to us, and we thank you for praying for us over the past few months as he was safely delivered and seems very healthy. So praise the Lord for that. Trusting you are in the Scripture in 1 John 4, 1, verses 1 through 6. Let me read the text, and we can follow along and then see what the Lord has for us this morning in the Holy Scripture. So the Bible says, 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. By this you know the Spirit of God. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. And every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God is not from God. This is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you heard was coming, and now is in the world already. 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. They are from the world. Therefore, they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. 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. May God bless the hearing and teaching of his word this morning. Let's pray together.

[2 : 4 7] Heavenly gracious Father, Lord, I come to you today asking for your blessing upon the sermon that I pray that you would empower me to deliver. From your text, may what is conveyed be the truth of the word as originally intended and inspired. May Lord, we grow from it and mature through it.

May Lord, you work your will in our hearts for your holy, inspired, preserved word. And we do pray these things in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Well, we are, of course, in the New Testament text this morning. But if I could draw your attention to the Old Testament, you don't have to turn there.

But consider the book of Job. I'm sure we're all pretty familiar with the content of that book. But if you've read through it, most likely we tend to understand the beginning portion, the narrative portion of the beginning, and the narrative portion at the end a little bit better than the middle portion. Because the middle portion is more poetic in nature. It's wisdom literature.

And it's something that I would encourage everyone to study more in depth. Because it is a portion of scripture that is both very convicting and very encouraging at the same time. But when we consider the narrative portion, the main character, of course, is Job. But the primary antagonist in the book, as you probably know, is Satan. So Satan comes and God presents Job as this example of a blameless and upright man. And Satan is unpersuaded. He says, essentially, the only reason why Job worships you is because of the prosperity you've given him. And God responds by saying, very well, you may not hurt him personally, but you may take away his prosperity. He does that and even goes to the extent of having this great windstorm come and kill off all of his adult children. But Job does not curse God. Instead, he worships God and says that while God has given him certain things, God has the right to take those away. Well, undeterred, Satan says, fine, I can take away his prosperity, but I haven't been able to afflict his health. Take away a man's health and then he will curse you. And God says, all right, you have the opportunity to afflict his health. And what he does is he creates this disease of some sort that has these horrible disfiguring boils. And Satan afflicts him in this way. And Job is in a situation where he's in great pain, but he's also an outcast from society.

He actually sits in the outside of the city in what is the equivalent of the city dump there when he was a man of great prominence. And three of his friends come, as you may know, and they come initially to comfort him. And they're all very quiet for a while until after a little few days later, silence breaks.

[5 : 28] And this conversation, this dialogue takes place that involves most of the rest of the book. And in that dialogue, these men who were initially there to comfort Job now become his accusers and tormentors.

Job rightly calls them, I believe, and Job 16.2, miserable comforters at that point because of the way they turned from his friends to be his antagonists, his accusers. And you might wonder, why did they take this disposition with Job? And I think the first friend to speak, the oldest friend, Eliphaz, gives us some insight into why they behave this way. He says this, you don't have to turn there, but you can just listen, Job 4, verses 12 through 16. This is Eliphaz, his most mature, supposedly friend, speaking. Now a word was brought to me stealthily. My ear received the whisper of it.

Amid thoughts from visions of the night, when deep sleep falls on men, dread came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones shake. A spirit glided past my face. The hair of my flesh stood up. It stood still, but I could not discern its appearance. A form was before my eyes.

There was silence, and then I heard a voice. And he goes on to say the content of what he heard. Well, what we see here is that some sort of spirit visited this man, and it clearly wasn't the Holy Spirit. It's not the Spirit of God. It is some sort of evil spirit that comes upon him. And the reason I bring this up is because I think this depicts the way Satan usually works. You see, Satan's very visible in the early portion of the text in Job. But then you don't really hear about him directly.

But Satan's very much still at work here, because he's influencing these evil conversations that God eventually says that does not please him in the end of these three friends as they torment him.

[7 : 17] And this is really the way Satan works. You don't physically see Satan in front of you. He works through various people, trying to influence them to discourage God's people in this corrupting fashion. And this is a key part of what we see here in John's warning to us this morning about these false prophets, satanically inspired men who work to undermine the church.

And so as we consider back into the New Testament in 1 John, this is a key element as John brings up this exhortation in verse 4. But leading into verse 4, it's important and helpful at least to have the context of what has John been discussing. Previously, towards the end of what we have is chapter 3 before us, John has been talking about the importance of brotherly love, the importance of being loving to your fellow Christian. And in saying this, he speaks about elements that are reflected in the lives of true Christians. If you look at verse 23, if you look up just briefly from where you are in chapter 4, he says this, and I'm reading from the ESV translation, by the way. But he says this, and this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his son, Jesus Christ, and love one another just as he has commanded us. So we see two essential elements of being a Christian. One, you have to believe in Christ, that makes perfect sense. But that also means there's going to be fruit in your life that comes from that. And the fruit he's discussing here is loving your fellow Christians, loving other believers within the church. And he goes on to add one other element to this in verse 24.

Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God and God in him. And by this we know he abides in us by the Spirit whom he has given us. He makes the point here that if you are a Christian, you have the Holy Spirit. If you have the Holy Spirit, you are a Christian. So putting all this together, a Christian, as John sees it, as John declares to us, has put his faith in Christ. He has works or fruit that demonstrate that profession, that back up that profession. And he has the Holy Spirit internally in him, working in him and witnessing to him, assuring him of his position in Christ. And that is the basis, as John shifts into this discussion here of the conflicting situation between those who have the Holy Spirit and those who may profess to have the Spirit, but don't. Look now in chapter 4, verse 1.

Look how John begins his address. He uses the word, at least as I have in the ESV, I think the King James is the same, the word beloved. Kind of an old-fashioned word to refer to people you care about. But essentially, he could have written in more contemporary language, or if you had a more loosely translated Bible, it might be something like, dear friends or dear Christian brothers, I am making this addressed to you.

And I think in that one word, I think in that one word, there's some, a couple nuances that are important and they help us understand the message John is giving us. One, we see a shift. In chapter 3, John uses we, the first person plural pronoun. So he's including himself in the discussion. But now, look, he's addressing it to the beloved, to other Christians, to the readers of this text.

[10 : 28] He's now bringing forth an exhortation to us directly and truly trying to capture our attention in this way. I have something important to tell you. And he'll go on to tell us what that is.

But there's also something else embedded in that word. And that is this. John has an apostolic role. He has apostolic authority. And he is coming to us, coming to his original audience and those who read the text thereafter, with an exhortation. But look at the way he addresses us.

He does it with pastoral care and compassion, calling us beloved and dear friends. He's gentle in the way he speaks to his readers. A little later on in verse 4, he'll call us little children.

And it's not to be diminutive or to be disparaging in any way. It's showing pastoral, brotherly care. And so as John exhorts us, he exhorts us in the sense of being a fellow brother, a fellow Christian. I think there's an application there. You know, there's times when we need to exhort other Christians or we need to bring instruction to other Christians. And the idea isn't that we come up in the position of being a teacher and having lordship over somebody else, but it's the idea of coming along another brother or another sister in the right fashion, seeing them as like brethren, and gently correcting them in this manner. I think John sets a great example for us here. But nonetheless, while John is very gentle, there is a call to discernment.

There is an exhortation here that John has for us. And I think there's three elements to the exhortation that we'll see in these verses in verses 1 through 6. One, Christians must test spiritual authorities. So a test must take place when we have authorities come before us that we need to evaluate whether they're truly from God or not. Two, even though this evaluation is important, we still can have confidence in those who truly are in Christ, including ourselves.

[12 : 20] There's great confidence the Christian can have that John presents to us in this passage of Scripture. And then finally, while we have great confidence and while there are all these false teachers who depart from the faith, nonetheless, these false teachers will have some influence in the world, but real Christians don't give them any ultimate heed. So the three elements are test the spirits, two, have great confidence as a Christian, and three, don't be discouraged when false teachers have a hearing in the world because true Christians, God's people, will ultimately not be swayed. And I think we'll see that through the text this morning. Well, if you look back at verse 1, you'll see after he refers to us as beloved and tells us this exhortation is coming, there are two elements to his command. First of all, we are not to believe every spirit. So we can't be lackadaisical in believing every authority that comes to us. And two, with those spirits or with those authorities, we need to examine them. We need to engage in some sort of evaluation. Those, as we already saw, who are truly Christians have the Holy Spirit. But this is important. Those who claim they have the Holy Spirit don't always have the Holy Spirit. So a true Christian has the Holy Spirit, but there are people out there who will claim to be Christians, claim to have the Spirit, and they do not. And John, the example John uses here, people like that, is that there are some sort of false brethren out there, or false prophets, as he puts it, who are claiming to be walking in the Spirit, who claim that they are faithful to being Christians, but their conduct and their theology testifies otherwise. There is an evil spirit behind them. Now, it's important to keep in mind, it's not necessarily the sense that these are demonically possessed individuals, like you see in the Gospels. Instead, it's more along the lines of their philosophy, whether intentionally or not, is influenced by false spirits, by evil spirits. And these are the people John has in mind. But we must be very wary, because of the situation, of such individuals, such spirits that are in the world. These people may claim to speak from the Holy Spirit, but they do not. And when Christians indiscriminately accept the claims of anyone who claims to be a

