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A0442 -- Oct. 17, 2004 – 1 John 3:24-4:3 – Testing the Spirits

Last week, we looked at the Doctrine of Prayer. I made seven significant points about prayer. ***First***, was the general significance of prayer. Our Lord emphasized prayer in the Upper Room Discourse and His attendance to prayer in His own life stimulated his apostles to ask Him to “teach them to pray.” They were not asking a particular method of prayer but for Him to teach them how to really attend to prayer; how to really devote themselves to prayer. They must have been in awe, looking at the One who would most likely need to pray the least, God in the flesh, and yet He, being Perfect, devoted a lot of time to prayer. How much more do those who are imperfect need to devote themselves to prayer. ***Second***, we looked at the Dispensational aspect of prayer, not often considered in such a study, but very important. The dispensational aspect of prayer introduces a new ground for prayer during the Church dispensation. That ground is prayer in the name of Jesus Christ. Before this His apostles had asked nothing in His name, now they were to ask in His name, trusting that the new grounds of prayer were effectual. ***Third***, we have a new partnership in prayer. Christ ascended is now the mediator between us and the Father and our prayers go through Christ to the Father, in particular however, only the prayers that are in the will of God proceed from Christ to the Father. ***Fourth***, there are two human conditions that must be met for prayer to be answered. They amount to knowing the commandments of God and obeying the commandments of God. Whatever steps you have to take to learn the commandments of God, take them, and then do something with them, obey them. Under those two conditions being met ask whatever you wish and it will be granted. ***Fifth***, there are a couple of reasons prayer is not answered. First, because you don’t ask, instead you try to get things on your own steam, and second because you ask with wrong motives, selfish things that God could care less about. ***Sixth*** we looked at the Divinely prescribed order of prayer. We pray to the Father, in the name of the Son and by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. We don’t pray to Jesus or the Holy Spirit because Jesus mediates our prayers and the Holy Spirit enables us to pray. ***Finally***, we looked at the relationship between the Divine will and the human will in prayer. Why pray if God’s will is going to

be done anyway? Well, this has always been the supposed problem from the human perspective and it always will be a problem as long as you are looking at it from the human perspective. You have to look at prayer from the divine perspective in order to understand its importance and necessity for bringing about the plan of God. God does condition some of His actions on prayer. However, it does not follow that those things that are conditioned on prayer are uncertain to come to pass because prayer is the decreed means by which some of God's purposes are met. Apart from our prayers the will of God could not be accomplished. But, at the same time, apart from the plan of God our prayers could not be offered. In other words, God did not simply decree the beginning and the end of His plan. He also decreed the means between the beginning and the end. Our goal as Christians is to align our will with the will of God so that we can be a part of bringing that plan to pass and stop wasting our time praying with selfish motives.

This week, we are leaving the proper conditions for having confidence in prayer and moving on to look at briefly at Pneumatology, that is, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and a specific test for discerning the True Spirit from False Spirits. There are many spirit beings or spiritual attitudes and influences in the world today. But first, let's look at...

1 John 3:24

(Indwelling Holy Spirit)

1 John 3:24 kai. o` thrw/n ta.j evtola.j auvtou/ evn auvtw/| me,nei kai. auvtu.j evn auvtw/|\ kai. evn tou,tw| ginw,skomen o[ti me,nei evn h`mi/n(evk tou/ pneu,matoj ou-h`mi/n e;dwken

1 John 3:24 Now the one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him: And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He gave us.

Not only does the one who keeps His commandments have confidence in prayer but he also **abides in Him** and He abides in him. This points once again to the reciprocal fellowship which John is so fond of pronouncing in his doctrine of abiding (cf. John 15:4-5). It also recalls Jesus' words in **John 14:23** "*If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.*" Keeping the commandments of God is a key ingredient to enjoying the Christian life. It is the condition upon which the Father and the Son come to a Christian and make their dwelling place with him. This is not talking about salvation but sanctification. When a believer meets these conditions the Father and the Son disclose themselves to us. This is why I always implore you to stay in fellowship! Because I want you to meet the conditions necessary for God to disclose Himself to you. This self-disclosure is an advanced concept. It has to do with unveiling a blueprint of the mind of God. It is one thing to learn a few

