

# So That You May Know

## An Expository Study of the Epistle of **1 John**

### Chapter 16- The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error

#### 161. Testing the Spirits- Part 12

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WAOY Tuesday 03/04/08

Welcome again, my beloved in Jesus Christ. We're continuing our verse by verse "journey" through the Epistle of **1John**, and today I want to continue to examine what John taught about "Testing the Spirits". So let's open our Bibles and read **1John 4: 1-6-** again together:

- 1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.**
- 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God;**
- 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the *spirit* of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.**
- 4 You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.**
- 5 They are from the world; therefore they speak *as* from the world, and the world listens to them.**
- 6 We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.**

Now on the last broadcast, we were going over just who John was referring to here in verse 1 by looking at the three major heresies that attacked the Church during the age of the Apostles.

Now we have gone over the heresy of both the Judaizers and the Antinomians- who fought against Grace from two different sides- and today I want to look at the third major heresy which crept into the church while the Bible as still in production and that is the heresy called, Gnosticism.

Now Gnosticism is a lot like the modern so-called New Age Movement in that there isn't just one kind of Gnostic beliefs- but an

entire collection of offshoots of that paganism. Gnosticism comes from the Greek word, "Gnosis" which means: "to know". So the Gnostics put great emphasis on what they called, "divine knowledge" that was hidden in codes or secret ceremonies and which could only be revealed to certain people.

We have modern equivalents of the ancient Gnostic cults in our day like Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientology, and Christian Science which teach many of the very same things that these ancient heretics taught 1900 years ago. So, we can see that although the heresy of Gnosticism is ancient- it is by no means extinct.

Many of these modern groups have tried very hard over the last several years to try blend in with Christianity- but we must be faithful, beloved, to sound a clear trumpet and with love and gentleness and be faithful to teach that these cults are not Christian. And the reason that we can say this is because their view of Grace and the Character and Nature of God the Father and the Person of Jesus Christ is radically different from what the Bible declares to be true. So even though many of these people are nice and even very moral- they are at odds with Divine Revelation over serious issues of eternal matters and that is not okay.

**Jude 4** tells us that certain men will creep into the Church who will attack the Gospel along these lines and the Gnostics did this late in the first century and early in the second. I have a very in depth study on all seven of the major heresies that I think is about 54 messages and if you would like a copy- please call or write and let me know and I will send one out to you.

Now while God used Paul and Peter and James and Barnabas to defend the Faith against both the Judaizers and the Antinomians- it feel primarily to the Apostle John to defend Biblical Christianity against the attacks of the Gnostics.

So part of the reason that John wrote the Epistle that we are studying was to teach the men and women of the Church how to deal with Gnosticism when it reared its ugly head.

Now there is much about Gnosticism that is complicated and hard to grasp, but if you can get this main point- you can get the gist of what Gnosticism is and why the Church fought against it in the first century. The Gnostics didn't believe that men are saved from their sins by Grace through Faith in Christ alone. The Gnostics believed that saving Faith

was the result of “receiving” or of “being enlightened” to hidden or secret information that was buried in codes amongst the ancient writings of the Gnostic mystics. The Gnostics didn’t believe in the Words of Scripture- so they fought against the inspired writings of the Apostles and the Old Testament prophets and attacked the authenticity of the Bible. They still do this today. This is why the Christian Scientists and the Mormons, and all the other Gnostic cults that are alive today have “other revelations” about Jesus which are outside the orthodox and inspired writings that came from the heart and the mind of God.

The Gnostics believed that all spirit was good and that all flesh was bad. So, this is why they taught that Christ was not a real live human being- because that would have made Him evil and sinful. They taught that Christ was a spiritual *concept*- not a literal human being.

And this is why John wrote **1John 4:2-6**- so I want to read those verses again:

**2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God;**

**3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the *spirit* of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.**

**4 You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.**

**5 They are from the world; therefore they speak *as* from the world, and the world listens to them.**

**6 We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.**

Now when I was first saved in the early 1970’s- I thought that these verses had to do with Ouija Boards, Séances, Astrology, and things like that. Now whereas those things are indeed evil and believers should have no part with them- the Apostle John was writing very specifically here of the Gnostics who had infiltrated the Church and were teaching that Jesus was not a real live human being.

