



“The Spirit of the World”

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"Explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words."

1 Corinthians 2:13

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PREFACE

This article consists of two related messages from John's first epistle. Part 1 is entitled "**DO NOT LOVE THE WORLD**", and Part 2 - "**DO NOT BELIEVE EVERY SPIRIT**". Regarding the Christian's relationship to the world, these are the two commandments the apostle John gives in his first epistle: "Do Not Love the World" and "Do Not Believe Every Spirit".

PART 1

“Do Not Love the World”

*“I don’t care about economy, I don’t care about astronomy,
but it sure do bother me to see my loved ones turning into puppets.”*

~ Bob Dylan
From “Slow Train”

“Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.”

1 John 2:15-17

In this passage, the apostle John is telling us **“Do not love the world....”** In his gospel, the same writer is telling us that **“God so loved the world** that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16) So, are we to understand that it’s O.K. for God to love the world, but we should not? Is the apostle John contradicting himself? Is this a contradiction in the Scriptures? Is God being inconsistent?

THE WORLD

The key is to understand that there are various meanings to the Greek word, *kosmos*, which is translated “world”. In this message, we’ll primarily be looking at John’s usage of *kosmos* in his epistles, which is different from his use of this word in his gospel. In fact, the Greek word, *kosmos*, has several applications¹: Firstly, it can refer to the physical earth. Secondly, it can refer to the inhabited world. This is how John used the word in “God so loved the world – the inhabited world, that is, humanity, God so loved humanity that He gave His only begotten Son....” Thirdly, *kosmos* can refer to “a period of existence and all that exists in the world under the conditions of time”. Fourthly it can refer to “the course and current of this world’s affairs, which have been corrupted by sin”. Fifthly, it can refer to the order, the system, what Greek scholar, Marvin Vincent, describes as “the sum total of human life in the ordered world, considered apart from, and alienated from, and hostile to God, and of the earthly things which seduce from God”. In his First, Second and Third Epistles, the apostle John uses the word *kosmos* 23 times; and every time, he is referring to the last two aspects mentioned: “the course and current of this world’s affairs, which have been corrupted by sin” - “the sum total of human life in the ordered world, considered apart from, and alienated from, and hostile to God, and of the earthly things which seduce from God”.

I realize that this definition of “the world” is quite general, and that for personal life application one would look for more specific details and emphases. This message on the subject of “the world” is meant to be introductory and an overview of this complex subject matter. I think the subject of “the world” is

¹ What follows is based on Marvin Vincent’s *Word Studies in the New Testament*.

crucial to understanding the Kingdom of Heaven, and yet, it has been largely ignored, or at best, has been misunderstood because of simplistic interpretations. It's my conviction that this deficiency leads to a perspective that is different from the one Jesus and His apostles had with regards to the place of the Christian and the Church in relationship with "the world".

So, this message will be a general, introductory overview. I will limit myself to covering primarily what the apostle John mentions in his epistle. And I will trust the Holy Spirit to "personalize" this for each individual by speaking to your hearts and minds those more specific details and emphases for personal life application.²

I will offer this: In his epistle, John uses very simple language; but what he is saying about "the world" has much wider and deeper applications than we might realize. For example, some (including myself) understand the term "the world" in this way:

"An ordered world system governed from behind the scenes by Satan. This system encompasses politics, education, literature, science, art, law, commerce, music -- anything involved in the progress of mankind [humanism]."

No matter how good the initial intentions, all organizations created by mankind eventually turn away from Godly power to worldliness. When the influence of Divine Life is removed, organizations gravitate towards materialism, humanism, worldliness, and Satan."³

² Actually, for the most part, this is always my approach to teaching and writing.

³ This quote is from a book summary (not an excerpt) of *"Love Not the World"* by Watchman Nee offered by a Davin Dahlgren on www.Indwelt.com This book, as with his many other books, is actually published from the notes taken by his students during Watchman Nee's talks (1920-1972).

But, at this point, we can summarize in this way: In his gospel, John tells us that God loves what He created. Viz. humanity. In his epistle, John tells us to not love what the world has fashioned. Viz. **The culture of fallen humanity.**

Before we investigate this idea more deeply in John's epistle, I think it would be good to first clarify that not **every** aspect of life in this world is to be shunned by Christ's followers. As I look out upon the human condition, especially as I grow older, I see a bittersweetness. The "bitter" is attributed to Sin; the "sweetness" is attributed to the Incarnation. Part of a song lyric I wrote many years ago may possibly communicate a little more of what I mean:

*"This whole world is moaning and groaning to be redeemed. Sin and death in this world can everywhere be seen.
But, Lord, we can still see Your hand in all of creation.
And that just goes to show, Lord, how mighty You are."*⁴