commandments and keep them; it is a wholly other thing to understand the plan of God from beginning to end. When one can see God's plan from beginning to end, he is essentially looking at the mind of God. This changes everything in terms of daily Christian living. When this self-disclosure begins taking place the Christian begins to realize the implications of Scripture for every area of life. He says, "ok, now here we have the Bible and now I realize that the Bible dictates what reality is and I have also got these other areas of life out here; art, education, family, government, history, language, money, music, philosophy, science, technology, etc. So, now I have got to submit these areas of life to the Lordship of Christ. I was trained in the secular university and they taught me a way of knowing things. Now I have to re-work the basic way of knowing these things so I can think about them from DVP rather than HVP. In short, we have got to develop a Christian epistemology. The world says you start with self and we dictate what these things are; we dictate what art is (realism vs. abstract), we dictate what education should be (level of parental involvement, we are the experts, curriculum, etc.), we dictate what constitutes a family (homosexual couples with children), we dictate what type of government is best (totalitarian, democracy, republic, anarchy), we dictate what happened in history (i.e. we re-write history to fit our agenda; did you know that all the great despotic rulers re-wrote history in order to manipulate people), we use language however we want (i.e. deconstruction, relativity, ambiguity), we say what science is or is not and we are therefore gods. Man is autonomous, man determines what is and is not, man determines the proper way to think, man must interpret the data, man has the standards within himself, and man is therefore the final authority. Biblically we have to trash this idea. We are not lords of knowledge; He is the Lord of knowledge. And if we are to know anything properly, we must realize that everything comes pre-interpreted for us. We are therefore not warranted to give some piece of data down here on earth whatever interpretation we want. If He is the Creator and Lord of all as the Bible proclaims then these areas are not areas where we are free to think whatever we want. They are pre-interpreted and there is a right way of thinking about them and a wrong way of thinking about them. There are absolutes. He is the Lord of knowledge. He knows about every particular in the universe and how it relates to every other particular and how they all fit together in a universal theory of the universe. And all this provides a finite blueprint of the thoughts and mind of God. This is why it is so important for the Christian to step out of his little box and subdue these areas of life that I have mentioned. For in doing so, he is simply unfolding more of the mind of God. It is not knowing things just for the sake of knowing things, it is knowing things because you want to know more about the God behind these things. Creation is revelatory of the mind of God. So, to have this knowledge and blueprint of the mind of God we must obey His commandments so that He self-discloses His pre-interpretation of all things. And then we simply re-orient our thinking and lives in terms of God's way of thinking. When you do

this, you stop being self-centered and you become God-centered. When one first sees and begins to contemplate the plan of God daily and to think in terms of it then he becomes a force to reckon with. So, the Christian who follows the commandments is in the position of coming to grasp the eternal counsels of God and His overall mind and plan. To enjoy the abundant Christian life, one must keep the commandments of the New Testament epistles and the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17). When we do it signals that we are abiding in Him and He in us. This means there is a vital and reciprocal fellowship going on between God and the Christian (i.e., the vine and the branches). This is when self-disclosure can take place and this is the most intimate level of fellowship that a Christian can enjoy.

In addition to God abiding in us we also have the Holy Spirit indwelling us. This is the first direct mention of the Holy Spirit in John's first epistle. The Holy Spirit was designated as "the anointing" in 2:20, 27 which is the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit, but here He is directly mentioned. The way we can know that God is abiding in us is by means of the Holy Spirit which was given to us at the moment we believed and which permanently indwells believers. The exact way He gives us this knowledge is developed later in this section.

INDWELLING OF HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is a gift from God given to all believers at the moment the individual believes and therefore all Christians have the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit. To not be indwelt by the Spirit is to not be saved. But one who is indwelt by the Spirit can certainly sin. He may quench and grieve the Spirit but the Spirit will not leave them. Some Christians say that we can commit certain sins that cause the Holy Spirit to withdraw from us. If such were the case, then at the moment He withdrew we would be unsaved again. And this is contrary to Christ's prayer in **John 14:16** that "*he [the Father] shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever;*" If Christ prayed that the Father would give us the Spirit and that he would abide with us forever and the Holy Spirit did not abide with us forever then Christ's prayer was not answered. To be sure, sin affects the effectiveness of the Spirit in our lives but it does not remove His indwelling presence from believers. It is true that in the Old Testament indwelling was temporary, but from the day of Pentecost until the Rapture indwelling is a permanent ministry of the Holy Spirit. This is a strong argument for eternal security of the genuine Christian.

