

**Lesson 18: “The Highest Heresy”****1 John 4:1-3****Craig Crawshaw**

In chapters 1, 2 and 3 of 1 John the emphasis has been on the tests of our faith by the evidence of obeying, abiding and loving. The great message about God in these opening 3 chapters is that “God is Light” with no darkness at all.

Now as we move to chapters 4 and 5 of 1 John, the emphasis shifts to the doctrinal tests of our faith as to what we must believe regarding Jesus Christ. And the great message about God in these closing 2 chapters is that “God is Love” and that His love is perfected in His children.

The apostle John, now in his nineties as he writes this letter, possibly the last living eye-witness apostle of Jesus on the earth, feels a great responsibility and concern for the health and protection of God’s children. He has already given a number of warnings – (1) that we must be careful to acknowledge and confess our sins (1:8-10), (2) that we must not love the world or the things of the world (2:15-16), and (3) that we must watch out for the spirit of antichrist all around us (2:18-19). Now in the opening verses of chapter 4 he intensifies this last warning to have us “test” for the spirit of antichrist. And here we find the first critical “test” of our belief in Jesus Christ.

***1 John 4:1-3** 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. 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; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.*

**CHRISTIAN HERESIES**

A “heresy” is a belief or opinion contrary to orthodox doctrine. Here are some of the most common ones:

✓ God will be good to everyone in the end – all good people go to heaven – HERESY!

✓ The Bible is a document written by fallible men, so should not be taken as completely accurate – HERESY!

✓ Salvation is by a combination of faith in Jesus and sufficient good works – HERESY!

But the ultimate, “highest heresy” is a disbelief in Jesus Christ as fully God and fully man. That is why the most important spiritual conversation you can have with someone is about who Jesus is to them. Is He Savior? Is He Lord? Is He the God of all creation and the King of all the universe?

An incorrect view of the person and nature of Jesus is the hallmark of a false religion or “Christian” cult.

**JESUS to the major religions:**

To Jews: Jesus was a good teacher, but not Messiah and certainly not God. God is one.

To Muslims: Jesus was only a man. He was a prophet equal to Abraham and Moses, who are below Mohammed in importance. There is no God but Allah – the God.

To Hindus: Jesus is just one of many incarnations, or sons of God. He was no more divine than any other man. Brahman (God) is a formless, abstract and eternal being without attributes.

To Buddhists: Jesus was a good teacher, but less important than Buddha. You yourself must make the effort to become enlightened. There is no personal God.

**JESUS to the major cults:**

To Unitarians: Jesus is no more or less divine than any man. “God” refers to the living processes of nature and human conscience.

To Jehovah’s Witnesses: Jesus is not God, but God’s first created creature. God is one solitary being from all eternity – there is no trinity.

To Christian Scientists: Jesus was not God, but only a great man and teacher. God is an impersonal principle, not a person.

To Mormons: Jesus was a man only, who had three wives. God is a material creature who was once a man as we are now men. Jesus achieved godhood of this earth, as we too can achieve godhood.

**TESTING THE SPIRITS**

So John begins his warning with “beloved,” again showing his shepherd’s heart for the church. Then he warns to “*not believe every spirit, but test the spirits.*” Two questions emerge immediately. (1) Who are the “spirits” we are to test? And (2) what is to be test? Let’s answer the first question first. We might be tempted to think that we are to somehow test the evil spirits – the voices of antichrist. But it is clear from Scripture that the demons know exactly who Jesus is.

**Luke 4:41** *Demons also were coming out of many, shouting, “You are the Son of God!” But rebuking them, He would not allow them to speak, because they knew Him to be the Christ.*

**Mark 5:7** *[Demon possessed man:] And shouting with a loud voice, he said, “What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High god? I implore You by God, do not torment me!*

**James 2:19** *You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.*

So John is not calling us to test the demons, but to test pastors, teachers, missionaries, chaplains and any who claim to speak for God. We know this because he goes on to say that “*many false prophets have gone out into the world.*” John is concerned God’s children might be taken in by churches and church leaders that are not “from God” or speaking the truth of God.

So the second question is “what is to be the test?” John answers that with verse 2: “*By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.*”

First, think with me how many levels there are to that test statement.

