

18. Explain the statement, "No Christian has any right to a guilt complex."
19. One of the greatest blessings of the Christian life is realized forgiveness. Explain this statement in light of I John 3:20.
20. The only basis upon which one's heart can fail to condemn him is _____
21. The experience of answered prayer is evidence of _____ according to I John 3:22.
22. What are the two conditions which must be present in our lives in order to pray effectively?
23. When the word "father" was mentioned in the society of the first century, the first impression was of parental _____.
24. Why does the term "father" not suggest authority to us today?
25. Which is more important, the question, "Who is Jesus," or our personal belief in the answer, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God?"
26. _____ is still the only hope of healing the divisions caused by false teaching.
27. How does the anointing of the Spirit demonstrate that we are in the Christ?

CHAPTER XI

DIVINE SONSHIP DEMONSTRATED BY CONFESSION OF CHRIST AND ATTENTION TO TRUTH

(The Third Test . . . The Second Time)

I John 4:1-6

A. *The Text*

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world. (2) Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: (3) and every

spirit that confesseth not Jesus is not of God: and this is the spirit of the antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it cometh; and now it is in the world already. (4) Ye are of God, my little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. (5) They are of the world: therefore speak they as of the world, and the world heareth them. (6) We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he who is not of God heareth us not. By this we know the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error."

B. *Try to Discover*

1. How does the presence of the Spirit prove we have been begotten of God?
2. Are there preachers (or prophets) who deliberately and knowingly preach what they know to be false?
3. Are men today as conscious of the "spirit world" as they were in the first century?
4. Why is the Spirit apparently not as active in the church today as in John's time?
5. When one denies Jesus as Christ, what is he actually denying?
6. Why will false teachers not listen to truth?
7. Are there people whose concept of life and reality are such that the preaching of the Gospel to them is useless?

C. *Paraphrase*

"Beloved! not in every spirit believe ye, But test the spirits whether they are of God; Because many false prophets have gone out into the world. (2) Hereby do ye perceive the Spirit of God:—Every spirit that confesseth Jesus Christ as having come in flesh Is of God; (3) And every spirit that does not confess Jesus Of God is not. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, Touching which ye have heard that it cometh: Even now is it in the world already. (4) Ye are of God dear children, and have overcome them; Because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. (5) They are of the world: For this cause of the world they speak, And the world unto them doth hearken. (6) We are of God: He that is getting to understand God hearkeneth unto us, Whose is not of God hearkeneth not unto us: From this perceive we—The spirit of truth And the spirit of error."

D. *Comments*

1. Preliminary Remarks

"*Ek tou theou* is translated *of God* in most English versions. The idea is source or origin. Hence I have rendered it *from God*. Literally it may almost be translated *out of God*.

In essence, the phrase expresses the result of having been begotten of God. One who has been begotten of God possesses a life which is from, or out of God. It takes its source or origin in Him and issues from Him.

When John says certain people are not *from God*, we must conclude they they are not begotten of God. When He says certain ones are *from God*, we are to remember that they are begotten of God.

2. Translation and Comments

a. Call from credulity . . . v. 1

(1) "Beloved, stop believing every spirit, but test the spirit if it is from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."

The practice of love by a Christian ought never take the form of gullibility. The sons of God are never to be tolerant to the point of being credulous. There *are* false teachers and preachers.

In verse one, John uses the term "beloved" for the third time in this letter. It is not a cliché, but rather expresses genuine endearment. It is John's love for God's children that causes him to warn them of false teachers. Modern disciples of love may well profit from his example!

The outward evidence of the Spirit in the church was much more apparent in John's day than ours. The manifestations of the spirit were so numerous that Paul lists among them the ability to *discern* spirits. (I Cor. 12:10)

In such a situation, the gnostic heresy might pass as another manifestation of the spirit. The claim to special knowledge might be taken as knowing all mysteries and having all knowledge. (I Cor. 13:2) Indeed, such seems to be the case, for John's aorist imperative is "stop believing every spirit."

Attention must be given to the Scriptural meaning of "prophet." Too many have mistakenly thought a prophet to be a glorified fortune teller; a sort of divine crystal ball gazer. Such is not the case, either in the Old Testament or the New.

To be sure, the prophet, in performing his mission often referred to the future. The workings of God in man are primarily future oriented.

However, the watchword of the prophet of God is not "It shall come to pass," but "thus saith the Lord!" The prophet in both the Old and New Testament was to make the will of God known to His people. John's command here is that, before we do what a prophet says God wants us to do, we are to determine if the prophet is actually from God.

The relevancy of I John to our modern theological climate becomes vividly obvious in this verse. The need today for a divine standard by which to determine the truth or falsehood of religious teaching is great. As then, so today, many false prophets have gone out into the world.

b. The acid test . . . v. 2 & 3

(2) "Know in this the Spirit of God; every spirit confessing Jesus as Christ has come in flesh is of God, (3) and every spirit not confessing Jesus is not from God; and this is the one of antichrist, the one of which you have heard that it is coming."

