

TEST AND FIGHT, PART 2  
(SUNDAY, JANUARY 20, 2019)

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**Scripture: Deut. 18:55-22; 1 John 3:24-4:6**

**INTRODUCTION**

The last Sunday in 2018, I preached from 1 John 4:1-6. After the sermon, someone in the congregation expressed that I should have shared in my message some specific examples of what is taking place today.

I took the encouragement and challenge to heart and I have been thinking about this subject for several weeks.

What are the dangers facing Reformed and conservative, evangelical churches?

There are many!

I don't think any single message could cover all that is taking place.

I think it is profitable to present some examples. That is what I will seek to do today.

First, I want us to review 1 John 4:1-6.

Second, I will share 4 areas of threat and danger.

I will conclude with several points of application and further reflection.

**Do not be naïve! Test the spirits being confident God's truth will prevail.**

**1) PRINCIPLES FROM 1 JOHN 4:1-6**

Let us consider in review three things from these opening verses.

**First**, we have a warning and challenge in verse 1 along with a reason.

The warning is do not believe every spirit.

What does this mean?

People might claim that they are speaking truth, that they are speaking according to the Holy Spirit.

But do not just believe their claims.

The challenge is to test the spirits.

Make sure what someone is saying is truly of God.

The reason for the warning and challenge is that many false prophets have gone out into the world.

And what made these false prophets especially dangerous is that they were threatening churches with their false message.

If this was true in John's day, I see no reason why any different warnings or encouragements would be given today.

Second, John gives what we can say are three tests that must be applied when it comes to false teaching.

I don't think John was giving these as a one-sized fits all, but what he does say here has what I believe is a fairly broad application.

The **first test** is what we see in verse 2. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God.

Every spirit that does not confess this is not of God but rather is the spirit of Antichrist.

Now, not every issue and doctrine facing Christians today is directly related directly to the doctrine of Christ.

However, many false teachings do directly relate to this very point.

Here we include cults like the Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons.

I mentioned before that in the first centuries after Christ there were at least 20 heresies connected with false beliefs concerning Jesus and His divine person and human and divine natures.

There are other groups even today that claim to be Christian but deny the doctrine of the Trinity. They would fall under this same category.

The **second test** is from verse 5. False prophets speak as of the world, are heard by the world, and are loved by the world.

What is the point?

When someone is sharing some new doctrine or idea, I think a test can be, how would that idea in general be accepted by the world, that is by non-Christian thought?

Now, this doesn't deal with every false doctrine or teaching in such a simple manner, but you can see evidence of this in denominations that have changed their doctrinal positions in favor of ideas that sound much more acceptable to the world.

For example, in 1903, the mainline Presbyterian Church modified in four ways the Westminster Confession of Faith.<sup>1</sup>

These changes would today not sound radical, but they were changes against some historic positions of Reformed Theology and changes that would have at least on the surface sounded more appealing to the world.

And even more in 1967, the Presbyterian Church updated the Westminster Confession of Faith essentially to make it conform to the tenants of American political liberalism as of 1965.

This updated Confession called for the peoples of the earth to be one universal family and attacked "enslaving poverty in a world of abundance."<sup>2</sup>

False teaching is usually welcomed by the world.

The third test is what we see in verse 6.

**True teachers and messages will recognize the authority of the apostles** which now finds its place not in church tradition but in the completed word of God.

Those who know God will give attention to God's truth.

Those who do not know God will reject God's truth and the legitimate authority of those who possess such.

Before I move on to my next main point, let us consider the beautiful truth in verse 4.

Even in the midst of false teaching and false prophets, we must keep in mind:

**He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.**

Isn't this such an encouraging and comforting truth?

So, although we are to be alert, we are certainly not to be controlled by worry or fear.

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<sup>1</sup> North, 308.

<sup>2</sup> North, 624-625.

We don't rest in our own strength. We are not to think highly of our own ability or power. No, like children we trust in our Father, we rest in the victory and power of our Lord.

## **2) FOUR EXAMPLES OF THREATS AND DANGERS**

This message is not meant to be exhaustive or the final word, but I trust it will be helpful and will encourage you as you do some of your own research, thinking, and praying about these matters.

Here are four areas of danger that I will present in overview and then will share in greater detail.

What are some of the threats and dangers facing Reformed, conservative, and evangelical churches?

- 1) Discarding the supremacy and authority of God's Word
- 2) Restricting the application of God's Word
- 3) Confusion over what should be clear
- 4) A twisting or denial of the gospel

Let me expand on each of these areas.

### **1) Discarding the supremacy and authority of God's Word**

Listen to the words of the Westminster Confession of Faith, 1.10:

*The Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.*

Every Christian should confess this truth.