When God created the world, He said it was "good"; but Sin drastically changed things - and that is exactly what the apostle John wants us to understand in his epistle. But, at the same time, the image of God triumphantly shines through the "deep darkness which covers the peoples"⁵ – as John stated in his gospel, "the darkness cannot eclipse or overwhelm the Light".⁶

We also need to understand that neither the Holy Spirit nor the apostle John are suggesting that we look upon people in the world as personal threats to ourselves and are therefore to be considered objects of contempt. Some of the nicest people I know

⁴ From the song, "Jesus Come Back"

⁵ Isaiah 60:2

⁶ John 1:5 cf. Commentaries of Westcott and Moulton.

are sadly, and some thoroughly, deceived by what the apostle Paul calls **“the principles of the world.”**⁷ Suffice to say that these **“principles of the world”** are the principles that make up the foundations of vain philosophies, false religions, and the culture of fallen humanity. While it is true that “in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving”⁸, it is also true that it is part of fallen human nature for people to “not endure sound doctrine; but (to want) to have their ears tickled, (so) they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires.”⁹ Basically people are products of what they have been taught – what has shaped their minds. Like our heavenly Father, we are to love the people of the world whom He created, but “hate” the **“principles”** that have shaped **the culture of fallen humanity which the world has fashioned.**

Never-the-less, it is in no uncertain terms that the apostle John is telling us “Do not love the world”. Why? What’s wrong with the world? Whatever it is, the apostle John is not alone in this perspective. In their epistles, the apostles Peter¹⁰, James¹¹ and Paul¹² all hold the same view of the world. But limiting ourselves just to this context of John’s epistle, we will see ample explanation clearly given to us about just what is wrong with the world and why we are enjoined: “Do not love the world”.

In his epistle, John states that **the world – the culture of fallen humanity – is controlled by Satan** when he refers to Satan as “the god of this world”, and states that “the whole world lies under the control of the evil one”.¹³ In order to have the same

⁷ (Greek) *stoicheion*: elements, rudiments, principles. Galatians 4:3 & 9; Colossians 2:8 & 20

⁸ 2 Corinthians 4:4

⁹ 2 Timothy 4:3

¹⁰ 2 Peter 1:4; 2:20

¹¹ James 4:4

¹² 1 Corinthians 2:12; 11:32; Galatians 6:14.

¹³ 1 John 5:19 NIV. Also see: 1 John 3:13 & 4:4

spiritual perspective as Jesus and His apostles, it crucial that we understand that, while God is Creator and ultimately in control, in this age, much of what is in the world has been fashioned, not by God, but by the world under the influence of Sin and the control of Satan. I am not referring to the physical creation, but again, I am referring to the culture of fallen humanity. If we do not believe this is true, we do not hold a Biblical/Christian worldview.

EITHER - OR

Jesus said: “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”¹⁴ He presents an **“either-or” case**. His brother, James, said: “You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”¹⁵ Another case of “either-or”. In the same way the apostle John says: “If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”¹⁶ Another case of “either-or”. In this message, we are looking into the explanation as to WHY that is the case.

In the next verse John explains that “all that is in the world ... is **from** the world.” It is not **from** God – it is **from** the culture of fallen humanity. **The “principles of the world” are born of, are sourced in, and emerge out of – the culture of fallen humanity.** Where did the apostle John get this perspective of the world? This was the perspective given to him by Jesus. In John’s gospel, he records Jesus as saying that while His followers are **in** the world, they are **not of** the world.¹⁷ According to Jesus, the Christianity He initiated, is **in** the world, but **not of** the world. So, we see that, like Jesus, throughout his epistle, John draws very clear lines of demarcation when he speaks in the following terms: “They **went out** from us, but they were not really **of** us; for if they had been **of** us, they would have remained **with** us; but they **went out**, so that it would be shown that they all are not **of** us.”¹⁸

¹⁴ Matthew 6:24

¹⁵ James 4:4

¹⁶ 1 John 2:15b

¹⁷ John 17:15-18

¹⁸ 1 John 2:19

From the apostolic perspective, we are either abiding in life or death.¹⁹ We are in the light or the darkness.²⁰ We are either walking in the truth or in error.²¹ We either have love for the Father or love for the world.²²

I think a quote from *The Hard Sayings of the Bible* really captures the significance of the “line of demarcation” inherent in the apostle John’s command “Do not love the world”:

*“This makes it clear why a believer cannot love the world. To love is to be **emotionally invested** in something.... We cannot be totally emotionally invested in two contradictory directions. We chose either God and His values or the world and its values.*

*The natural human desire to be accepted and to “fit in” will not find these verses comfortable ones. The Christian will always live in tension with the world, suspicious of, if not rejecting, much of the product of human culture. The **countercultural** lifestyle of the Christian invites rejection, for living by different values suggests that the values of one’s neighbors are inadequate. The tension is there. The pain is real. **We cannot have it both ways.** We cannot love both God and the world.”²³*

¹⁹ 1 John 3:14

²⁰ 1 John 2:9

²¹ 1 John 4:6

²² 1 John 2:15

²³ *The Hard Sayings of the Bible*, 1 John, Peter H. Davids

THE LUSTS OF THE FLESH

Again, John said: “all that is **in** the world... is **from** the world”²⁴ What all is **in** and **from** the world? John offers three categories:

- 1) the lusts of the flesh
- 2) the lusts of the eyes
- 3) the boastful pride of life

Seeing these things for what they really are helps us to see the world for what it really is.

