

First John (14) - Testing The Spirits

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[0 : 0 0] in 1 John chapter 4 and we'll look at these six verses from the beginning of the chapter for a short time this evening. As we last time saw the previous passage dealing with assurance or reassurance we can see how that ends in verse 24 of the previous chapter with a reference to the Spirit to the Holy Spirit as you can see it's got a capital S by this we know that he abides in us by the Spirit whom he has given us and so that's immediately introducing us to the Holy Spirit which again features in the passage that we're going to look at this evening as we work our way through 1 John so that our assurance of salvation involves very much centrally indeed the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of God's people it is through that as we'll see in conjunction with the Word of God that we come to be assured of our redemption our relationship with God our salvation in Christ and so on and that's what John is dealing with but then you see he was facing false teachers heretics who also claimed to have the work of the Spirit and to have the Spirit in support of what they were teaching and saying false teachers also claimed to be led by the Holy Spirit and that their teaching was of God and of the Holy Spirit and that of course is what we face today because what's spoken here is very true today as well we saw something of this back in chapter 2 if you recall where we saw that the spirit of Antichrist or many spirits have gone out false prophets have gone out into the world and this is the spirit of Antichrist which you heard was coming and now is in the world already so John is re-emphasizing that fact for them that is indeed one of the main reasons that he's written this letter to those that he loves those that he wants to actually protect from further inroads from false teaching taking them away from the truth of God and that's what we face today as well because as you well know yourselves there are some who come to claim to speak from God and indeed go so far as to seek to control other people's lives with a word from as they claim from the Spirit of God a word for healing or a word for signs or a word for miraculous works a word to instruct people as to how they themselves should look after their children or not look after their children all sorts of very detailed ideas of how to bring up your children how to get involved in things such as the work of the gospel but nevertheless not in keeping with the central foundational things of the Bible as we know them so what do you do how do you find out who's right and who's wrong who do you listen to who do you not listen to who do you believe and who do you not believe how do you know who to trust when various teachings of that kind come to you and claim to be speaking for God and yet you have a suspicion because there are aspects of what they teach or how they behave that does not accord with what you know are important foundational central truths of the gospel well John's answer is actually quite simple or there are some profound things about it it's quite simple he says don't believe every spirit but test them put them to the proof don't believe everything you hear even if it's in the name of God you have to actually test it out doesn't matter who's saying it it doesn't matter if it comes from this pulpit it doesn't matter if it comes from outside it doesn't matter if you come across it in something you read doesn't matter if it comes from the internet whatever it is that claims to speak for God and

from God you have to actually put it to the test and as we'll see the test involves Christ himself being central to that and the word of God being central to it as well so that is his response that is his advice that's his counsel do not believe every spirit every form of teaching every claim to speak for God but put them to the proof put them to the test whether they are from God for many false prophets have gone out into the world so what is he saying to us well you can divide it tonight into two it's a testing or approving firstly by the nature of the message that's being taught or conveyed it's a testing regarding the nature of the message or by the nature of the message you can actually see whether it's false or whether it's from God or not by looking at the nature of the message itself and what it says and then fitting it or placing it alongside four square on or alongside the teaching of God's own word the Bible it's a teach and testing by the nature of the message and secondly it's