1 John 4:1
(Test the Spirits)

1 John 4:1 Ὁ ἀγαπῶν, (μὴ. παντὶ. πνεύματι πιστεύετε ἀλλὰ. δοκιμάζετε τὰ πνεύματα εἰς ἐκ τῶν/ θεῶν/ ἐστίν(οἳ πολλοὶ. ψευδοπροφήται ἐβήλουν, ὅσιν εἰς τὸν κόσμον

1 John 4:1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test (*dokimazo*) the spirits, if it is from God, because many false prophets (*pseudoprophetes*) have gone out into the world.

John's mention of the Holy Spirit causes him to pause and to warn us about false spirits. As Christians we should not be so naïve to think that only God's Spirit is in the world. There are, in fact, many other spirits at work in the world. In the New Testament the word **spirit** has a multitude of connotations, all of which John is referring to here. There is the human **spirit**, angelic **spirits**; good and evil, and there are various attitudes (e.g., **spirit** of fear, etc.). Christians should beware of all malevolent spirits of Satan, every human spirit that is his agent (and all unbelievers are Satan's agents Eph. 2:2), and every manifestation of the spirit of error or fear, etc. John says that these false **spirits** have **gone out into the world** and we should not believe them! The Old Testament gave two tests for distinguishing true and false prophets. The first test is found in **Deuteronomy 13:1-5** and I want you to look at this test carefully because in one respect it is very similar to the test we are given here for discerning false spirits.

"If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder,² and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,'³ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.⁴ "You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him.⁵ "But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion against the LORD your God who brought you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, to seduce you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from among you."

So, first, a proclaimed prophet predicts a sign or wonder will take place, second, the predicted sign or wonder comes true. In other words, a prophecy was given and fulfilled. Notice, the fulfillment of prophecy is not the test. That may happen but that does not mean he is a legitimate prophet of God. It is the words that matter. What these false prophets would do would get you watching what he was doing, get you all amazed by these signs and wonders and people would just say, "Oh, isn't this so wonderful, look at all these

miracles he's doing, he must be a prophet of God." And while he has got you all distracted with his miraculous works, he slips you false doctrine over here. Notice what the Lord is doing in all this. He is testing you to find out if you really love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. In other words, the real issue at stake is not miracles and signs but teaching. What are they teaching? Next test in the Old Testament is in **Deuteronomy 18:22**

"When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him."

Notice with this test what it does not say. It does not say that if a proclaimed prophet predicts something and it comes to pass, he is a true prophet of God. No, it does not say that. This test is a negative test. If he predicts something and it does not come about, then this guy is a deceiver. In other words, he could predict 2000 things to come to pass but if just one of his predictions doesn't come to pass, then he is not a genuine prophet at all. So, this should get rid of all the questions about Nostradamus and modern day proclaimed prophets. So, two things can be gathered about Old Testament tests for prophets: First, it is their words that really matter; and second, fulfilled prophecy does not mean he is a genuine prophet. He has got to have the words of God and 100% of the time fulfilled prophecy to be a genuine prophet of God.

What about during the Church Age? What is our test here in the New Testament for false spirits? The substance of it is found in 1 John 4:2-3. But first I want to talk a little about false prophets and spirits in the Church Age.

There are many places and ways that false spirits can infiltrate our thinking. Lots of Christians think that a false spirit is going to show up in a red cape, horns and a pitchfork. That is just pure naiveté. Satan is called an angel of light. He never comes in some form that is easy to detect. And just because someone is a Christian does not immunize them from malevolent spirits. If it did, John would not have written this warning. In fact, at the time 1 John was written, the New Testament canon was still being written and there were many true and false prophets running around. These had to be discerned as to whether they were true or false prophets. There are still false prophets today. Many of these are pastors who influence thousands of people. They claim to be modern day or last day prophets but there is no biblical basis for doing this. The next prophet that this world will see will be Elijah. This is prophesied in Malachi 4:5 *"Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD."* The great and terrible day

of the Lord refers to the Tribulation. He is going to be sent BEFORE the Tribulation to restore all things. John the Baptist came to prepare the way for Christ at His first coming, but Elijah was prophesied to come and restore all things before His second coming. So, Elijah will be the next prophet in the world.