When Jesus was challenged by the Pharisees regarding marriage and divorce, Jesus directed them to consider the foundational truth of Genesis 2.

Paul challenged Timothy in 2 Tim. 2:15.

**2Tim. 2:15** Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Now we would say this is all very basic to the Christian faith.

Every Reformed, conservative Christian should accept this.

The danger is accepting this and then coming under the influence of humanistic ideas in the name of science which force us to change what is very clearly taught in Scripture.

So today, evolutionary ideas or psychology is given greater authority than the word of God in key areas.

We know that this happens in terms of the creation of the universe and increasingly this compromise is seen in the doctrine of Adam.

Evolution teaches that man evolved over millions of years. So what are we to think of Adam? Well, we must adjust what Scripture says about Adam.

For example, Covenant Seminary Professor John C. Collins argues for an attempted synthesis of Scripture and evolutionary ideas regarding the origin of man.

In this view, “Adam” was the “first man” in the sense of being either a specially chosen hominid or a larger tribe of early hominids.<sup>3</sup>

In an article written by Collins he stated:

If someone should decide that there were, in fact, more human beings than just Adam and Eve at the beginning of humankind, then, in order to maintain good sense, he or she should envision these humans as a single tribe. Adam would then be the chieftain of this tribe (preferably produced before the others), and Eve would be his wife. This tribe “fell” under the leadership of Adam and Eve.<sup>4</sup>

What is the reason for these crazy ideas? I would say it comes from disregarding the supremacy of Scripture and an attempt to try to blend the Bible with evolutionary thinking.

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<sup>3</sup> These are the comments of Peter Enns summarized on the Bayly Blog.

<http://baylyblog.com/blog/2012/02/nullifying-word-god-sake-academic-reputation>

<sup>4</sup> Cited by Tim Bayly.

<https://warhornmedia.com/2019/01/15/covenant-theological-seminary-and-the-decline-of-the-pca/?fbclid=IwAR2LG9-eRomH-3vX53K2MuVZKnRgkzPvZriWhJi6woVRYXfY-nbwqvywdWk>

Now thankfully, Peter Enns who today holds even more compromised positions on Genesis was removed from teaching at Westminster Seminary.

However, the number of people and conservative denominations who have accepted some sort of a compromise with evolutionary and other ideas of this age is vast.

Am I saying that everyone who makes this compromise is an unbeliever on their way to hell?

No, but they should not be given positions of influence in churches and denominations and seminaries.

Once we start taking man's word as being equal to or above God's Word, then we are in serious danger.

## **2) Restricting the application of God's Word**

One of the famous passages in the NT on civil government is Romans 13.

It has been a number of years since we last looked at this passage.

Let me share Romans 13:3.

**Rom. 13:3** For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same.

Paul in this passage is speaking of what should be ideal for those in power.

They are not to punish those doing good but those who are doing evil.

From this we should ask the question, what is the standard for good and evil?

The answer is it must be defined by God's Word. What other ultimate standard could be given?

But on the other hand, some suggest we should use natural law.

Natural law should be the basis for good and evil.

By natural law I am referring to the idea that we can deduce principles of law from observation of creation and other principles of man's logic and reason.

Now, there was a time when aspects of natural law kind of fit in with Biblical ideas of law, that is when a culture had a more Biblical basis.

The problem of appealing to “natural” law is that men and nations change their ideas about what is natural.

Many even in the Reformed and conservative camp would have no problem with natural law ideas and argue against the application of God’s Word for today in terms of civil affairs.

For example, we go about 20 years ago to David Jones, a long-time professor at Covenant Seminary who in an interview with Christianity Today stated that all laws against homosexuality or sodomy should be repealed.

He said that they were not necessary.<sup>5</sup>

By what standard?

A similar danger today is what is called Two Kingdom Theology.

One of the main proponents of this view is David VanDrunen who teaches at Westminster Seminary in California.

Here is his definition for Two-Kingdoms:

‘God rules the church (the spiritual kingdom) as redeemer in Jesus Christ and rules the state and all other social institutions (the civil kingdom) as creator and sustainer, and thus these two kingdoms have significantly different ends, functions, and modes of operation.’

Now, on the surface, this definition doesn’t sound all that bad.

I agree that there is a difference between the church and the state, but should we say that there are two separate kingdoms?

Further, one of the great problems of this view is that it believes that God’s Word is really only for the church and that it has no direct application necessarily for civil affairs.

In one of VanDrunen’s books which I had the chance to browse, I was shocked.

He was very dismissive of the need for Christian education.