To begin with, it may be helpful to look at how the *Amplified Bible* attempts to bring out the fuller meaning of the Greek words John uses in this verse²⁵:

“For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh [craving for sensual gratification] and the lust of the eyes [greedy longings of the mind] and the pride of life [assurance in one’s own resources or in the stability of earthly things]—these do not come from the Father but **are from the world [itself].**”

The Amplified Bible explains the “lust of the flesh” as “cravings for sensual gratification”. The Phillips translation refers to it as: “Men’s primitive desires.”²⁶ Based upon the apostle James principle, “...when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin”, I believe it is accurate to say that “**the lusts of the flesh**” correspond to “the deeds of the flesh” – that is, desires in the heart and mind result in sinful actions in the soul and body. There is a partial list of the “**deeds of the flesh**” in Paul’s Letter to the Galatians.²⁷ From this list we see that some lusts and deeds of the flesh are **sins of self-indulgence** - like the various types of

²⁴ 1 John 2:16

²⁵ 1 John 2:16 *The Amplified Bible*

²⁶ *The New Testament in Modern English* by J.B. Phillips.

²⁷ Galatians 5:19-21 (NASB & GWT)

sexual sin, drunkenness, drug abuse, partying. Other lusts and deeds of the flesh are **sins of self-exaltation** - like hatred, strife, jealousy, anger, conflict, factions, and envy. And still other lusts and deeds of the flesh are **sins of self-preservation** - like idolatry and selfish ambition.

Each one of these “deeds of the flesh” warrants further attention, but it is not within the scope of this message to go into further detail regarding each one individually. But suffice to say that they fall into these three categories of **self-indulgence, self-exaltation, and self-preservation**. From this we can see that “**self**” is a primary focus in the “principles of the world”. This self-centeredness is resident in the hearts of fallen human beings who fashion and propagate the culture of the world.

THE LUSTS OF THE EYES

The *Amplified Bible* explains the “**lusts of the eyes**” as “greedy longings of the mind”. Phillips translates it as: “their greedy ambitions”.²⁸ This refers to the ungodly longing for things which we can see. Biblical wisdom literature tells us that “the eyes are never satisfied”.²⁹ The word “covetousness” defines this condition. More modern terms would be “greed” and “materialism”. These terms speak of the tenor of our age – the culture of fallen humanity. But listen to the apostle Paul’s response:

“Therefore, put to death whatever is worldly in you: your sexual sin, perversion, passion, lust, and greed (which is the same thing as worshiping wealth). It is because of these sins that God’s anger comes on those who refuse to obey him. You used to live that kind of sinful life.”³⁰

²⁸ Ibid, J.B. Phillips

²⁹ Proverbs 27:20; Ecclesiastes 1:8

³⁰ Colossians 3:5-7. Also, Ephesians 5:5-7

THE BOASTFUL PRIDE OF LIFE

The apostle John would also have us to be aware of “**the boastful pride of life**”. The Phillips translation refers to it as: “the glamour of all they think splendid.”³¹ Most translations render simply “pride of life”; but the New American Standard includes an aspect from the root of the Greek word by adding “**boastful**” to “pride of life”.³² The word implies “self confidence”, as well as confidence in earthly, material things, as the *Amplified Bible* brings out with the phrase, “assurance in one’s own resources or in the stability of earthly things”. What is being described here is putting confidence and trust in one’s personal gifts and talents, money and material possessions, and the accompanying social position and power.

³¹ Ibid, J.B. Phillips

³² *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance*: (Greek) *alazoneia*.

The World Is Passing Away

The apostle Paul tells us that putting confidence and trust in one's personal gifts and talents, money and material possessions, and the accompanying social position and power is not a very sound approach to life simply because God has a program wherein, He is determined to put to shame the things that the world considers strong and wise. He does this to intentionally nullify man's boasting and to bring glory to Christ.³³ Nevertheless, human beings continue to focus on their own abilities and the resources they have amassed from the world. While the resources of this world are, in fact, deceitful and uncertain,³⁴ and while at some point, eventually, everyone's pride is humiliated (if by nothing other than our becoming sick and dying), it is possible to seemingly do quite well in life through worldly success, or so many human beings would not be pursuing it. The main point regarding this worldliness is not that it will eventually disappoint you – the main point is that it is ungodly. It is born of, sourced in, and emerges out from the world – **not** from the Father. This is the apostle John's main point.