Christian, or anyone who claims to have the Spirit, they will be led astray, pardon me, and embrace false doctrine. You know, this wasn't just isolated to this situation. Paul brings this up when he speaks to the Corinthians. You may recall in 2 Corinthians 11.4, Paul has to rebuke the Corinthian church in this way. For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different Spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. So the Corinthians were being very lackadaisical in this manner. They were not just being discerning about these other people who claimed to know Jesus, but as a different Jesus. They were people who, pardon me, were preaching a different gospel, and they were accepting it readily enough, and Paul had to rebuke them. And now John is giving us instructions or an exhortation along these lines as well. Look in verse 1. There's a conjunction, at least as I see in the ESV. The word but is there. You can't just accept these spirits, but you must engage in this test, in this evaluation. We must see whether somebody is from God, or if they are from the enemy. As John puts it in this verse, it must be discerned whether they are from God. And so John will soon share with us how we are to engage in this evaluation. And you might think, okay, John, you've convinced me. We've gotten to the point here where I know this discernment, this evaluation must take place. How do we conduct it? But John's not going to tell us quite yet.

I think if we're faithful to the text, we also have to delay a little bit before we get to the examination John calls us to engage in to determine whether somebody is a false teacher or not. For you see, John wants to emphasize here just how important it is to engage in this evaluation, just what a precarious situation it is. He uses these two imperative statements here. One, that there are many false teachers in the world. So this isn't just an isolated situation. There are a multitude of false teachers out there. And moreover, what else does he say here? They've gone out into the world.

So it's not isolated to just one region. I don't think it's even isolated to one time period. I think it's talking about the church age in general. These teachers are a big problem. They're like a cancer. They've spread. They've metastasized throughout the world, throughout the church age. You know, we've already seen that these men are influenced by evil spirits. But Paul gives us a little bit more insight about just how serious the situation is. In 1 Timothy 4.1, he says, Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times, some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and the teaching of demons. The teaching of demons. This isn't just some inconvenient situation or people are a little bit off base. No, these false teachers are teaching nothing less than the teachings of Satan, the teaching of demons, emphasizing just how important the situation is. The term false teachers, if you care about the Greek, the pseudo-prophets here, is used 11 times in the New Testament. And always, of course, negatively, but negatively about enemies of the church and enemies of Christ. In 2 Peter 2.1, Peter says this. He mentions that false teachers will arise and they will come in and introduce heresies into the church. They did it then, they do it now. And the Lord, even in the Gospels, talks about how attractive these people will be to people in the world. And John, as we see in verse 5, goes on to say, the world listens to such teachers.

[18:10] This demonic spirit is a real pain and problem for the church. And it is something that the world accepts, but we as Christians must be more discerning. You know, in this era of the church, when John was writing, it was a particularly dangerous situation. Because consider the condition of the church at that time. When John was writing 1 John, there was no completed New Testament canon.

They didn't have the luxury of having the Bible in its completion before them. And so what you had was a lot of house churches during this era. And I believe they're all scripturally, of course, organized with elders and deacons. But nonetheless, they met in houses. And they were very much reliant on apostolic emissaries and the apostles themselves coming to them with an orally communicating right doctrine and a right understanding of church practice. But what happens when you get false teachers come into the mix? Well, then that sows all sorts of confusion within the church. And it's why it's a key portion of John's warning here. And even in the second epistle, he warns the church about this dark influence. And these wicked teachers, these agents of Satan, were very crafty individuals.

You know, they went as far as to circulate letters that they would claim would come from the apostles. And we have Paul's testimony to this in 2 Thessalonians 2.2. Do not be quickly shaken in mind or alarm, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. So these false teachers were circulating letters supposedly from Paul or from the other apostles and sending them to the church. And it was discouraging the members of the church. They were confused about the day of the Lord and other theology. And this is the way they behave. So the church really has to be on guard to ensure the integrity of any communication they receive. These false prophets who have gone out into the world and has become a recurring challenge for the church, both of that era and throughout the church age, as we've mentioned. Well, we've already talked about the false teachers not always consciously trying to corrupt the church, though, of course, many of them were. But they are satanically influenced.