He suggested that an absolute ban on abortion would not necessarily be a good thing.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <https://warhornmedia.com/2019/01/15/covenant-theological-seminary-and-the-decline-of-the-pca/?fbclid=IwAR2LG9-eRomH-3vX53K2MuVZKnRgkzPvZriWhJi6woVRYXfY-nbwqvYwdWk>

<sup>6</sup> These are things that shocked me in my reading of the book.

Are modern nations free to determine what is good and evil or is there a God-given standard that we find in Scripture?

One of the fascinating things that we see in the OT Scriptures is how the prophets spoke not only against the sins of Israel and Judah but also spoke against a number of the surrounding nations.

For example, in 10 of the prophetic books you can find over 40 messages directed against 15 different nations or cities.<sup>7</sup>

Yes, God's major focus was to His people, but the prophets were called to speak against the wickedness of the nations and their rebellion against God's Word of truth.

They could not claim innocence simply because God had not made a direct covenant with them.

When the US Supreme Court several years ago with no basis in law or history declared that gay marriage was now legal everywhere in America, there were Reformed Christians who didn't really think it was a big deal.

In their view, this is not something that the Bible directly would apply to. We must just move on and do the best we can.

So, beware of the restriction of the application of God's Word to simply matters dealing with the church or family.

### **3) Confusion over what should be clear**

Under this point I am speaking of how what the Bible says so clearly about marriage, gender, and appropriate desires is becoming confused today even in conservative denominations.

What is clear is being confused by new ideas and compromises.

Some argue that the Bible only speaks against sodomy in about 7 places.

And this means that really it is not all that important of an issue Biblically speaking.

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<sup>7</sup> This comes from the ESV Study Bible. The chart was cited at the following website:  
<https://veritasdomain.wordpress.com/2017/11/27/guest-review-the-world-is-christs-a-critique-of-two-kingdoms-theology/>



Well, it might be the case that the Bible only speaks to this issue in about 7 places or so, but that doesn't mean that what Scripture says should be downplayed or ignored.

For example, a search for the word kidnap or related words shows it is only spoken about 3 times in all of Scripture.

Should we conclude from this that what the Bible says against kidnapping is not all that important?

Now some professing Christians have totally compromised on what the Bible speaks about proper relations.

Laurie Higgins of Illinois Family Institute, for example, sadly reports that she has heard from multiple reliable sources that there are many professors at Wheaton College who affirm "progressive" views of homosexual practice and relationships in defiance of theologically orthodox understandings of Scripture and of Wheaton College's formal position, which they conceal from the public.<sup>8</sup>

Wheaton is considered one of the top evangelical colleges in the US.

Another very sad example is the Revoice Conference which was held at a PCA Church in St. Louis in the summer of 2018.

The purpose of this Conference was to promote LGBT+ flourishing in historic Christian traditions.

Though I believe most of the speakers would say that the Bible speaks against homosexual behavior, they are bringing great confusion to what should be very clear.

One author summarizes this confusion this way:

The entire LivingOut.org, spiritual friendship, gay Christian, Revoice movement is built on the premise that neither repentance unto life nor sanctification unto holiness involve turning one's back on the LGBTQ identities and that each of these sexual perversions should be liberated from the shame God attached to them.<sup>9</sup>

Supposedly we are to see aspects that are positive and beneficial in "queer" cultures.

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<sup>8</sup> Posted on her Facebook Wall, January 1, 2:47 p.m.

<sup>9</sup> Revoice Reviewed: PCA Pastor Greg Johnson, <https://warhornmedia.com/2018/08/22/revoice-reviewed-pca-pastor-greg-johnson/>

Friends, the examples of compromise entering Reformed churches at least in name is shocking. I don't have the time to share a number of other egregious examples of things happening **even on this very day in connection with some churches.**

Beware of those who confuse what is clear or do not speak clearly about what is clear in Scripture.

#### **4) A twisting or denial of the gospel**

The Corinthian church as you know had some very serious issues that Paul rebuked.

There were divisions. There was tolerance for a wicked relationship between a man and his mother.

There was confusion in this church over spiritual gifts and the like.

Paul had to bring a number of rebukes to this congregation.

But what congregation was given an even more serious rebuke by Paul?

What letter begins with no word of praise but of marvel and an imprecatory statement?

It is the letter of Paul to the Galatians.

Compared to the church in Corinth, the Galatians probably looked much better on the surface. If you visited that church, you might well have been impressed with them.

The danger facing the Galatian church was that she was turning away from true grace to a different gospel.

In a summary fashion, the Galatian church was showing openness to what is called Judaizing false teachers who were threatening the central NT doctrine of justification through faith alone.

In the Judaizers' perversion of the true gospel, they added the requirements, ceremonies, and standards of the old covenant as necessary prerequisites to salvation.<sup>10</sup>

Some of the strongest words spoken by Paul are found right at the beginning of Galatians 1.

