1 John

An Exegetical Series

1 John 4:1-6: The Spirit of Truth and Error, Part 1: Confessing the True Christ

Summary of The Doctrine of the Spirit

- The Holy Spirit is the divine Third Person of the Triune God—Truly God of Himself—fully sharing the attributes, works, and identity of God. He gives life, communicates God's truth, applies the work of Christ, and dwells within God's people.

➡ In 1 John, the Spirit is God's own presence within us, assuring us that we abide in Him. Christ secured our redemption, and the Holy Spirit applies that redemption to us, transforming us and assuring us of God's presence.

Opening Questions

- **How does the world around us describe Jesus?** What do people today believe about who Jesus is, why he came, and what he accomplished through his life, death, and resurrection?
- **How does Scripture describe Jesus?** How does God's revelation in Scripture describe who Jesus is and what he came to accomplish? Where might the biblical Jesus differ from the Jesus commonly presented by the world?

Opening Questions

- **Why does getting Jesus right matter?** How important is it that Christians rightly understand and confess who Jesus is? What happens to the Christian faith when we believe something false about Jesus?
- **Testing claims about Jesus:** If someone claims to speak for God, how should we determine whether what they say about Jesus is true?
- **Why does it matter that Jesus Christ truly came in the flesh?**

Test What They Confess

The Spirits and What They Confess (1 John 4:1-3)

- If we were to summarize these verses for what they say (a) in historical context, and (b) in its theological implication, we can say this:
  - John is calling his congregation to rightly discern the claims people, who profess to be Christians, make because though they say they confess faith in Christ, believe the Apostles, and “have” the Holy Spirit
  - Their view, despite their “faith,” is flawed and wrong

Test What They Confess

The Spirits and What They Confess (1 John 4:1-3)

- Historically, the congregation's split via the antichrists probably professed to have the same authority as the Christians that stayed but came to different conclusions about Jesus Christ, specifically, that he "*has come in the flesh*" (1 John 4:2)
- Theologically, this means they (a) do not have the Spirit and by that implication (b) do not have Christ who cleanses from all sin

Where We Really Are

The Implication of 1 John 3:24 on 1 John 4:1-3

- John has noted that we know we remain in God because of the “Spirit he has given us” (**3:24b**)—We noted this is a double meaning from John. The Spirit given to us is:
  - The Holy Spirit who transforms and indwells God’s children (**John 3:5-6**)
  - The Holy Spirit motivates and trains our spirit by teaching us the truth of God and the teaching of Jesus Christ (**John 14, 16; 1 John 2:27**)

Where We Really Are

The Implication of 1 John 3:24 on 1 John 4:1-3

- If this double meaning is true—which it is!—then, the “spirit” of those who confess other opinions of Christ must be tested and we must not give into what it is they teach for they teach what is false
- The false thing the antichrist/false prophets teach is that Jesus Christ did NOT come in the flesh—certainly, they believe he appeared and they confess faith in him, but they deny something regarding his “flesh”

Where We Really Are

The Implication of 1 John 3:24 on 1 John 4:1-3

- This false teaching could be a form of “docetism” or the believe that Jesus merely appeared to be human, but what not truly human
- This false teaching could be a form of early Gnosticism—special knowledge of the divine outside of Apostolic teaching

➡ While we don’t know what the exact false teaching was, we must be armed with the truth, which is of Spirit of God, and we know the Spirit by his truth taught to us!

What Did Jesus Claim?

He was “in the flesh” — John’s Gospel

- John 5:43
- John 7:28;
- John 8:42;
- John 12:46;
- John 16:28;
- John 18:37

To deny Jesus in the flesh is to deny not only his true humanity, but also his redemptive mission as the one who reveals the Father and gives life to those who know and love him!

Trinitarian Implications

The Triune Work of God

- The work of the Holy Spirit, as we have seen, is multifaceted and vast! Yet, the key ministry of the Spirit in John's literature is the mode of teaching us what Jesus said and what he meant when he said what he said!
- The Spirit is not a liar—he only brings us to the truth (1 John 2:27) and, therefore, when we read the words of Jesus, we will come to the right conclusion about what Jesus was intending to communicate

Trinitarian Implications

The Triune Work of God

- The Spirit works with the work of Jesus!
- Jesus in the “flesh” is not arbitrary or something that Christians merely came up with because it “seemed right” or that they “copied other religions” which some attempt to say is the case
- Rather, God’s wisdom is displayed in the dimension of Jesus in the flesh—let’s explore Jesus’ humanity and its gospel relevance!

Why Did Jesus Come in the “Flesh”?

The better questions is “why did he *have* to”?

- Humanity required new covenant headship if we were to saved from our sin—a headship of purity, not sin
- Adam was our first “covenant” head in that he represented all humanity and by whom all humanity is cursed (Rom 5)
- Jesus’ humanity is known as the second Adam and, in his humanity, he accomplishes what the first Adam doesn’t—he loves God and neighbor perfectly, died a death as a pure, sinless lamb, and bodily resurrected—all of which apply to us!

Why Did Jesus Come in the “Flesh”?

The better questions is “why did he *have* to”?

- Without the humanity of Jesus, we have no covenant representation on our behalf (Heb 2:17-18; Rom 5)
  - No righteousness to be “imputed”
  - No atonement to pay for our sins
  - No redemption of our whole person (1 Cor 15)
  - No fellowship with God (John 17)

Bringing it All Together

- John encouraged his congregation to **know the truth** so that they could **test the truth** when false teaching came around
- They were not merely called to identify false teachers, but to remain **secure in the truth** through the Holy Spirit who teaches, transforms, and assures God's people
- **The same posture is required of us:** we must know the truth revealed in Christ and Scripture, discern what is true and false, and remain steadfast in the truth through the Spirit who dwells within us

Bringing it All Together

- We are spiritually discerning not because we are suspicious of everything, but because we are committed to knowing Christ truly, confessing him faithfully, and remaining in the truth the Spirit has given us

➡ In other words: Know the truth. Test what is taught. Remain in Christ through the Spirit of truth—whether in the church, out in the world, and all in between.

➡ John believed his readers could do this—I believe that you can do the same, as well!

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