And so what that means is all false teachers, all false teachers are ultimately spokesmen for Satan. No matter how they present themselves, no matter how they think about themselves, they are ultimately spokesmen for the adversary. And we have to keep that in mind as we reflect upon these false teachers. I think there's one small other element to the idea that the false prophets have gone out into the world. You might recall there's a famous verse here in 1 John, 1 John 2.19, that talks about apostasy. People who were once Christians and then they leave the church. John puts it this way in this verse. They went out from us, people who supposedly were Christians, 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. So you have this idea of the false churches coming out of somewhere and going into the world. What I think this indicates is the false teachers, many of them were in the church, in the legitimate church, pretending to be Christians for a long time. And then they come out and they seek to corrupt that very church.

And I think you see that as people come out of churches today, even. They can come out into strange religions or at least come out and be very harsh against the church from some of the church's strongest enemies. They're at least unintentionally strong advocates for the enemy.

[21 : 45] And so I think there's some applications we have for our modern era that this is not, as we've mentioned, not just an issue that afflicted Paul. It's a serious issue for the church even today.

We might think about some of those people who do come out of the church, these ex-believers, these ex-vangelicals, people who are deconstructing or whatever they call apostasy today. They come out of the church and what do they want to do? A lot of times they want to encourage other people to come out as well. In their mind, they've become enlightened. They understand the truth about scripture and religion and they want you to be as enlightened as well. So they beckon you out of the church. I think that's an example of a false teacher. Or maybe more on point to what John is specifically talking about. What about professed Christian leaders who are out there who claim to be orthodox Christian leaders? They might even have a big audience in the world.

But yet, under the veil of orthodoxy and the veil of belief, they depart from what the scripture says. They depart from the historical faith. I can think of one well-known minister. I won't necessarily use his name. But every time I hear about him, it seems like he adopts a new heresy, yet he claims to be part of the evangelical church, as though he slowly tries to lead people away from a historic and scriptural understanding of what Christianity is. And then I think one other category in which we interact are people who claim to be Christians, but they claim to be Christians in a different sense.

They might even claim to be the true Christians of the true church. They hold to some doctrinal truth. They may hold to the belief in the deity of Christ and the Trinity and the like. But they add things.

They add the traditions of men. And they try to present themselves as the true Christians and encourage other Christians, true believers or true Christians, to come out and join them in their assemblies and in their false systems. And all these combined, there's different tactics they use, but all of them do different things to try to lead the church astray. And when the church puts down its guard, it will be led astray. The church here is called by John to be vigilant and to be discerning so we are not seduced by corrupt leaders and corrupt authorities. Well, of all that, I think John has made a strong case that this is an important issue for us, something we need to be discerning about and well consider. And so John finally does get to the point where he will tell us, okay, John, how do we discern who is a false teacher and who is not? And in verses 2 and 3, he gets into that. He tells us how we can identify these individuals. Paul has already given us some insight as a test as how we can evaluate if somebody is a false teacher or not. Recall, they come in with another Jesus than the true Jesus. They come in with a different spirit than the

[24 : 33] Holy Spirit. And they preach a gospel that differs from the gospel that the apostles pass down to us and is in the Holy Scripture as he rebukes the Corinthians in the previous passage we looked at.

But here is John's test. Here is John's rubric for how we engage in this evaluation. If you look at verse 2, he puts it this way, at least in the English Standard Version, by this, or we could say, in this way, you know the Spirit of God. So this is how you're going to know the Spirit of God.

By the test I'm about to elaborate on, you will know if the person is directed by God's Spirit or if they are directed by a foreign spirit. Stated otherwise is a question, perhaps we can put it this way. How can we know if someone has the Spirit of God or a false spirit? And here in verses 2 and 3 are the prongs, pardon me, the elements of the test. One, does the purported Christian, this is my phrasing, my paraphrasing, does the purported Christian acknowledge that Jesus was truly incarnate in the flesh? Does a teacher truly acknowledge the incarnation of Jesus Christ and his humanity?

And two, does he confess Jesus? And those may sound very similar, but I think there's a nuance, a distinction that John is drawing here. First, to take a look at the first prong of the first element, I think what's teaching is the incarnation is the key facet of legitimate Christian faith and theology. If somebody does not embrace the incarnation, they are not a Christian. The teacher I was referencing earlier, one of his first heresies was he didn't seem to think that was a big deal to believe in the incarnation or not. So I think that's a mark of a false teacher. They deviate from the incarnation, the humanity of Christ, the bodily resurrection, the virgin birth. These are people who are not faithful to the Word of God. In fact, this is so important to John in his gospel. In John 1.14, he puts it this way, It seems like the incarnation is pretty important to John who writes that gospel and, of course, is writing to us now and here. Now, John may have a certain group of people in mind as he writes this.