1. Jesus is Savior (that’s the meaning of His name – Matthew 1:23)
2. Jesus is Christ = Messiah (that’s the anointed redeemer of God)
3. Jesus is “come in the flesh” = God in the flesh = the incarnation
4. Jesus being these things must be “confessed” = lived out in life expression

All are important, but the emphasis is on the incarnation – He has “*come in the flesh.*” I have always felt that the most amazing God-miracle of all the incredible God-miracles is the incarnation. It is the one that stretches the limits of our imagination – that the eternal, almighty I AM could and would become a human baby in order to reach and provide salvation for the crown of His creation – mankind. That God walked the earth as a man just blows the mind. Yet believing and professing the incarnation is what John says confirms that one is “from God” – that is, representing God’s message of truth.

And likewise, if a church, pastor, or any teacher of God does not believe in and affirm the incarnation of God for our salvation, he/she is representing the spirit of antichrist. Those other world religions and Christian cults are clearly in that category of not believing in Jesus being God come to earth. And sadly, many churches that call themselves “Christian” do not affirm the incarnation either.

## JESUS - GOD IN THE FLESH

It continues to amaze me that so many who call themselves “Christian” deny the deity of Christ Jesus. They even claim that the Scriptures do not teach of His deity. But the deity of Jesus as God in the flesh is taught in so many ways and in so many Scriptures. Here are some of my “favorite” and obvious:

✓ The Father had the infant son of Mary named “Immanuel” as spoken of by the prophet Isaiah – which means “God with us”

✓ When being betrayed by Judas, Jesus asked “Whom do you seek?” Twice his accusers answered, “Jesus of Nazareth.” And twice Jesus responded, “I AM” – the Holy Name of God Jehovah – which made them fall to the ground. (John 18:4-8)

✓ Timothy, in describing the “mystery of godliness” goes on to talk of Jesus in the flesh (1 Timothy 3:16)

✓ The Father calls the Son “God”

**Hebrews 1:8** *But of the Son He [the Father] says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.”*

✓ Jesus said, “*I and the Father are one.*” (John 10:30). And the arguments go that Jesus was just saying that they were one in spirit. Yet when Jesus asked the Jews why they were picking up stones to stone Him, they answered:

**John 10:33** *For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God.*

Yes, even his enemies knew that Jesus was claiming to be equal with God – God come in the flesh.

## JOHN’S 4-FOLD JESUS TEST

John has here established that what one believes and affirms regarding Jesus is of critical importance to one's salvation. But John knew that believing that Jesus was fully man in the flesh was only one piece of the doctrinal puzzle. We are going to see in the last two chapters of 1 John that he gives 4 doctrinal tests regarding the person of Jesus – all of which must be “passed” to conclude that one is doctrinally sound.

**TEST #1 - JESUS WAS FULLY MAN** as God in the flesh

*1 John 4:2 ... every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.*

**TEST #2 - JESUS WAS FULLY GOD** as God in the flesh

*1 John 4:15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.*

*1 John 5:5 Who is the one who overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*

As the “only begotten Son” (John 3:16), Jesus is of and from the very essence of God – divine!

**TEST #3 - JESUS IS SAVIOR OF ALL** as Messiah / Christ)

*1 John 5:1 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God ...*

But we know that Jesus is not the Savior of all, but of all who would receive Him. Many believe that because “Jesus died for all” then all will be saved. But that is heresy, as we have already pointed out. So ...

**TEST #4 - JESUS IS SAVIOR OF EACH** (who receive Him as such)

*1 John 5:12 He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.*

*John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.*

May we not believe every profession of Jesus to be from God – but TEST that profession by the above 4 tests. Does that church, pastor, teacher, missionary, chaplain, person ... believe in the incarnation – that Jesus was fully God and fully man. And does this one believe and affirm that Jesus is the anointed savior of the world to each who receive Him as such.

And as you are sharing you faith with another, do all you can to bring the conversation around to the person of Jesus Christ. What they believe, receive and affirm is of crucial importance to one's eternal destiny. Beloved, do not believe every spirit ... To deny the truth of who Jesus is, is THE HIGHEST HERESY.

About five years ago I was looking for a song that would reflect the truth that Jesus was both fully God and fully man in the incarnation. Not able to find one, I wrote the following, which I share with you as I close.

**SON OF GOD, SON OF MAN**

King of heaven, Son of earth  
None can fathom all your worth  
Timeless One, born in time,  
Helpless babe and Lord divine

Son of God, Son of Man  
Both a part of Your great plan  
Fully God, fully man  
Yet I can't fully understand

But I can praise you as Savior  
Love you as Lord  
And I can love you as Shepherd  
You are Jesus – both God and man

