

Series: The Confident, Loving Church – week 18

CDOBC – beginning on 2/14/10

Title: “Your ID Please”

1 John 4:1-3 ~ July 11, 2010

OBJECTIVE: To help believers discern between true and false teachers.

Announcements

- Welcome / guests – communication cards
- Gospel Rescue Mission – Christmas in July food drive
- Summer Book Study – “Purpose Driven Life” – see website for details
- Voter registration – today 7/11

In recent months, our state has been at the center of a heated debate over the topic of illegal immigration with the passage of SB 1070. The prospect of proving one’s true identity and legal status is an issue that causes passionate arguments from both sides.

Another issue related to someone’s true identity has also been in the headlines recently, as a group of Russian spies were arrested, and then on Friday a ‘spy swap’ took place with Russia. This group was living for years under false identities, with the hopes of gaining information and insight into our nation’s secrets.

This idea of discovering someone’s true identity is nothing new. In the realm of nations, it has always been an issue. I was a Youth Pastor when the Columbine murders took place, and after that event your identity was crucial when visiting a Jr. High or High School campus.

When it comes to the church, how are we able to identify if someone is a false teacher with a false message?

When it comes to identifying false Christian teachers from those speaking the truth, and when it comes to identifying the veracity of some areas of Christian thought and ideas, most believers approach things with a dangerous innocence. If they move and search for a new church home, many believers seem to focus more on the *feel*

of a church – the décor, worship style, and the menu of ministries offered, instead of whether or not the Pastor and other leaders are truly led by the Spirit of God and faithfully teach the truth of God.

As we have already seen, the Apostle John has warned his readers (2:18-19) of those who are anti-christs – those who teach a false message about Christ, about the Gospel, and about Christian living. This type of warning is not original to the Apostle – or to any of the other Apostles who wrote the pages of Scripture. In fact, this has been a primary issue since the beginning of humanity in the Garden of Eden. From the start, Satan’s primary strategy has been to distort and mischaracterize God and His Word. This is how he most frequently works to destroy the people of God and the Kingdom of God.

In Genesis 3, we read how Satan, in the form of the serpent, distorted God’s directions to Adam and His prohibition regarding the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Elijah and the other prophets all had to fight against the perversion, twisting, and the neglect of God’s Word.

Jesus warned of false prophets (Matt. 7:15; 24:4-5, 11, 24), as well as Paul (Acts 20:29; Rom. 16:17-18), Peter (2 Peter 2:1-3), John (1 John 2:18-24), and Jude (Jude 4-19).

Being able to distinguish a Christian teacher or leader who is led by the Spirit of God from those who are actually led by a spirit of falsehood has always been important for God’s people.

Why is this an important issue? What’s the big deal if a Christian teacher is a little off base on the truth of God’s Word? Some people claim that those who insist on a rigorous adherence to the Bible are closed minded and living in the past...are they correct in that accusation?

It's interesting that some have a hesitation when it comes to a high standard for Christian teaching, but they have no problem setting high standards for other areas of their life.

They insist that their *doctor* has a diploma on the wall – that he/she has the proper certifications and licenses next to their diploma. To have a doctor who was a little off base in their medical studies disqualifies them from being considered as their doctor!

They won't settle for their *airline pilot* to be good at some areas of aeronautics and not others.

They want the *mechanic* who works on their car to get it right – to have the knowledge and ability to fix the problem – not just to wrap some duct tape around a part of the engine and hope the problem is fixed!

They demand that those who *teach* their kids at school to be fully competent to teach writing, reading, and arithmetic.

They even want their *sports teams* and their *favorite singers* to be the best at their trade. Nobody wants to pay money to see a baseball player that can't catch very well, and nobody is buying CD's of those who fail to make it though week 1 or 2 of American Idol!

But when it comes to their faith and a pastor or teacher, so many believers say, *“Well, his theology is a bit off, and he has some unorthodox positions, but he means well and the music is great! And, besides they have a cool coffee bar!”*

Why is it so important that our church – that our preachers and teachers are dedicated and committed to Biblical truth?

- ◆ This is an important issue because it has eternal implications. If you are wrong in this area, there is no going back to fix it!
- ◆ This is an important issue because it has life-changing and life-determining actions on this earth.

- ◆ This is an important issue because God has commanded us to make it a priority.
- ◆ This is an important issue because words mean things – and our beliefs about God are foundational to how we will live.
- ◆ This is an important issue because if our theology is off, our belief will not be true, and our life will not be pleasing to God, and our life will not glorify God, it will glorify our version of God – which will be a god unto ourselves!
- ◆ This is an important issue because if we don't know God according to His own revelation to us (The Bible) – then we will not be able to live and love as He has directed us, and we will all be lost and far away from Him and His will.

Those are just some of the reasons why this issue is important – and why the Apostle John writes what he does in...

Turn to 1 John 4:1-3

Remember – the Gnostic teachers taught many false things about Christ – about the Gospel. One of the popular false teachings in the first and second centuries was called the Cerinthian heresy – and it taught that Jesus was a great man and that the Spirit of God indwelt Him at His baptism and left Him just prior to His crucifixion. According to this popular 1st century heresy, Jesus was not God in the flesh, but a mere mortal who was inspired by God throughout His ministry.

Read 1 John 4:1-3

The command against naïve faith *vs. 1*

There is a reason we have Sunday School classes. There is a reason we have small groups. There is a reason we have a Children's and a Youth Ministry. There is a reason we have

a Men's and Women's Ministry. There is a reason we have a grief support ministry, a step-family ministry. There is a reason that when I preach, I do my best to share and explain what God's Word says – not my uninspired ideas and philosophical thoughts – but the Word of God.

It's to help you know and understand what God says.

It's to help you know God more fully.