So John instructs the believers of the first century how dangerous the Gnostics were by telling them in verse 2 that anyone who is truly

born again has to believe or confess that Jesus Christ was not only God- but was also a real live human being.

Now please hear me on this issue- beloved. The comprehension of Jesus in both His humanity and His Deity is the source of probably more misunderstanding and false teaching than any other concept in the Bible. That is why we need to get this right.

So in order to fully understand what the Bible teaches about Jesus- we must try to grasp this concept: Jesus was and is the most unique Person in all of history. No one was ever like Jesus and no one could ever be like Him. In fact, Jesus was so special and so unique that words had to be invented to try to describe Him. The word, “incarnate” didn’t exist until God became and Man. The terms, “virgin birth” and Divinity came into use by the Church to try to grasp one of the most mysterious acts in Creation. John puts it this way in **John 1:1**:

**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**

Then he went on to say in verse 14:

**And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.**

So this Word that John says in verse 1 was *with* God and that *was* God was also in verse 14 made flesh and became human. 700 years earlier, Isaiah said that this Word would be born of a virgin and Luke testifies in his Gospel Account that Mary was that virgin and that Jesus was Immanuel. So as unusual as this may seem to us as humans- we are left with inspired scripture clearly teaching us that God became human; that God became a man; that God took on human flesh; that God draped flesh around Himself and was born as a man.

Now this should take our breath away. This should cause us to wonder after God and to be amazed at God and to fear Him and love Him and obey Him.

Those who can read what John says here and act as though this is no big deal are not realizing the significance of what John is saying here. And the fact that after 2,000 years of this being true- today- the Person of Jesus Christ is the single most debated and misunderstood and

attacked concept in the Bible.

So, when we talk about Jesus- we must realize that we are talking about a Person Who is unlike anyone else. The third century theologian, John Chrysostom said this about Jesus:

“Jesus is fully God and fully Man in the same body at the same time without conflict or contradiction”

The Apostle John wrote in **John 3:16** that Jesus was “**the only begotten Son**”. Now actually, that translation is not as good as it could be because in the Greek- John was actually saying here that Jesus was “**the one and only of the Father**”- once again showing us the uniqueness of Jesus Christ.

Now usually false teachings and false religions attack the Deity of Jesus Christ. They are perfectly willing to agree that Christ was a good man; or even a prophet or an angel or an example- but all wrongly agree on one point- that Jesus was not God.

But Jesus said that He was God; and the Apostles said that he was God and Jesus allowed people to worship Him and so if Jesus was not God; if Jesus was simply a good moral man or an angle or even a prophet- Then He is a liar and He was encouraging idolatry by allowing people to worship Him.

The cults and false religions have done a good job of confusing this issue in the mind of many people today and that is a shame. There was a time when people who went to Church were taught these things and the Church and the nation was so much stronger back then. Today we have filled our Churches with entertainment and easy sermons which make no demands on our lives and the result is that we don't know Divine Truth and the cults are growing by double digits.

In that study on the History of Heresy that I was talking about- you will learn that there was a time when the Church was so passionate about the issue of the Deity of Jesus Christ that they were willing to fight for 42 years over one letter of one Greek word being added to their Doctrine- because to add that one letter to that one word would have diminished the way we understood the fact that Jesus was God. Today we are willing to accept anyone into the Church as being believers even if they resolutely deny the Deity of Jesus Christ- and I find that to be unbelievable.

Many of us may be confused about the Divinity of Jesus Christ today- but the Jews who persecuted Him were not confused at all. They knew full well that Jesus was unashamedly making the claim that He was God and that is precisely why the Jews wanted to kill Him.

What is strange though is the Gnostic heretic of John's day fully accepted the Deity of Jesus- but rejected His humanity and that is why John writes here to warn us that those who deny that Jesus has come in the flesh are not of God. So Lord willing- we will get into that in more detail on the next broadcast as we continue our journey through the Epistle of **1John**. May God help us all.

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