So I'm going to throw a big word to you, but I think you probably have some understanding of what I'm saying and we'll unpack it a little bit as well. I think what he's referring to here is something that I would call a proto-Gnostic philosophy. And that might, if you know anything about the Gnostics, that might mean a little bit to you. The Gnostics were people who believed, supposedly Christians, who believed that they had special knowledge. And part of that special knowledge was that anything material, including our bodies, so anything material in the world is inherently corrupted.

[27 : 08] That's not the fall. It's not meaning it's corrupted by the fall of man. It means in its essence, in its creation, it is corrupted. Well, what does that mean? It would mean that our Lord couldn't have an actual body of flesh, right?

Because if everything's corrupted, if everything material, everything bodily is corrupted, he couldn't have been incarnated in the flesh. There couldn't be a bodily resurrection. And the reason I call it proto-Gnostic philosophy is because that philosophy probably wasn't fully developed at this time, but there were some elements of it most likely already being developed at that point in time. So that may have been what he had in mind here, but nonetheless, it is applicable today as we see those heresies being endorsed by other groups, even if they don't call themselves Gnostics or whatever they may have called themselves previously.

But John goes beyond the humanity of Christ in discussing what a false teacher believes or doesn't believe, because he tells us here that a Christian will also truly believe in Jesus.

That is, not just his humanity, but he will embrace everything about the personhood of Jesus and his atoning works. This is the way John puts in verse 3. Every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. So anyone who does not have a true profession of Jesus is not from God. The false teacher will not profess Jesus, or at least not confess the Jesus that John knows. He will not embrace the incarnation, of course, but he will embrace the identity of Jesus, or the lordship of the Savior as well. None of those things are things that he fully embraces. There's actually a small nuance in the original language, in the Greek language.

So in verse 3 here, it reads, every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. If we were to translate that very literally from the Greek, it would read this. Every spirit that does not confess the Jesus. So there's a definite article there. So it does not confess the Jesus, or this Jesus.

[29 : 05] And the reason I point that out there isn't to show that I know some Greek, which I know very little, but it's to show that there is a point here, that John is very, very specific about the Jesus he speaks about.

He's saying, essentially, anyone who does not confess the Jesus I am speaking about does not know God. Because you see in the world today, right, there's plenty of people who claim to know a Jesus, whether it's false religions, or even just general spirituality. You even see celebrities and sports stars who would have nothing to do with the Lord, wearing crosses on them and the like. They know a Jesus, but they don't know the Jesus of the Bible. They don't know the Jesus a true believer knows.

And John is being very specific today about to that point. This has always, of course, been an issue for the church. So if we put John's statements together, we put his two elements of his test together, we can see that if somebody rejects the incarnation and the virgin birth and the bodily resurrection of the Lord, if they reject that Jesus is the Christ, if they reject that he is the Son of God, if they can't confess those things at a bare minimum, they are not of God.

And if they are teachers, their teaching is to be rejected. I think there's an application for us here today in the modern world.

Sometimes you hear Christian teachers, whether they're well-known or otherwise, and they say something that just seems strange. It doesn't seem to line up with Orthodox Christianity. I think what John is calling us to do here is to test what do they truly believe about Christ and how zealous are they for a true biblical Christology.

[30 : 43] Is it just something they can take or leave? Is it something they're really passionate about? You see, if you find error in what they believe about Christ and how important they see a true Christology, a true understanding of Christ, you're probably going to find error in the rest of their claims.

And even then you can dismiss whatever false or strange assertions they make in a different realm. In John's view, it all comes down to this. What do you know? What do you believe about Christ?

John stated earlier in 1 John 2.22 and 23, Who is the liar? But he who denies Jesus is the Christ. This is the Antichrist, who denies the Father and the Son.

No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. Only those who truly know Jesus know the Father. Only those people are truly saved.

And it leads into, the statement leads into what we see further in verse 3, as John continues his argument, where he says, The spirit of those who are Christ-deniers are specifically people who have the spirit of the Antichrist.

[31 : 47] You know, John's, we hear the word Antichrist used a lot. You can even hear it in popular culture used at times, or people don't necessarily like. But John's the only author in the New Testament who ever uses the term, at least in the original, Antichrist.

Four times here in this epistle, once in his second epistle. And when he's referring to the Antichrist, it's a reference to the person Satan will eventually empower, at least as I see it, eventually empower to serve as the chief opponent of Christ in his church in the future, as my eschatology would inform me.

However, there are secondary Antichrists, like these false teachers, who are presently at work in this world. And once again, a heretic may not be aware of the master he truly serves, but John is pretty clear here and elsewhere, that who he serves, or who he is in league with, is the devil himself.

1 John 3.10, By this is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil. There's one camp or the other, one party or the other, one family or the other.