However, in the very next verse, John does say that the world will amount to a major disappointment, in a manner of speaking. He states, **"the world is passing away"**. This is the apostolic view of this world. But what does it mean? While Solomon did say that "There is nothing new under the sun... that which has been is that which will be, and that which has been done is that which will be done", this does not mean that the world is not evolving – or devolving. While there is nothing genuinely new in the world (which is symptomatic of fallen

³³ 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

³⁴ Mark 4:19; 1 Timothy 6:17

human culture), what always “has been” and what always “has been done” are moving either one way or another. Is the world getting better? Or is it getting worse? The apostolic view of the world is that it is getting progressively more ungodly. The apostles understood that just as God is moving forward in His plans and purposes, Satan also has an agenda that began in the Garden and has been moving forward throughout all human history.

In the very next verse, the apostle John gives us this sense: “Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour.”³⁵

Paul said something similar in his 2nd letter to the Thessalonians: “... the mystery of iniquity is already at work....”³⁶ – and in more detail in his 2nd letter to Timothy:

“But evil people and impostors **will proceed from bad to worse**, deceiving and being deceived.”³⁷ This apostolic perspective is most likely based upon Jesus’ own description of the world: “... because **there will be more and more iniquity**, most people's love will grow cold.”³⁸ So, I think it accurate to say that the apostolic perspective established by Jesus Himself, is that “**the world is passing away**”, the world system – the culture of fallen humanity – is “proceeding from bad to worse” – but contained in this perspective is the good news that “There’s a New World Coming” – “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.”³⁹

³⁵ 1 John 2:18

³⁶ 2 Thessalonians 2:7

³⁷ 2 Timothy 3:13

³⁸ Matthew 24:12 *God’s Word Translation*

³⁹ Revelation 11:15

OVERCOMING THE WORLD

I'd now like to now shift from chapter 2 to chapter 5 in John's epistle, where he is concluding his 1st letter to the Church. He writes in verse 4 and 5:

“For **whatever is born of God** overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”

In this epistle, John writes of the idea of **overcoming the world** by being born of God and by our faith; and in his Revelation, he adds that we overcome the world by “the blood of the Lamb, by the word of our testimony, and by not loving our lives even in the face of death”.⁴⁰ All this warrants a separate message in and of itself. What I would like to focus on here is simply that John feels that **the world is, in fact, something that we need to overcome**. We must overcome the world or be overcome by it.

John wrote: “For **whatever** is born of God overcomes the world.” Some translations⁴¹ read “Everyone who is born of God....” “Everyone” is a good translation because the next verse is obviously referring to people. But “whatever” is more accurate. The Greek pronoun, *pan*, simply means “All”. It is neuter; so, it takes in neuter things, as well as masculine and feminine people. So, it means “**everyone**” – all genders – who are born of God, overcome the world. But it also means “**everything**” – including our faith – that is born of God overcomes the world.

⁴⁰ Revelation 12:11

⁴¹ E.g., *English Standard Version* and *God's Word Translation*

I have said that, in this epistle, John is drawing lines of demarcation. In these verses also, we see John's perspective of the world. He sees only two groups of people in the world:

1) those who are born of God.

2) those who are not.

Only those born of God overcome the world – those that are not, are overcome by the world.

Also, there are only two groups of things in the world:

1) those things which are born of God, for example our faith

2) those things which are not born of God, but are born of, sourced in, and emerge out from the fallen human culture.

Only those things born of God overcome the world – those things which are born of the world are overcome by the world.

John seems to verify this in the closing lines of his letter where he writes: "We know that we are of God (born of God), and that the whole world lies under the power of the evil one."⁴²

A.T. Robertson comments on this verse:

*"This is a terrible picture of the Graeco-Roman world of the first century A.D., which is confirmed by Paul in Romans...."*⁴³

So, possibly a suitable exhortation to attach to the end of John's epistle is a passage from Paul's epistle to the Romans from the *Amplified Bible*:

"Do not be **conformed** to this world (this age), [do not be **fashioned** after and adapted to its external, superficial customs], but be **transformed** (be changed) by the [entire] renewal of your mind [by its new ideals and its new attitude], so that you may prove [for yourselves] what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God, even the thing which is good and acceptable and perfect [in His sight for you]."

⁴² 1 John 5:19

⁴³ Robertson's *Word Pictures of the New Testament*

Part 2

“DO NOT BELIEVE EVERY SPIRIT”



ANTICHRISTS

1 John 2:18-19

¹⁸ “Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that **antichrist** is coming, even now many **antichrists** have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour.”