The abundance of spiritual activity in the first century demanded a test, a criterion by which the child of God might determine the validity of any spirit's claim to divine origin. The demand of our present theological climate for such a test is much more subtle but no less urgent.

The acid test supplied by John is the sharp contrast between denying and confessing the co-existent deity and humanity of Jesus. "Every spirit confessing Jesus as Christ has come in flesh is of God."

Contained in this confession is everything that makes the Christian faith unique. The ethical teachings of Jesus can be reproduced, albeit somewhat crudely, from the great pagan religions of the world, but none of these claim for their leaders the incarnate deity which John claims for the Man of Galilee.

To confess Jesus as Christ is to say that Jesus is anointed by God to fill the office of Messiah. He is therefore recognized as prophet; the One Who is to make God's will known to God's people. He is recognized as priest; the One Who offers sacrifice and mediates between God and man. He is King; the final and absolute Ruler Whose word is law for God's people.

It is not enough to confess that a man named Jesus lived, and lived a sinless life, and died rather than renounce His own teaching. He is to be confessed as Christ; the long awaited fulfillment of the covenant.

Nor is it enough to confess that a man named Jesus was anointed as Messiah. He is to be confessed as having come in flesh. John 1:14 is perhaps the most concise statement possible of the essence of Christian

faith. The man Jesus, whom we confess as Christ, is not of human origin.

He is eternal, He was with God in the relationship of an equal, He is Himself Deity. (Cf. John 1:1) In order to accomplish the eternal purpose of God in man, He bought man's redemption with His own blood. (Cf. Eph. 1:7) To do this He became flesh, (Cf. John 1:14), thus identifying Himself with those He came to redeem. (Cf. Hebrews 2:14-18)

It is in the capacity of Divine Redeemer that He voluntarily submitted Himself to learn obedience as a servant (Cf. Hebrews 5:8), emptying Himself of His Heavenly nature to die as a man for men. (Phil. 2:6-8)

To be recognized as originating in God; to be Christian, the message of a prophet must set forth this vital truth about the personal identity of Jesus of Nazareth. It is not enough that the prophet *claim* special enlightenment, either in the form of gnosticism or in the form of intellectual snobbery which refuses to recognize scholarship in anyone who still clings to the good confession.

The testing of the spirits is not, on the other hand, to be made on the basis of what may pass for spiritual activity. The fact that someone may speak in a tongue or heal by the laying on of hands is not proof of divine origin. The test is in the submission of the activity to the Christhood and especially the authority of Jesus as recorded in the inspired record. No matter what a person's spiritual exercise, if he does not recognize and submit to revealed doctrine, his message is not of God.

Again John returns to the spirit of antichrist as the antithesis of Divine Sonship. Again we are reminded of Jesus' own words, "He that is not with me is against me." (Matthew 12:30) (a) Whoever is not confessing that Jesus as Christ has come in flesh is against the anointed ones of God. (See above on I John 2:18-19)

Significantly, in light of modern confusion concerning "The Anti-Christ," John here employs the neuter "it" in reference to the spirit of antichrist, rather than the masculine "he." This would seem to indicate that the spirit of antichrist is the predisposition on the part of all false prophets to oppose God's anointed ones, rather than a personal monster who is to make a dramatic appearance at the end of the present age.

c. Contrast of origins and the consequent contrast of responses
 ... v. 4 & 5

(4) "You are from God, children, and you have overcome them, because the One in you is greater than the one in the world. (5) They are from the world: on account of this they are speaking of worldly (things), and the world is hearing them."

The living Spirit of God is greater than the spirit of the world which in fact is no spirit at all! The Spirit in the children of God is the Holy Spirit; the Third Person of the Godhead. The spirit in the world is, at best, a prejudiced opposition to God's anointed ones on the basis of ignorance and self-worship.

Consequently, the children of God have the assistance of God Himself in their stand against the false prophets, whereas the false prophets are "on their own." It is small wonder that Christians are instructed in the Scripture to be confident of certain victory so long as they remain faithful to Him who sent the Spirit. (Cf. John 16:33)

Just as our anointing guards us from the doctrines of false teachers, (see above on 2:27) so the same anointing guarantees us victory over them. The reason for this is seen in the phrase "from God" as contrasted with "from the world." The diverse destinies of the contrasting kinds of life are inherent in their contrasting origins. The child of God originates in eternity through the divine begetting. Consequently, the child of God is destined for eternity. As the song says:

*"The soul of man is like a waiting falcon;
 When it's released, it's destined for the skies."*

Conversely, the false teacher (and those who believe him) are from the world. Their begetting is not "of God" but "of blood . . . the will of the flesh . . . the will of man." (Cf. John 1:13) Rather than being "destined for the skies" as are those whose lives find their source in God, they are destined to "pass away." (I John 2:17)

The cliché, "birds of a feather flock together", is proven by the fact that the world gives a ready ear to the false teachers whose origin it shares. The Greek philosophy, the oriental mysticism and the corruption of the Gospel of which gnosticism formed a synthesis all found their origin in the world; not in divine revelation. No wonder, then, that the world heard them gladly.