There's no in-between. You either serve God, or you serve Satan. Well, the people, Christians that John is writing to, have heard, and we have heard, that the Antichrist is coming into the world.

[33 : 01] But what he tells us here, is that the Antichrist is already here, and he's working. And he's working this deception, through these false teachers, these false prophets, about Christ, and about Christ's work.

And so John, at that point, concludes his warning about these false teachers. And it's very much a negative statement he's making here to us, is it not something to make us wary of supposed authorities, who are trying to corrupt the church.

But John shifts here now in verse 4, to give us a word of encouragement, if you will, if you look in verse 4. There's a great contrast to the way he's addressing us now, versus how he was previously addressing us, in regards to the false teachers.

As we mentioned already, he uses this terminology, little children. Once again, reinforcing this pastoral, fatherly sort of advice, as he comes to us, as he speaks to us. And he says that there is a difference, between us, and those false prophets.

And he gives us perhaps, one of the clearest words of encouragement, we could have. You are of God. Clear distinction between being in the camp of God, and the camp of Antichrist.

[34 : 10] You see, just as those who have failed the examination he had earlier, people who don't truly confess the true Jesus, are of Satan, are of the enemy, the Christian who passes that test, who truly believes, and has a true confession in Jesus Christ, can have great confidence, that he knows God, and is of God.

And today, if that is your sincere testimony, demonstrated by good works, as John has spoken about, like loving the brethren, and the like, then you too, this morning, can have absolute confidence, that you are of God.

You are not like the false teachers. You pass the test. You are of God. And there is a reason, John goes further, as to why he has such confidence, in better things for us, versus these false teachers, these false prophets.

He says, that we have overcome. We have overcome, what the apostates, and what the false teachers, have presented. We have not departed from orthodoxy.

Recall, the apostates make it clear, they are apostates, because they leave the church. But we, if we are true Christians, we persevere in the faith. We persevere in the faith. The spirits of the false prophets, that are attractive to the world, but the Christian, the true Christian, does not listen to them.

[35 : 31] Instead, they listen to the voice of the shepherd, for John 10, 27. And John even goes further. He explains, not only do we not hear these false prophets, and are not seduced by them, and don't come out like the apostates, from the church, there's a reason, why that takes place.

And he says it, if you look in verse 4, the reason why, regenerate Christians, don't depart from the faith, is that there's, one greater, in us, working in us, than these, wicked forces.

And you might think, who he has in mind here, because of, the discussion so far, about various spirits, and leading into this, is a discussion of the Holy Spirit, that the one, greater in us, who is greater, in us, that he's referring to, is the Holy Spirit.

Well, I'd be happy to talk to anybody, afterwards, about the details of this, but the grammar, in the Greek, doesn't allow for that. The grammar, in the Greek, doesn't allow for that. It can't be the Holy Spirit, that he's referring to here.

The one, who is greater in us, to whom John is referring, is the second person, of the Trinity. It's the Lord, Jesus Christ, that he's invoking. And so, it's true, that the Spirit, doesn't dwell us.

[36 : 39] I believe, Romans 6, teaches us, that we have union in Christ, through the Spirit of God. That is true, the Spirit's in us, and he puts us in Christ, if you will, or puts Christ in us, as we might phrase it. But it is Christ, who allows us, to abide in the truth, and to understand his identity.

John 16, 33, I have said these things to you, this is Christ speaking, that in me, you may have peace. In the world, you have tribulation, but take heart, I have overcome the world.

Christ has overcome the world, and that's what allows us, to overcome the false prophets, and the false teachers. The Lord's presence in us, through the Spirit, causes the Christian, to reject false doctrine, and a corrupted version of Jesus.

It's Christ, who saves you, but it's also Christ, who keeps you grounded in truth, and grounded in orthodoxy. And this is in strong contrast, to those who have ultimately, been enticed by the world, who listen to the prince, the power of the air, and are drawn into darkness.

But Christians, are not like that. They are not seduced by Satan, and they don't go into the world. I think there's an encouraging, um, response to that, or something that, um, is born out of that understanding.

- [37 : 53] Consider this. You probably have, and likely will, continue to receive, all the arguments of the world, different religions, different versions of Christianity, and atheists, and humanists, and the like, throw all sorts of arguments, that you may or may not, be able to articulate, a strong response against.

And that may be discouraging to you. And your personal shortcomings, may discourage you as well. And you might be discouraged as well, when you see conflicts, within the church, and without the church.

Scandals that arise, conflicts between people, all sorts of, unfortunate things we see in the church, and outside the church. All these things, may discourage you. But if you are a true Christian, because you have Christ in you, you will never be overwhelmed, by those arguments, or overwhelmed, by the situations, that cause you to depart, from the faith.