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<sup>10</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, Accordance electronic ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013), paragraph 22923.

**Gal. 1:8** But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.

**Gal. 1:9** As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

How does God save sinners?

God saves sinners according to His sovereign grace through the working of the Lord Jesus Christ and the application of that redemption to sinners through the working of the Holy Spirit.

Sinners could never earn approval before a holy God.

What can sinners do?

Through the working of the Holy Spirit they are called to turn to God in true faith and believe and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.

**Eph. 2:8** For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is the gift of God,* **9** not of works, lest anyone should boast.

The summary of the gospel recovered in the time of the Reformation is this.

- 1) Justification is a judicial declaration of acceptance with God.
- 2) This declaration of righteousness is by grace alone.

Cornelis Venema wrote:

Full acceptance with God is found in Christ whose righteousness is perfectly adequate to the need of believers. To say that a believer is 'at once just and a sinner', therefore, is to affirm that human sinfulness is not an insuperable obstacle to God's free grace. Grace triumphs in the gospel of free justification, even in the face of continued human sinfulness and unworthiness.<sup>11</sup>

- 3) This justification is through faith alone.

Faith is believing in Jesus Christ.

Faith is looking away from yourself and focusing your attention on Jesus Christ who is your righteousness.

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<sup>11</sup> Cornelis Venema, *Getting the Gospel Right*, 16.

Faith is not a work but rather a gift that God gives. As such there is absolutely no place for boasting or self-congratulation.<sup>12</sup>

The amazing thing about grace is that God shows it to those who absolutely are undeserving!

Now who denies this?

Well, the gospel is denied in both obvious and more subtle ways.

Some of you are familiar with N. T. Wright. He is a brilliant, British scholar who writes more in a year than most people read in a year, I would say.

His writings have been published by InterVarsity and many other publishers.

Some of what he says is fascinating, but the more he writes on some issues, the more confusing it becomes.

In some of his recent writing he has definitely opposed the idea of imputation in terms of our justification.

The gospel is not an account he says of how people are saved.

That Christ died in the place of sinners is closer to the pagan idea of an angry deity being pacified by a human death than to anything in Israel's scripture or the NT.

His views have influenced very conservative, Reformed churches and denominations.

We have had to wrestle with some of these same ideas as a local church.

And we must continue to be clear on this.

The other way that the gospel is twisted today is when it is replaced as the central focus for our witness by works of mercy, which certainly must have an important place but not the central place.

Dr. Gerald Harris who is part of the Southern Baptist Convention wrote in a recent article about his own denomination.

The Southern Baptist Convention is the largest Protestant denomination in the US.

And we are thankful that in many ways this massive denomination turned away from liberalism.

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<sup>12</sup> Venema, 18.

Back in 1990, he writes about how there was a great victory for the cause of biblical inerrancy in this massive denomination.

But now he writes the new emphases infiltrating this denomination are: social justice, the social gospel, feminism, tolerance, and intolerance for certain aspects of patriotism and symbols of our nation.<sup>13</sup>

## CONCLUSION

I want to conclude with some warnings and encouragements.

The major focus of this message has been areas of danger and threat faced by conservative churches.

It is good to be aware of these things.

However, as a church we must remember that the church in Ephesus was praised by our Lord for being very vigilant for truth and exposing false teachers.

This is good, but it is far from being the end of our duty.

The church of Ephesus was reminded of God's judgment even though in many ways she was faithful because she lost her first love.

Many times I have spoken about this passage. Was this a loss of love for the Lord and the gospel message or a loss of true love for others?

It is hard to say, but in a way it doesn't matter. Both are horrific.

As a church our own history must not be forgotten in terms of why we started.

Why was this church established?

It was established to reach with the truth of the gospel and the fulness of God's Word those who were politically conservative but lost in sin.

God has used us, I believe.

Let us not forget this calling.

Second, may we be those who love the truth and seek to teach our children carefully.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://christianindex.org/the-southern-baptist-convention-is-undergoing-a-seismic-shift/>

The primary way is through God's Word. A secondary way is through the use of faithful confessions and catechisms.

Use and review the Heidelberg Catechism with your family this year.

Third, as we study these matters we must often cry out to the Lord even as we seek to trust in Him.

There are some very dark skies and days ahead.

What I have shared is probably only the tip of the iceberg in many ways.

However, let us not forget that others have had to face challenges before.

Let us not forget that the Lord has His people.

Let us place our confidence not in ourselves but in the promise that God's truth will prevail.

**Do not be naïve! Test the spirits being confident God's truth will prevail.**

**Prayer**

**Hymn 267**

**BENEDICTION: PHILIPPIANS 4:19-20**

And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.  
Now to our God and Father *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.