What about the gift of prophet mentioned in the NT? The gift of prophet was concerned with receiving direct revelation from God and the communication of that revelation. It often contained a predictive element. But once the canon of Scripture closed in 96AD the gift of prophecy ceased. Modern-day proclaimed prophets play on their audiences' ignorance of Bible doctrine and their emotions. I have heard them publicly announcing that they got a word from God about the vision of some church or building some new building and all that and it is just a pile of bull. They are doing this to get money to see their own agenda fulfilled. They did not get a word from God, that is directly contrary to Scripture. If they got a word from God, why didn't they write it down and why don't we have Revelation 23 or new books being added to the Bible? If God is speaking to them, then why don't they write it down? Because obviously God is not talking to them. If He were, they would be writing it down. I can assure you that if they did write it down, it would make them out to be fools because it would sound so ignoramus. These people do not teach the Bible, because if they did, they would betray what they are doing and they would not get the money they need to live in million-dollar homes. These people are not interested in the Bible, they like to use God-talk to keep young and naïve Christians listening and giving. But the Bible is never sufficient for these people. They want money and they want to claim that they got their own little word from God. And then they accuse those who actually do teach the Bible of worshipping the Bible. Let me ask you a question. How can you know the God of the Bible without the words of the Bible? People try to have mystical experiences through meditation techniques or drug use to make contact with the spirit realm. But that is just the problem. Who are you contacting? According to John, it is naïve to think that the only spirit out there is the Holy Spirit. There are very malevolent spirits out there that want to destroy you. If you want to get a word from God all you have to do is read the Bible. "But that is not spiritual, people say, you are just worshipping a book." People who read and study the Bible; people who lock themselves in their office and learn new languages just so they can get the nuances and life of the original languages; people who do word studies and cross-referencing are not worshipping the Bible. The fact is you cannot separate the words of God from the Word of God. Christ and Scripture cannot be separated. How can you ever know Christ apart from the words of Christ? Also, people forget Psalm 138:2 where God says He will magnify His word even above His name (KJV). That's right; God Himself said He will magnify His word even above His name. So, we are not the ones who elevated the Bible on such a high plane. God Himself did, and the

reason He did this is simply because you can't know God apart from the word of God. You cannot worship Christ, you cannot obey Christ, you cannot love Christ or anything apart from the word of God, the Bible. So, the Bible is not just dead words on a page. If you think these are just dead words, then we might as well be studying any old textbook and be hoping to hear a word from God there. I might as well pull out my Cell and Molecular Biology text and teach that from the pulpit. But we don't because these words are living and active now, they are not just words on the same level as a textbook! They are living and active now! Not in the first century only, but now! And as I have said before, if you want to hear the word of God, if you want to hear God's voice today, then read the Bible. He has already said all He wants to say for now and it is recorded in this book. You can talk to God wherever and whenever you want, but if you want to hear God, you have got to read the Bible. Now, for the substance of the test for spirits today:

1 John 4:2

(The Test)

1 John 4:2 evn tou,tw| ginw,skete to. pneu/ma tou/ qeou/\ pa/n pneu/ma o] o`mologei/ Vhhsou/n Cristo.n evn sarki. evlhuqo,ta evk tou/ qeou/ evstin(

1 John 4:2 By this we know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses (*homologeō*) Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,

Notice what John does not say. He does not say they should be tested by their works but by their words! Now, many Christians think that Jesus taught that false prophets were to be "tested by their fruits". Well, He did. The problem is that people think that when Jesus said "fruits" He was referring to works! Let's see if that is really what Jesus meant. Turn to Matt. 7:15-20.

"Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? ¹⁷ "So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. ¹⁹ "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ "So then, you will know them by their fruits."

v. 15 is the key. Notice that they look like sheep but they are actually "ravenous wolves"! If you tested their works you would not be able to tell they were ravenous wolves. So, there has to be another test. And that test is their fruit. In Jesus, thinking what is "fruit"? Flip over to **Matthew 12:33-37**

"Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. ³⁴ "You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. ³⁵ "The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil. ³⁶ "But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. ³⁷ "For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

Clearly Jesus equivocates “fruit” with “words”. How can evil people speak what is good? The mouth is careless and reveals whether someone is a ravenous wolf in sheep’s clothing. It is not by works that anyone is justified or condemned but by their words! And notice vv. 38-39. What then do the people go on to ask for? A sign! What does Jesus think about signs? See, these people are all messed up on Dt. 13. All they care about is seeing a sign but Moses told them to pay attention to the words! This is the same test John gives us in 1 John 4:2-3. Forget the signs and miracles, pay attention to what is being said. And the test is two-fold: **every spirit that confesses (*homologeō*) Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God**. See, once again the test has to do with what is being said. If one says that **Jesus Christ has come in the flesh** then the source of that **spirit...is God**. Who does John have in mind? What teachers in particular does John have in mind? He has in mind the antichrists, whom we have been calling the Revisionists. They denied this exact point. They taught that Jesus and Christ were two distinct persons. Jesus was the material person who was inherently evil and Christ was the immaterial good. This separates the human Jesus from the Divine Christ and as a result destroys the whole plan of salvation. But if one did confess that Jesus Christ came in the flesh then that confession finds its source in God.