In this passage, the apostle John associates the fact that “many antichrists have appeared” and that “antichrist is coming” with it being “the last hour”, or the “last days”.⁴⁴ He is expecting antichrist(s) because he is living in the last days. This is something we also should expect. The subject of “antichrist”, while not pleasant, is certainly not a “bizarre” subject – it is Biblical subject; and antichrists are to be expected.

The term “antichrist” is a combination of two Greek words, *anti*, meaning “against” or “in place of”; and *christos*, meaning “anointed one”. There have been “many antichrists”⁴⁵ that have come up *against the person of Jesus the Christ; the Anointed One*;⁴⁶ and they are forerunners of the future antichrist, also known as “the man of lawlessness”⁴⁷ or “the beast”⁴⁸ who will attempt to *take the place of Jesus the Christ*.

There is an extended meaning and application to this phenomenon of antichrist: The term “Christian” is taken to mean “followers of Christ (the Anointed One)” – or “little christs” – “little anointed ones”.⁴⁹ God, Himself, refers to His people as His

⁴⁴ Viz. The time between Christ’s first and second coming.

⁴⁵ 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7; Matthew 24:24.

⁴⁶ Acts 10:37-38; Acts 4:27; Hebrews 1:9; Luke 4:18 (Isaiah 61:1).

⁴⁷ 2 Thessalonians 2:3

⁴⁸ Revelation 13:1-18; Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11; Matthew 24:15.

⁴⁹ 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Romans 8:9; 1 John 3:24; 4:13.

“anointed ones”.⁵⁰ Therefore, antichrists, in this sense, are against us Christians also.

¹⁹ “They went out from **us**, but they were not *really* of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but *they went out*, so that it would be shown that they **all are not of us**.”

In this epistle, John made a distinction between “we” (viz. the apostles) and “you” (viz. the Christians he was writing to).⁵¹ Here John says: “**They** went out from **us**.” In this context, “**they**” refers to the “many antichrists”. “**Us**” primarily refers to the apostles – their teaching, their fellowship, and the churches in fellowship with them which followed the teaching Jesus Christ had passed on to His apostles. A verse from John’s second letter supports this. He wrote: “Anyone who goes too far and **does not abide in the teaching of Christ**, does not have God; the one who **abides in the teaching**, he has both the Father and the Son.”⁵²

So, we see that these people, whom John refers to as “antichrists”, were at one point, in fellowship with the apostles and their churches, but “went out” from them. They “went out” into what John describes as “the world”.⁵³ Another verse from John’s second letter supports this. He wrote: “I say this because many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, **have gone out into the world**. Any such person is the deceiver and **the antichrist**.”⁵⁴

Notice also that John identifies “the deceiver and the antichrist” as persons “**who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as**

⁵⁰ Psalm 105:15; 1 Chronicles 16:22

⁵¹ 1 John 1:1, 3.

⁵² 2 John 1:9

⁵³ See the booklet “*Do Not Love the World*”.

⁵⁴ 2 John 1:7

coming in the flesh". This essentially means they were **"denying Jesus is the Christ"**, and this is definitive of the "spirit" which John is commanding us not to believe. This specifies the deception of the antichrist which John is addressing in his epistle to the Church at the end of the first century. The Holy Spirit continues to use these Scriptures to speak to the Church today regarding the deception of the antichrist.

John will refer to these things again in verses 22 and 23, and then again in the opening verses of chapter 4. So, in this message we will take a closer look at the phrase, **"denying Jesus is the Christ"**, and the significance of **"not acknowledging Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh"**. But for now, we will follow along John's line of thought, where he next mentions "the anointing".

THE ANOINTING

1 John 2:20-21

²⁰ “But you have **an anointing from the Holy One**, and you all know. ²¹ I have not written to you because you do not **know the truth**, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth.”

As I read this passage from John first epistle, I’m reminded of a similar passage in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians:

“For to us God revealed (things) through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.”⁵⁵

Again, in John’s words: We have been given “an anointing from the Holy One”. The Greek word translated “anointing” is *chrisma*. In the Scriptures, the concept of “anointing” is associated with **receiving the Holy Spirit**, as well as, **the Holy Spirit’s gifts, enablements and appointments**. In this instance, John is pointing out that the receiving of **the Holy Spirit enables one to know truth**; and that all who receive the Holy Spirit are **able to discern between truth and lies**. This “anointing” is absolutely critical in

⁵⁵ 1 Corinthians 2:10-13

the Christian life. It is essential that we understand, believe and practice what John is discussing here.