also a testing by the nature of the audience because John moves from those who are speaking to those who are listening he says that they are from the world these heretics therefore they speak from the world and the world listens to them we by that he means the apostles like himself those that God established to set foundationally the New Testament church and the teaching that you find now in their epistles he says we are from God whoever knows God listens to us whoever is not from God does not listen to us so these are the two strands of his teaching in this passage firstly there's a testing of the spirits by the nature of the message taught and there's a testing by the nature of the audience and who people listen to including ourselves this is what he's saying beloved do not believe every spirit but test prove the spirits put them to the proof to see whether they are from God and in the text that you find here in the original text of the New Testament this is a very strong imperative John is not mincing his words he's regarding this as something far too serious to be trifling with he's setting it out by way of a very strong imperative don't believe every spirit but do test the spirits whether they are from God and as part of our calling as ministers of the gospel to actually set before those that we preach to that this is a necessary exercise an ongoing exercise we can't be elusive about these things we can't actually deal with them as if they're just sideline issues because for John it's very much to do with relationship to God and to his truth the genuineness of our standing and of our witness and of our Christian experience and this is what he's saying the reason for this he's saying that they have to not believe every spirit but rather test them is for many false prophets have gone out into the world and that's taking you back to chapter 2 you recall verses 8 there to 19 where you find him dealing with the same kind of thing there where you find the world also mentioned and those who've gone out from them they went out from us chapter 2 verses 18 from from there onwards you have heard that the antichrist has come that antichrist is coming so many antichrists have come therefore we know it is the last hour they went out from us but they were not of us they went out from the church they sought to throw to draw people into their form of teaching they tried to take over from the inside and we saw at that time how the greatest danger to the church is not what's out there it's what's in here it's what happens from within it's when people actually bring out a species of teaching or of what purports to be the gospel that actually isn't the gospel at all well he says this is what we're facing and he says no you have to test the spirits whether they are of god for many false prophets have gone out into the world and you notice it is an issue ultimately of origin it's an issue of origin ultimately because either the teaching he says is of or from god or as in the case of these heretics it is the spirit of the antichrist the spirit of that which is anti-christ anti-gospel anti-what god has revealed and these are the two sources i know there can be quite a lot of overlap or interaction perhaps it doesn't mean that everybody who says something that's not in accord with the gospel is actually a heretic out and out but these people certainly were because they were denying some of the cardinal doctrines and as we'll see especially denying things that are absolutely crucial to understand and accept and follow about jesus himself and this is a perennial exercise for you and for me as well don't believe every spirit test the spirits whether they are of god and if i can say this to the young folks or those who are newly converted or seeking to follow the lord after a short time maybe you've not yet gained much experience in the kind of teachings that you come across in reading or in going onto the internet or listening to people whatever we have a duty as those who are more mature in the faith to give you the right guidance and you have the privilege to your being with older christians you know it's not really nowadays as much done sadly but it should be that younger christians and younger people meet with those more experienced on a regular basis that's where so much was given out from those who are well on in the christian way to actually advise to defend the gospel to protect younger ones from these in the spirits from these false teachings and that's something that we should seek to recapture surely be with older christians you young ones you inexperienced ones be with them as much as you can it's important we look after our young people as well our children our sunday school children our younger ones even than that because they have access to the internet they have access to phones they have access to all sorts of information that we didn't have in our young days and that makes them vulnerable makes them vulnerable to the teachings of antichrist it makes them vulnerable to false teaching to heresy and you know that it is the mind of antichrist the mind of the spirit of the world to draw people away from the gospel to draw people away from christ and from a proper understanding of what salvation is not far into our studies in first john i came across adverts for meetings that are taking place in the cal in which really are supposedly a re-expression or a re-discovery of the gospel or of the truth of god and yet denying some basic christian doctrine such as the doctrine of the trinity don't believe every spirit however glossy it seems however