It's so that when certain issues and decisions come up in your life, you will have knowledge of God's Word that can be applied to that situation – and you can make a decision that is in obedience to His Word – which will result in you pleasing the Lord (3:22).

Illus. – This past week, I messed up as a parent. One of my kids did something that was wrong. I was angry – and anger was appropriate because of the disobedience. But, I sinned by not controlling my anger and letting it get out of control. I said things I shouldn't have said – and I over-reacted in my anger. So, later that night, I apologized and asked for forgiveness from that child.

If I didn't know what God's Word says in Eph. 6:4 about *exasperating my kids*...

If I didn't know what God's Word says about *anger* in James 1:20, Galatians 5:19-20, Col. 3:8-9...

If I didn't know what God's Word says in Col. 3:12-13, Eph. 4:32 about *forgiveness*...

I wouldn't have known how sinful my actions were and I wouldn't know how important these things are in the work of repentance.

Now – what is truly important is that you have the right teaching – the God-inspired message - and that you know the true desire of God in such matters. We must be aware that Satan would love to distort the process at the root – he would love to give us a faulty foundation so that the entire structure

of our Christian life would be unsound. There is no better way to discourage and ruin someone's faith than to persuade them to build it on shifting sand instead of the solid rock of God's truth (Matt. 7:24-27)?

If you are not aware of the existence of false spirits (false teachers), then you will be open to following all kinds of teachings that may sound good, but in reality are far from God's truth. John's opening statement here in vs. 1 or chapter 4 helps us to understand fully the spiritual landscape we are called to travel through – a landscape that contains God-inspired and God-blessed truth – and falsehoods that are not only anti-christ, but they are from Satan himself, meant to discourage and mislead many from the safety and blessing of God's truth.

The test for truth vs. 2-3

In 1848, gold was discovered in California by James Marshall. By 1849, the state was under a full invasion from the treasure hunters as thousands were seeking their fortune in gold. Drawing their name by the year of great promise, the '49ers' learned that there was not only *gold in them there hills*, but there was also *fools gold*. Fools gold is nothing more than iron pyrite, and it was relatively worthless.

However, most miners soon learned a few different ways they could tell *fools gold* from real gold – saving themselves public humiliation from a false claim, and a great deal of work for no reward.

The Apostle John realizes that just like *fools gold* is hard to distinguish from real gold, sometimes it's difficult to discern if a spirit / teaching is from God or from the Devil.

Throughout the O.T., this same issue was present – how could the people of Israel tell if someone who claimed to be a prophet of God was indeed a prophet of God?

Deut. 18:22

“If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.”

Jer. 28:9

“But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the LORD only if his prediction comes true.”

The Apostle Paul dealt with this issue in the church at Corinth. However, in the church age – the accuracy of prophecy was no longer the primary test for a prophet – but now Jesus was the primary test.

1 Cor. 12:3

“Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.”

Well, the same issue was present at the end of the 1st century, so John gives us a test that was similar to the other tests we just read, but specific to the false teaching he was fighting against.

The test was the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Since the Gnostics taught that Jesus was not ‘God in the flesh’, the primary way for John’s readers to detect a false teacher was to hear their view of Christ. Two-thousand years later, this test is still one of the best ways to detect a false teacher or a false religion.

The test of the spirit of God was not miraculous signs – because even the Devil has supernatural power.

F.F. Bruce says, “*No matter how charming, how plausible, how eloquent the prophets in question may be, the test of their witness to Christ and His truth is the test by which they must be judged.*” (The Gospel & Epistles of John, by F.F. Bruce, p. 105)

John clearly says in vs. 2 – “This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God...”

By their view and profession in Jesus.

First the confession they must have is “Jesus Christ” – this refers not only to the man (Jesus), but also to His deity, as seen in His office and role as Messiah – (Christ). The O.T. descriptions of the Messiah could only be met by someone who was both God and man (Psalm 22; Isaiah 53).

This eliminates those who profess a belief in the person named Jesus, but who deny His supernatural and eternal nature.

Next, we see that He “...has come in the flesh is from God...”

John needed to clarify this truth because of the Gnostic and Cerinthian heresy I referred to earlier. Jesus was not a man who was born, and then filled with the Holy Spirit for a time. He was God – who willingly and obediently came to earth to take on flesh, so that He could show us the truth – show us the Father – die as a sacrifice for sin – and then rise from the dead to conquer death and sin.

“acknowledges” – Greek word *homologeō*– means to ‘*say the same thing*’ – present tense = continues to say / repeatedly says this about Jesus. A “track record” should be observed to make sure they are consistent in their belief about Jesus.

So, one of the primary ways we can tell if a teacher / preacher / author is from God, is if they routinely / regularly confess “...that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God...”

On the flip side, if a teacher / preacher / author does not confess “...that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God...”, then you can be sure that they are not from God and they are

not speaking the truth of God – and I would suggest that you reject their spiritual teaching.

This is why doctrine / theology – especially in the area of Christology – is so important. This is why reading your Bible and studying the truths about Jesus are so vital. If you don't know these things, how can you make a right judgment about the 'spirit' behind their teaching?

Application

Proper identification is important – not only in a society, but especially when we must identify if a message is from God or not. We cannot ask for a Pastor's ID or his paperwork to prove his status as a faithful teacher of God's Word. Like the Bereans (Acts 17:11), we must make sure that what we hear agrees with Scripture.

It's up to each of us to stop believing everything, and “test the spirits”

1. Listen and read with caution.
Be aware of the reality of false teachers.
2. Apply the test of Christ incarnate
Develop the ability to discern truth from falsehood.
How is this done? By studying and meditating upon God's Word.
It's done by learning about Christ – Christology
It's done by learning about the bible – Bibliology

Close in prayer