I fully agree with what Peter H. Davids has written in his commentary on 1 John⁵⁶:

*“It is quite appropriate ... that Christians, who are followers of the Christ (which means ... the “anointed one”) should bear **that same anointing** (the root of “Christ” and “anointing” are the same in Greek).*

*Paul indicates that Christians have been anointed with the Spirit when he says: “He anointed us, set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.” (2 Corinthians 1:21-22). **The experience of the Spirit was a normative part of early Christian initiation.** Paul explicitly denies the modern idea that one is not supposed to experience or feel anything at conversion when he argues that **one knows if one is a Christian because of the presence of the Spirit within** (Romans 8:9; 1 John 3:24; 4:13)⁵⁷. Acts also connects the reception of the Spirit to Christian initiation (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:15-17; 10:44-48; 19:5-6).*

*John ... does not place Word and Spirit over against one another. In 1 John 2:24 we read, ‘As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.’ The ‘what you have heard from the beginning’ is the apostolic witness to Christ (1 John 1:1-3), which in the Gospel of John became Scripture.... **The anointing** is not ‘that which you heard’, but a complement to it, **the Spirit within**.*

*.... Again, John does not separate the Word from the Spirit or substitute one for the other, but he does recognize that **the Spirit should be giving true discernment to the believer.... It is the***

⁵⁶ *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, IVP, 1996, pp. 734-736, Reprinted from *More Hard Sayings of the New Testament*, 1991.

⁵⁷ I would also reference Romans 8:16 “The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit....”

discernment taught by the Spirit that John believes will enable the believer who is committed to Christ to see correctly in this situation. The human remains important, but the divine Guide is the one in whom John places his ultimate confidence.

*This passage is difficult then.... it expects our experience of the Spirit to be real enough that we will understand that **the Spirit himself does indeed teach us and lead us into truth**. The challenge of the verse is to live in this experience, not in rejecting the role of the Word, for John never does that and in fact easily slips back and forth from Spirit to Word, but in so walking in obedience to the words of Christ in Scripture and **the inner voice of the Spirit** that we recognize immediately when the world tries to seduce us through that which claims to be Christian but is tainted in some way."*

So, it is imperative that we **look to and rely on the Holy Spirit for truth**. Basically, that is what separates true from false Christianity. The false Christianity – that which is a misnomer – that which actually should not be referred to as “Christianity” – that which is not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ – that which is not “the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints”⁵⁸ - is a particular heresy which John addressed at the end of the first century. But this same heresy, in various forms, has continued to exist even until today. In his epistle John is specifically addressing Gnosticism. The particular phrase he employs – “denying that Jesus is the Christ” – still applies to the modern-day versions of this same heresy. Again, this is the “spirit” which John is insisting we not believe.

John is speaking of “spirits” here in the same way Paul refers to the “spirits of prophets” in his epistle.⁵⁹ The Greek word

⁵⁸ Jude 1:3

⁵⁹ 1 Corinthians 14:32

in both cases is *pneuma*, which is rich in meaning. In this context, it refers to the “breathings” (literally) or the “speakings” of prophets and teachers operating under either the influence of the Holy Spirit or the deception of evil spirits.

DENYING JESUS IS THE CHRIST

1 John 2:22-23

Once again John brings us to the definitive spirit which he commands us not to believe – the spirit of “the deceiver and the antichrist” – the spirit which **“denies that Jesus is the Christ”** because it **“does not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh”**. He writes:

²² “Who is the liar but the one who **denies that Jesus is the Christ?** This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.
²³ Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.”

Here we see the Christ-centeredness of John’s theology: “... whoever denies the Son does not have the Father....” We cannot have God without Jesus Christ. But, if we have Jesus Christ, we have “all the fullness of God”⁶⁰, as Paul said, “For in Him (Christ) all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form”.⁶¹ It is significant that Paul specified “in bodily form”, because John also demanded “acknowledgement of Jesus Christ as coming **in the flesh**” or “**in bodily form**”. Again, “**not acknowledging Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh**” is the heresy which John addressed at the end of the first century. But this same heresy, in various forms, has continued to exist even until today. In his epistle John is specifically addressing Gnosticism, and there are modern day versions of this same heresy.

⁶⁰ Ephesians 3:19

⁶¹ Colossians 2:9

“Gnosticism” gets its name from the Greek word *gnosis*, meaning knowledge. “Gnosticism” refers to a variety of teachings arising out of certain basic assumptions: The unknowable spirit god was far too perfect and pure to have anything to do with the material universe. One of the “emanations” of the pure spirit was “Wisdom”, which desired to know this unknowable god. This was the beginning of evil and the creation of the material universe. Deliverance from this evil material existence is attainable through “special” knowledge obtainable only from “special” Gnostic teachers. The Christ spirit came to the material universe to reveal this special knowledge necessary for redemption.

Even with my very over-simplified description of Gnosticism, it can clearly be seen that Gnosticism denies both the Incarnation and the Atonement. When John wrote in 1 John 2:27, “the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things”, he was saying that Christians did not need the “special” knowledge and teachers of Gnosticism.