It is ever so with false teachers. Today's "Christian Atheism—God is Dead" theology finds its origin in German rationalism, obsolete modernism, and Neo-orthodoxy's "crisis theology." These are the speculations

of befuddled, bewildered men. Their origins are in the world, not in Divine revelation.

It is no great marvel, then, that these materialistic babblings are readily accepted by the world. The real tragedy lies in the fact that such teachings are able to make inroads into, and often destroy, congregations where once the Gospel of Christ was center. It is because such congregations have failed to heed the warning of John to "test the spirits" by the tests set forth in these verses.

Contemporary left-wing theology began with the denial of the authenticity of the Bible. The Scriptures are "they which bear witness" of Jesus as Christ having come as flesh. The present denial of a transcendent God is the logical conclusion.

Materialism begets materialistic religion, just as surely as God Who is Spirit begets Spiritual life in His children. Theology which takes its source in a competitive world cannot preach a crucified Christ. Doctrine which begins in the exaltation of self may teach a soft petulant tolerance, but it cannot teach a self-crucifying love. A tenet which comes from a philosophy accepting the concept of the survival of the fittest cannot set forth a life which expects to reach its full glory in eternity.

d. False teachers revealed in their refusal to hear truth . . . v. 6
(6) "We are from God: the one who is knowing God is hearing us. The one who is not from God is not hearing us. From this we are knowing the spirit of reality and the spirit of error."

Just as failure to confess Jesus as the incarnate Christ is proof of worldly origin, so refusal to hear the truth is demonstration of the same.

The person who refuses to hear the teaching that the incarnation is indeed historic fact, who sees the acceptance of this truth as "naive and unscholarly" is simply not from God. He has not been begotten of the Father. Not only is his teaching in error, he is himself a fake of the first order!

Those who are of God listen to those who are of God. Those who are of the world listen to those who are of the world. Those who have an increasing experiential knowledge of God hear the truth.

Perhaps the term "Christian Atheism," as it is used to describe the latest Protestant theology is the most vivid present day demonstration of what John is saying. The term is itself contradictory.

The adjective "Christian" comes from the noun Christ. None who

know the meaning of the noun can attach the adjective to atheism. How can the Anointed One of God be in any way related to the denial of God?

It is time the people of God forgot "tolerance" for a moment and apply the test of truth to those claiming to preach the Gospel.

B. Questions for Review

1. What is the meaning of the phrase "of God" or "from God" as used in this passage of I John?
2. At what point does Christian tolerance become gullibility?
3. How do you account for the fact that the outward demonstration of the Spirit was more evident in the first century Church than today?
4. What is the test by which we are to "prove the spirits whether they are of God?"
5. What is the primary work of a prophet?
6. Why do prophets often refer to future events in revealing the present will of God?
7. What does John's test prove about the claim of modern liberals that the Ecumenical Movement is led by the Spirit of God? Explain.
8. Does the *fact* of spiritual activity prove that the activity originates in God? What is the test of Divine origin for such activity?
9. What is the one unique truth of the Christian faith? How does it relate to the uniquely Christian teaching that God is Father to His people?
10. To recognize Jesus as Messiah is to recognize Him as _____, _____ and _____.
11. As Prophet, the Christ is the One Who _____.
12. As Priest, the Christ is the One Who _____.
13. As King, Christ is the One Who is _____.
14. What is the difference between confessing that Jesus as Christ came as flesh and confessing simply that Jesus is the Christ?
15. The man, Jesus, whom we confess as Christ, is not of human origin. Explain.
16. John 1:1 teaches three things about Jesus that have a direct bearing on the confession here presented as a test of false teaching. What are those three things?

17. In order to accomplish the purpose of God in man, Jesus _____ with His own blood.
18. To do this He became flesh, thus _____ with those He came to redeem.
19. It is in the capacity of Divine Redeemer that He voluntarily submitted Himself to learn _____.
20. To be recognized as originating in God, to be Christian, the message of a prophet must _____.
21. Why does John refer to the spirit of antichrist as "it" rather than "he?"
22. What is meant by the statement, "The children of God have the assistance of God Himself . . . whereas the false prophets are "on their own?"

HEREBY WE KNOW

PART IV

I John 4:7—5:21

God Is Love

Divine Sonship Tested By

The Inter-Relationship Of:

1. Love
2. Faith
3. Righteousness