You always remain, steadfast in the faith, because of Christ, if you are truly his. And that is an encouragement, as we persevere in the Lord, or as he causes us to persevere, we can put it that way.

Well, while the true church, will never give, these false prophets, these false teachers, a receptive audience, there are people, who will listen to them, sadly. If you look down at verse three, the first five, pardon me.

- [39 : 06] The world often, is very receptive, to outright paganism, is it not? They'll listen to anything, listen to all sorts, of ungodly things. And Christians, of course, can be tempted, to do so as well.

But, there does seem to be here, a sense that the people, we are speaking about, aren't just these, outright pagans. They have some, veneer of Christianity. And so, there is some element, some version, of Christianity, that's attractive, to the world, so called Christianity, at least.

The way John puts it here, is they speak from the world, and the world, listens to them. Now, John, as we spoke about, his primary, audience, or maybe his primary focus, and talks about, heresies and the like, was those Gnostic individuals, that would make some sense.

Because, the Gnostic viewpoint, was a combination, of Christianity, and Greek philosophy, right? And so, that would be very attractive, to a high-minded, philosophical Greek. Well, okay, maybe I don't like, pure Christianity, but if you merge, Christianity with my philosophy, then it becomes, more acceptable.

And don't we kind of, see that today? You see that broadly, and you see that narrowly, at times. And what I mean by that, is broadly, liberal Christianity, can be very attractive, to the world. These are Christians, so called, who emphasize, charitable works, and political activism, political justice, and the like.

- [40 : 24] They claim to be, faithful Christians. In some cases, they claim to even be, more faithful Christians, because they, as I see it, actively embrace, the biblical commands, to assist the poor, and the oppressed.

Yet, all their good works, are meaningless, by John's test. Because, they reject, the true Jesus. All they see him as, is that merely, at best, a good teacher, and a good example.

And so, for all their, supposed good works, they gut the core, of Christianity. They're false teachers. The world is happy, to hear these Christians. Those Christians, are okay. Or maybe a little bit, more narrowly, think about the, the Mormons, the Mormon religion.

They insist, they take great pains, to just want to be seen, as another Christian, denomination, right? But when you start, digging into their theology, you see, that they believe, very strange things, that men can become gods.

They reject the Trinity. They even believe, ancient Israel, was polytheistic. So it's pretty clear, the Jesus they know, is a different Jesus, not the Jesus of the scripture. But the world, at times, may hear their voice.

[41 : 28] Now, they get mocked, alongside us, for being conservatively, oriented, and the like. But, certain people are, attracted to, their sort of religion. After all, it's very impersonal. Not really a personal, relationship of Jesus, even the Jesus, of their mind.

It's non-convicting. It's not exclusive. They don't believe, that just Mormons, go to their version of heaven. Other people can go there. It's just, the Mormons, kind of get the, top tier treatment, I guess, in their perspective.

But, that could be, attractive to people, because it's a religion, without Christ, without real conviction there. And, the Mormons, present themselves, as very conservative, individuals, good neighbors, and the like.

Once again, that can be attractive. And, we, as time, could be tempted to, embrace any, and all of these people, because, we want to have a, a broad unity. And, that's why, John's test is so important.

It can be easy, or even tempted, to have this false unity, or to desire this false unity. We might even feel grateful, that there are other people, who are at least willing, to call themselves Christians, in this, increasingly, unbelieving world.

[42 : 31] But, this Christianity, is a counterfeit Christianity. Right? It does not save, it only leads people, into confusion, and away, from the truth.

We, cannot fall prey to that, and that's why, this attesting is important. But, John quickly shifts, his comments here, in verse 6, because he thinks, once again, of better things for us, those who at least, are, are true Christians.

It's not our situation here, to be deceived in this way. Because, why? We are of God, as John puts it here, in 6. And look again, we mentioned earlier on, about the pronoun usage, which is always, the most interesting thing, to look at, but there's a, there's a point here.

Beforehand, he was exhorting us, he's talking to us, as you, the second person pronoun. But now, it's we again, it's we, all of us, we, are of God. He's including himself, in that, to show this great distinction, between all, who believe in Jesus, all who are saved, and all, who reject Jesus, and are, these false professors, these false teachers.

And what's more, as John puts it, as we speak, and as we teach, unlike with the, worldly teachers, we will have a credibility, with a believing audience.

[43 : 43] Those who hear, the gospel, as it's revealed, through the Lord Jesus Christ, in the scripture, and accept it, and turn to the Lord, they are of God, as well. People who have, already either accepted the Lord, or God is drawing them, to himself, they will give us, as an audience, they will listen, to the gospel, they will listen, to a scriptural presentation.