The particular Gnostic heresies being addressed by John are either the teachings of the Docetists or Cerinthus, or both. The term “Docetism” is from the Greek word *dokeo*, meaning “to seem” or “to appear”. This heresy argued that Jesus was not really a human being – the Christ spirit only “appeared to” materialize. Jesus only “seemed to” be a human being, and only “seemed to” die on the cross.

While Cerinthus taught that Jesus was a human being, he denied the Incarnation by teaching that the Christ spirit descended upon Jesus of Nazareth at His baptism and then departed from Him before His crucifixion. Therefore, Jesus died, but Christ did not die on the cross. On the other hand, John

taught that Christ did not merely enter into an already existing human being, but that He came into the world as a human being. In 1 John 4:2, John writes: “**Jesus Christ** has come in the flesh.” John’s use of the title “Jesus Christ” means that the Man, Jesus of Nazareth, is the Christ, and the Christ is the Man, Jesus of Nazareth. The Greek tenses in the phrase “**has come in the flesh**” indicate that not only Jesus Christ came as a human being, but also that He is still a human being – **forever fully God and fully human**. The denial of this is the heresy - “the spirit of the antichrist”⁶² – which John is addressing.

As I indicated, revived ancient heresies are “alive and well” in Christendom today. It is not within the scope of this message to go into great detail in identifying and analyzing these modern heresies⁶³; but I will offer a few references regarding some “spirits” today which deny “Jesus Christ has come in the flesh”, that is, deny that the Man, Jesus of Nazareth, is the Christ, and the Christ is the Man, Jesus of Nazareth: Along with the popularity of Dan Brown’s *Davinci Code*, there has been a fascination with the so called “lost gospels” of the Nag Hammadi Library⁶⁴ of Gnostic texts containing extra-biblical sayings⁶⁵ of Jesus. A prime example would be *The Coptic Gospel of Thomas*. This document has been the main source material of authors like Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossman, two Fellows of the *Jesus Seminar*. But also drawing from *The Coptic Gospel of Thomas*, authors like Elaine Pagels⁶⁶ have promoted a brand of “Christian Gnosticism” which synergizes the teachings of Jesus and Buddha. Citing Nicolas

⁶² 1 John 4:3

⁶³ ⁶³ Recommended Reading: *Jesus: Fact and Fiction, POP Spirituality and The Truth, Christianity & Eastern Religions* (Rose Publishing); *The Missing Gospels* (Darrell Bock); *Misquoting Truth* (Timothy Paul Jones); *A Case for the Real Jesus* (Lee Strobel).

⁶⁴ Discovered in 1945.

⁶⁵ “logia”

⁶⁶ Also, Edward Conze

Notovitch's book, *The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ*, many New Age teachers make a historically unverified scenario of Jesus traveling to India between the ages of 12 and 30 to study Buddhism. New Age teachers such as Deepak Chopra⁶⁷ and Eckhart Tolle⁶⁸ present Jesus and Buddha as examples of men having achieved "Christ consciousness" – "oneness with the divine" – which is the potential in all human beings. The idea of the Christ being a "consciousness" that people can achieve through quasi-spiritual exercises rather than the One who "has come in the flesh" is a fundamental tenet of most New Age groups, as well as Mind Science groups like Christian Science and the Unity School.

⁶⁷ Author of *The Third Jesus*.

⁶⁸ Author of *A New Earth* promoted by Oprah Winfrey.

ABIDE IN CHRIST

1 John 2:24-27

²⁴ “As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. ²⁵ This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life. ²⁶ These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. ²⁷ As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you **abide in Him.**”

The anointing abides in us. If we heed this anointing, we will abide in Christ. “His anointing teaches us about all things”, therefore we have no need for the “special knowledge” offered by the “special teachers” of Gnosticism. “What you heard from the beginning” is the apostolic witness of Jesus Christ. If this apostolic witness abides in us, we will abide in Christ.

Peter H. Davids expresses very well our need to abide in the real Jesus Christ: *“The Christian church finds its unity not around this or that doctrine, but around Jesus Christ. To reject the real Jesus, either by denying his true humanity (“being in the flesh”) or by denying his divinity (by denying that Jesus was really the Christ), is to break with the faith and to split from the church community. It is not that doctrine is the key issue, but that it expresses the distinguishing characteristics of the person to whom one is committed. The one not committed to the real Jesus Christ does not know either the Father or the Son, according to John.”*⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Ibid. pp. 747-748

TEST THE SPIRITS

1 John 4:1-3

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.”

As was stated earlier, the term “spirits” here refers to the messages of prophets and teachers operating under either the influence of the Holy Spirit or the deception of evil spirits. So, we are to not just naively believe every spirit, but rather “test” every spirit to examine, distinguish and discern⁷⁰ if the message is from the Spirit of Christ or the spirit of antichrist. If the message says that Jesus did not come from God, that is, that He is not fully divine, that message comes from the spirit of antichrist. And if a message says that Jesus Christ has not come in the flesh, that is, the Christ was not incarnated as fully human, that message comes from the spirit of antichrist.