persuasive it seems put it to the test and let's look after our young people and our young christians especially and that's why we're so grateful for the quality that we have in this congregation of youth leaders and of those who are in charge of instructing and looking after our young now they themselves have to actually beware that they don't believe every spirit they have a great responsibility looking after our young folks that they themselves understand where false teaching comes into contact with their lives and they're able to discern that we have to keep on praying for a spirit of discernment a spirit of recognition of what is and isn't from god what is and is not through to the gospel and in keeping with what god has given us i know that may sound very negative but remember the bible has many negatives as well as positives and this is a negative do not believe every spirit and there's the positive corresponding but test the spirits put them to the test so what's the core issue and how do we come to test the spirits the teachings the claims that you come across well the core issue as you can see in verses 2 and 3 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 which you heard was coming and now is in the world already that's the core issue it's their view of jesus it's their opinion about jesus it's their presentation of jesus and who he is and what he has done or not done or who he is not and what he is that's the core issue as it very often is and you notice that that is what he brings out especially that jesus christ has come in the flesh it's from god now incidentally and i'm not just saying this in passing because it's not important it's something that fits alongside of this that you have to remember as well and this is something that jesus himself taught the disciples wherever you find a teaching where jesus is kept in the background and where the likes of the holy spirit is presented as that which is in the forefront be at least suspicious of it because the holy spirit does not present himself the ministry of the holy spirit is to present jesus that's what jesus himself taught if you just cast your mind back to what he taught what god what jesus himself taught in john 16 in the gospel of john this remember is what he said when he said about the holy spirit that he would actually come and that he would take the things that were christ's and show them unto you he will glorify me for he will take of my things and show them unto you that is what jesus himself actually said he will glorify me he will guide you into all truth he will not speak on his own authority but whatever he hears he will speak and he will declare the things that are to come he will glorify me for he will take what is mine and declare it to you that is the pattern that god himself has established though the spirit is fully god it is his ministry and it's by his authority that we come to have jesus presented to us that's why jesus is at the forefront of the gospel that's why he is crucial in our understanding of who he is and what he has done that's what the spirit presents to us not himself but christ that's in passing but it's important but you notice in verse 2 what he's saying here this is how you know the spirit of god every spirit that confesses that jesus christ has come in the flesh now we could we could change the words around a wee bit and it's still true to the original text because probably better translated something like that jesus is the christ come in the flesh you see the question was about jesus of nazareth this human being how is he in relation to god who is he in himself is he god is he just a mere man or some of the heretics taught if we follow what developed from this after the time of the apostles that jesus wasn't even real in terms of his humanity that he only seemed

to be real and that he just appeared to be a human being or others think that the divine spirit and the way they thought about it came upon this real human being jesus for his ministry on earth and then just departed from him before he died on the cross and you see how that affects so much if not all of your understanding of salvation if you get the person of jesus wrong it's going to have an impact on so much else because he is if he is not god then your doctrine of the trinity collapses and our salvation is a trinitarian salvation it involves the father the son and the holy spirit as distinct persons of the godhead and if jesus is not fully human then how do you understand his death how do you understand what happened on the cross how do you understand his resurrection from the dead physically from the grave see this is what he is saying jesus is the christ the anointed one the promised deliverer that was promised in the days of the old testament this is jesus this is the jesus who is spoken about in the gospels the jesus who was born of a woman of a woman in this world who was raised as an infant who came in his human nature to be dependent on his mother who came as we read in luke having been found in the temple teaching the doctors of the law he then went back and was obedient to mary and joseph his parents jesus jesus is the christ of god jesus is that christ that was promised that anointed one come in the flesh real full humanity sinless in himself nevertheless a complete human being well as the catechism puts it a true body and a

reasonable soul a rational soul everything that you need to have the proper full definition of what it is to be human that's Jesus you don't need to include sin for your definition of what it is to be human to be complete he is fully human he is fully God he is the God man this is what he's saying and it's such an important aspect of what he's setting before those that he's writing to it's crucial he's saying what you believe about Jesus your relation to Jesus and to God through him affects everything else that is the test you see the test for me as a preacher of the gospel the test that you must put me to as a preacher of the gospel don't say that in any other way but in a way that is seeking to be true to scripture itself the test is not so much or not only what I actually put into the content of my preaching or anyone who's preaching the gospel not just me that of course is part of the test but I could preach all year about the death of

[19:31] Christ and say nothing about his resurrection and that would not be true to the gospel there's not so much he's not just saying it's important what preachers of the gospel put into their message it's also important that people who are listening examine what they leave out and if we leave out consistently core truths of the gospel we're not being true to God we're not being true to the gospel itself it has to be a balanced presentation of the truth which is what we're seeking always to try to do though very often I'm sure we fail however this is what he's saying the test isn't very much about Jesus and the teaching that compromises that he's saying is not from God you take it that the teaching that you come across says that well Jesus didn't actually rise from the dead bodily that's just a spiritual conclusion that the disciples came to having heard his teaching and they worked that into what they presented as the gospel that is not from

God because Paul is adamant and John is adamant that Jesus is the Christ come in the flesh God incarnate God become human while still God and how often we come across this in preaching in our study of God's word this question who is Jesus who is he it's there all through the bible it's there in the gospel of Luke especially when you read Luke's gospel periodically you come to this question it's sometimes on the lips of the disciples it's sometimes on the lips of those who find fault with him who is this man who is he what is he about what is his life about what is his person about why was he in the world what did he do in the world and how do you understand who he is from what he did well who is he tonight for yourself that's the great question too isn't it because you and I have to bring this down to a very personal level who is