Consider Cornelius, in the book of Acts, in chapter 10. He's described, as you might recall, as a God-fearer. He had an interest, in the God of Israel, but it seems clear, that he didn't truly, actually believe, he still needed, to come to faith.

But, as God is drawing him, to himself, when Peter comes, and preaches, the gospel of grace, Peter believes, and he receives the word. We have an audience, with those, who are God's people, or God is drawing, to himself.

As John 10, 27, 28, puts in the King James Version, my sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, and I give unto them, eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man, pluck them, out of my hand.

Evangelistically, we're called, to go out, to the entire world, and we should have a heart, for everyone, we preach to, an earnest desire, that all souls, will come to Christ.

[44 : 59] But, I think what this teaches us, is we shouldn't be offended, or discouraged, when the message is resisted. Because there are some, who hear the voice of God, the voice of the shepherd, and there are others, who will not.

As John goes on, to say here in verse 6, whoever is not from God, does not listen to us. As we invoke the scripture, and tell them, these words of truth, some will hear, but when the scripture, falls on death ears, it really falls on, the ears of the dead, at least the spiritually dead, unless God would quicken their heart, in the future.

And this is the second element, of John's test here, as he puts it. By this we know, the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error. Those, as we've seen, who hear the truth rightly, and receive it, and confess the true Jesus, this person is a person, the spirit of truth.

They have the Holy Spirit, or they will have the Holy Spirit, when they're saved. But those who reject it, are deceived, and they embrace the spirit, of the Antichrist, and of Satan.

The false prophets, and the false teachers, are of Satan, being deceived, and deceiving, the world. As we draw to a conclusion, we know that Satan, is a powerful enemy, not to be trifled with.

[46 : 19] He influences political powers, he influences the prince of Persia, in Daniel chapter 10, and the king of Tyre, in Ezekiel 18, and the king of Babylon, in Isaiah 14.

He, as we saw in Job, he goes to and fro, across the earth, accusing God's saints. He's a lion, seeking to devour men, in 1 Peter 5, 8, and Ephesians 6, 11, tells us that we need to put on, the armor of God, to protect themselves, from the wiles of the devil.

And there's more, and more examples we could give, if we had more time. But clearly, it is wise to be aware, of the influence, Satan and his minions have, in this world. They are crafty. We saw how they even, tried to circulate, these false letters.

And they seek to undermine, the church at every opportunity, through very creative, and deceptive means. And John's test for us here, is to consider the source, when it comes to authority.

When men speak, do they speak from a clear, gospel and scriptural foundation, or not? Charm, or intellect, or any other factor, cannot override, this consideration.

[47 : 22] If you are here this morning, and you do not believe, well, I think we've touched upon, what the gospel is. We are sinners, the scripture tells us, and the perfect son of God, died in our place.

And if we repent, and believe, we can be reconciled, with God the Father. Any other declaration, any declaration, that takes issue with that, that seeks to persuade you, of an alternative philosophy, no matter how compelling, it may sound, is merely the words of Satan.

The true gospel, is to believe, in the Lord Jesus Christ. And anything that hedges on that, as we've seen today, is the teaching of false teachers. It is a demonic, satanic teaching. You would be well, to ignore that, and believe what the scripture says.

But if you are a believer, this morning, and I think we are called, the Jew, as John calls us, tells us here, not to believe every spirit, but to test the spirits, to see whether they are from God.

Failure to do so, has wrecked many local assemblies, and left men spiritually famished, and corrupted. I think it's very clear here, from John's words, that we cannot take, this task lately, brothers and sisters.

[48 : 34] Let's pray together. Oh gracious Heavenly Father, Lord, I know there is much in this text, much that wasn't even conveyed this morning, much that was conveyed by, somewhat of limited abilities, but Lord God, I pray that, the truths here, would permeate our hearts this morning, not just be, text we read, or speech Lord, but help us understand, just how, precarious of a situation, it is, when these, false teachers, roam around, throughout the world, seeking to drive men, and women away, from the truth.

May you give us strength, to resist that, and to test these teachers, to know, who is from God, and who is not, and to walk faithfully, and rightly, gently Lord, but wisely.

May you protect us, from the evil one, and if anyone here, has been persuaded by Satan, for an alternative philosophy, oh Lord, may you give them a right mind, to believe, if any Christian here, is straying from the truth, may you draw them back, Lord, as your children, may you bless this assembly, Lord, and let it be a beacon, a lighthouse for the truth, in the midst of, such darkness in this world.

We thank you for this time, and we pray these things, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.