In John’s epistle, and in this message, we have dealt primarily with Gnostic heresies old and new; but the anointing of the Holy Spirit is given to help us “test **every** spirit” to see if **any** doctrine be from the Spirit of God or from the spirit of the antichrist.

Peter H. Davids says: *“John says that one can tell the true Spirit of God by the doctrine he teaches. The true Spirit has the right doctrine; the spirit that does not lead people to pledge their allegiance to the*

⁷⁰ Greek: *dokimazo*

orthodox Christ is in fact not the Holy Spirit, but the spirit of antichrist."

SPIRITS OF TRUTH AND ERROR

1 John 4:4-6

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."

True Christians are from God, that is, born of God. We have the Holy One within us – this is the anointing – and He is greater than "the god of this world"⁷¹. By discerning the deception of the antichrist, we overcome the world.

John said, "By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error": "They", that is the false prophets, are from the world, so all those in the world who "lie under the power of the evil one"⁷² listen to the deception of the antichrist. The "we" and "us" refer to the apostles, who are sent "from God". Those who are "from God", that is, those who are born of God and know God, listen to the Spirit of Christ in the apostles' teaching.

Jesus taught that if we receive the apostles, we receive both Himself and the Father.⁷³ As the early church did, so also should we be "continually devoting (ourselves) to the apostles teaching",⁷⁴ because their teaching is the teaching of Christ.⁷⁵

⁷¹ 2 Corinthians 4:4

⁷² 1 John 5:19

⁷³ John 13:20

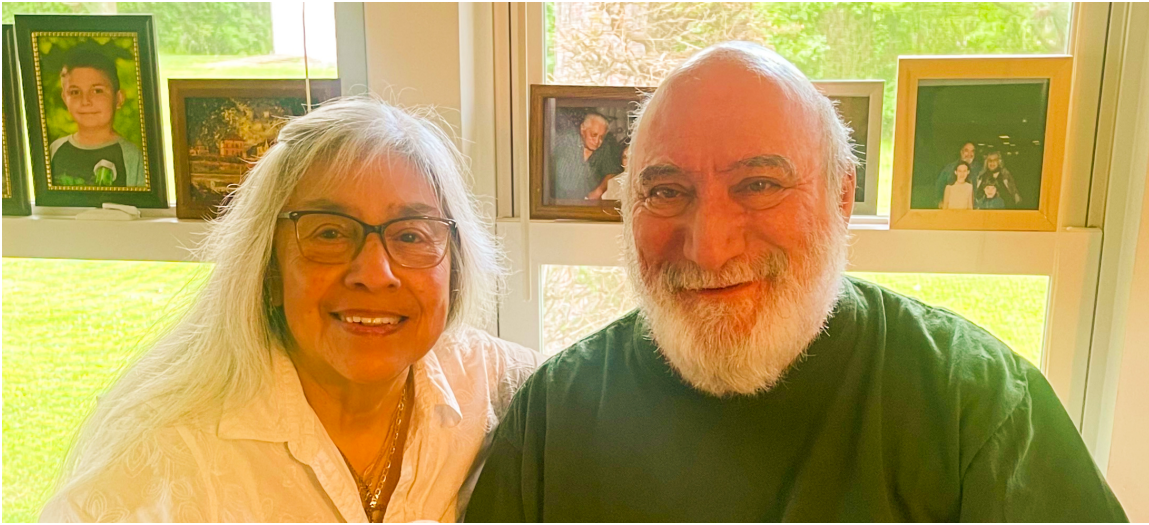
⁷⁴ Acts 2:42

⁷⁵ Matthew 28:20; 1 Corinthians 14:37; 1 Thessalonians 2:13

Those who “lie under the power of the evil one”, listen to the spirit of antichrist. Those who are “in Christ” listen to the Spirit of Christ.

The Christian abides in Christ by distinguishing between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error by the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Bill & Frances Furioso
~ At Christ's Table ~



Bill Furioso and his wife, Frances, have been married for more than 40 years, and have two children, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Bill and Frances served as missionaries in South Africa for thirteen years making disciples, establishing churches, and training church leaders. Over a span of 40 years, they also traveled extensively in an itinerant Bible teaching ministry which took them to hundreds of gatherings on four continents ministering in churches, conferences, spiritual formation seminars, and home gatherings. They have shepherded several churches, discipled many to Christ, and mentored church leaders in the USA and abroad.

Being an avid student by nature, Bill has done both formal and informal study in various fields including Education, Music, Philosophy and Theology. As a writer, he has authored many publications which are distributed worldwide. Because of Bill's disabilities resulting from a spinal cord injury, he can no longer travel, so their ministries of writing, recording, distributing, mentoring, and correspondence are now shared primarily via the Internet... www.AtChristsTable.org

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