Jesus in your life what have you made of him thus far how does your life relate to him do you believe everything in the bible about him and still do not know him as your friend as your savior as your lord and God who is he who is he for you who is he for me not just the Jesus mentioned in the gospel back in history but the Jesus who is now at God's right hand this person this whole person this God man who is he who is he to you what does he mean to you what is your life about if you are living without this personal relationship to him and of course if you have him you want to know more of him you want to be more with him you want to find out more about him his person his work that is why the bible is so precious to you why the preaching of the gospel is precious to you why we love to be involved in preaching the gospel because central to it is this great figure this person of Jesus the son of

God Jesus of Nazareth so that is the first thing it is attesting by the nature of the message but he goes on that it is attesting to by the nature of the audience and somewhat more briefly well he is saying here to those that he is writing to little children you are from God in verse 4 and you have overcome them that is the heretics for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world they that is the false teachers they are from the world therefore they speak from the world and the world and remember in John's writings gospel and epistles the world means that community of human beings as they oppose God as they resist God as they deny claims of God so this is what he is saying the world listens to them we are from God whoever knows God listens to us whoever is not from God does not listen to us what he is doing is carrying on with reassuring those that he is writing to that they are indeed children of God as he said at the beginning of chapter 3 and now he is saying you are from God and have overcome them the nature of those who listen to the gospel and appreciate and receive the gospel and live by the gospel that itself is an indication of who they are and what kind of spirit they are listening to and what does he mean by saying that they have overcome them they have overcome the heretics for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world what it means that they haven't been taken in by this false teaching they have risen above this false teaching they have dismissed this false teaching and not capitulated to it they have not given themselves over to it you have overcome them he's saying and that takes us really to the

phrase there for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world now that's what we find earlier in chapter two as well isn't it the anointing that's mentioned there that God has given to his people that anointing chapter two and verse twenty where Jesus is saying you have been anointed or have anointing by the holy one and you have you all have knowledge I write to you not because you do not know the truth but because you know it and because no lie is of the truth and all the way through there he goes on similarly to what you find here in our passage this evening and when he comes to verse twenty twenty seven he's saying but the anointing that you received from him abides in you and you have no need that anyone should teach you but as his anointing teaches you about everything and is true and is no lie just as it has taught you so abide in him now what he's saying by that as we saw is that that that that anointing is equated with a possession of the Holy Spirit the Holy Spirit coming to indwell God's people that anointing from God who is the person of the Holy Spirit himself is not that

[26 : 06] God gives his people as some false teaching says he gives his people the Holy Spirit and then somewhat after that maybe years after that you have the anointing by which you're raised to a certain level then that you're able to understand more about false teaching and you're in a position to overcome no he's given you the Holy Spirit and when he gives you the Holy Spirit that anointing is your great teacher when he says you have no need that anyone else teaches you he's not dismissing the teaching of the gospel obviously because John himself was a teacher of the gospel and he's teaching them by this epistle but what he's saying is you have within you you have upon you you have from God this great anointing for greater is he that is in you than he who is in the world the world doesn't have that however powerful that world is however powerful and persuasive the heretics have one thing they lack that you God's people have is the Holy Spirit within you and that's really such a crucial distinction greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world and that brings us to conclude this that in defending his people against