1 John 4:3

(The Antichrist)

1 John 4:3 kai. pa/n pneu/ma o] mh. o`mologei/ to.n Vhhsou/n evk tou/ qeou/ ouv k e;stin\ kai. tou/to, evstin to. tou/ avnticri,stou(o] avkhko,ate o[ti e;rcetai(kai. nu/n evn tw/| ko,smw| evsti.n h;dh

1 John 4:3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus Christ coming in the flesh is not from God: and this is the antichrist (*antichristos*), the one that you heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

Obviously, the other side of the coin is true as well, that **every spirit that does not confess Jesus...is not from God**. There are some words left out here in the NASB because it is based on the Critical Text. If you think about it, you will see that it doesn’t make much sense, **every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God**. That is not the test. The

test is **every spirit that does not confess Jesus Christ coming in the flesh is not from God**. It would be very easy for a scribe to leave out those words because they constitute 23 Greek characters which amounts to one line on the extant manuscript. It is very easy to skip a line when reading or copying something. That is apparently what happened here. If you have a KJV you will notice that it includes the words **Christ is come in the flesh**. That is because the KJV is based on the Textus Receptus rather than the Critical Text. I personally think the Majority Text, which is a close cousin to the Textus Receptus, is the best manuscript we have available today. The Majority Text constitutes over 85% of the known manuscripts in the world today. We have a total of over 25,000 manuscripts. So, the words **Christ coming in the flesh** should be inserted after the word Jesus in v. 3. The test is not whether one **confesses Jesus** but whether one **confesses Jesus Christ coming in the flesh**. The Revisionists would confess Jesus; what they would not confess was that Jesus Christ was one person that came in the flesh. Every spirit that cannot, or refuses, or simply does not make that confession does not find its source in God. “If a religious movement cannot speak loud and clear about the fundamental Christological and soteriological truth that **Jesus** is the **Christ**, then that leader or movement does not have its source, or dynamic, in **God**.”¹ What John is saying is that a denomination or religious movement can simply remain silent on this point of doctrine and be considered heretical. On the other hand, a ministry that confesses that Jesus Christ is God in the orthodox meaning of those terms is of God. **Flesh**, of course, does not refer to the sin nature as it does in some contexts, but rather to a true human body. To be orthodox, one must confess the same thing the Council of Chalcedon expressed in 451AD. In summary, they said Jesus Christ is “undiminished deity [Ebionites, Arians] and perfect humanity [Docetists, Apollinarians] united without mixture [Eutychians], change [Eutychians], division [Nestorian], or separation [Nestorians] in one person [Nestorians] forever.”

To deny this or refuse to confess this truth indicates that this **spirit** is the **spirit** of the **antichrist**; the ultimate end-times personality now in the world in many deceivers. This, of course, is not the one ultimate end-times personality but those who teach the same doctrines as the **antichrist** will teach. The source of the **antichrist’s** teachings and the source of these **antichrists’** teachings are one and the same; Satan.

They have already heard that **antichrist...is coming** because they had already been taught Paul’s book of 2 Thessalonians and perhaps had linked that teaching up with some of the Old Testament references to the **Antichrist** in Genesis and Daniel. What they did not know is that the **antichrist** was **already in the world**. He was in the world in the sense that these men taught the same doctrines that the ultimate end-times personality will teach in the

Tribulation. John does not even hesitate to call them **antichrists**. Anyone who denies such a fundamental doctrine as the fact that Jesus Christ came in the flesh needs to be avoided.

There is an old story about a man named Cerinthus who denied that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. One day John the Apostle heard that Cerinthus was in the same building as he. He became quite angry and left immediately. He would not even stay in the same building with such a heretic. Such should be our response to **spirits** that have either defected from Christianity (e.g., Campbellism) or are organized against Christianity (e.g., the ACLU) or groups that do not confess Jesus as the Christ (e.g., Judaism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, and Islam) or even those who simply leave out this teaching (e.g., various cultic groups). This teaching is fundamental to salvation. One cannot even become a believer without accepting this truth. Therefore, Christians ought to be well-informed that there are evil spirits in the world today and they are not immune to believing their teachings. The only way to guard against them is to be very astute doctrinally and be a very good listener. The more you know the easier it is to discern false teaching or significant omissions in doctrinal statements.

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ⁱ Hodges, Zane, *The Epistles of John* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 178.