John in defending these people against heretics and counseling them and giving them something of a defense but also how they can overcome and have already overcome the false teaching he's setting before them and he's setting before us here in this passage that we always look to two things that are always there for us and always foundational for us with regard to overcoming false teaching and not being drawn aside into heresy or departure from the ways of the Lord what are they there is firstly this objective standard of doctrine this objective standard of doctrine and secondly accompanying that you have the indwelling Holy Spirit I mean by the objective standard of doctrine is the doctrines of the faith itself as they're grounded in scripture the doctrines that arise from the written word of God these foundational doctrines such as the person of Christ the work of Christ the atonement how we come to be made right with God our justification our sanctification whatever is foundational to our salvation or very much an integral part of our salvation the structure of salvation these are our objective standard doctrines that's why John is taking his readers and listeners back to that the standard the objective truth of God in Christ not human opinion not the various ideas that you find floating from generation to generation not the kind of things that human wisdom comes up with not things that seem persuasive just because men of ability or women of ability are propagating them they're already revealed they're already here in the scriptures this objective standard of doctrine and that's accompanied by the Holy Spirit when you have the Holy Spirit within you as all God's people have when you have that along with the objective truth that God has given us in the gospel that's your defense and that's you're overcoming that's what you depend upon that's what you look to that's what you go back to that's what's foundational in your Christian experience and in your ongoing experience there's a wonderful definition in the confession of faith Westminster confession of faith in the first chapter which very tellingly begins with the doctrine of scripture where it tells us that there are so many things in the testimony of the church and in the qualities of scripture itself by which it gives abundant evidence that this indeed is the word of God but our full persuasion of the divine truth and authority of this word is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts see how beautifully that's put it's not just the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts it's not simply the word of God in our hearts it's the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the word in other words when you are persuaded of the truth of the Bible as to what it is and the truth of its teachings and then the truth of all the things that you understand in terms of how you come to be saved what salvation is about all of these things the Holy Spirit persuades you but he doesn't do it without the truth of the

gospel the truth of God nor is it the truth of God without the Holy Spirit by this he says we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error you see friends truth never becomes untruth truth never becomes untruth because it is always from

[31 : 41] God and whatever distortions you might find of the truth whatever claims there be to things other than the gospel to be the truth of God it still remains the truth of God however much it's denied however much attempts are made to change it or to restate it or to reform it in terms of its core elements the truth remains the truth that never becomes untruth and correspondingly or in the other way you can say the same about what is false what is false never becomes true however hard heretics try to convince us what is false will never become true what is true what is truth will never become untruth friends the spirit of antichrist is at large it's part of our responsibility to point it out in preaching the gospel it's something that we required under

God to do we're only following what God himself has set out for us in the likes of this passage that spirit of antichrist is at large many false prophets have gone out into the world you hold to the truth of God as you have it in your Bibles as you have it wherever you have it faithfully proclaimed and adhered to and finally make sure of this that it is the Holy Spirit that you have within you and not the spirit of error or untruth make sure that the Holy Spirit inhabits your soul how do you do that you accept Christ and as you accept Christ everything comes with him this Jesus who is God in the flesh the Christ of God let's pray Lord our

God and our Father in heaven God we give thanks again for the truth as you have revealed it to us and we give thanks that in your word we find our consolation and our comfort against all the error that we see around us and sometimes arising from within our own souls Lord guard our minds we pray as we interact with your truth help us to be faithful in conveying it by word or witness and enable us at all times to look to these foundational matters of your spirit and your word help us Lord to remember that when the Lord Jesus Christ himself lived in this life in this world he said so often thus it is written and depended upon this written word for himself Lord we pray that when it was so much his walk to do so that it may also be ours too grant us your blessing then we pray and protect us and shield us from all that seeks to take us away from your truth and from yourself and we ask this in

Jesus name and for his sake Amen well let's conclude our worship this evening singing in Psalm 119 that's on page 168 singing this time to Choon Warrington we're singing from verse 161 that section down as far as 168 Psalm 119 from verse 161 though rulers hound me without cause my heart fears nothing but your word for in your promise I rejoice like one who finds great spoil O Lord Psalm 119 verses 161 on page 167 the ruler shound me without cause my heart fears nothing but your word but in your promise

I rejoice like one who finds great spot O Lord all false who die have born and he with all my heart I love your love love I praise you seven times a day for your commands I hold in all all great peace have those who love your law they will not stumble in the way

[37 : 18] I wait for your salvation Lord and your commands I will obey I will observe your statutes Lord my love for the Lord my love for them is great and true pure laws and priests I obey for all my ways are known to you I will go to the main door Lord our God we pray now that you would bless the food prepared for us at the fellowship we thank you for it and for those who have prepared it we pray that you would bless

Alistair as he comes to speak to us about the work that he's been involved in in camps in your work whatever it is in the world and grant that your grace and mercy and peace from God the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit will be our portion now and ever more Amen