

1John 3:24–4:6

The Hallmark of True Christianity

Thursday, May 16, 2024 • Read 1John 3:24–4:6

*Questions from the Scripture text: What is the person in v24 keeping? In Whom does he abide? Who abides in him? How do we know that Christ abides in us? How does 4:1 address the readers? What are they not to believe? What are they to do with the spirits? Test them for what? Why? What test does v2–3a give? Of whom are those who do not confess a true incarnation of Christ (v3b)? But of Whom are the “beloved” “little children” (v4)? Whom have they overcome? How did this happen? To whom do false prophets belong (v5)? What “language” do they speak? Who hears them? But to whom do the apostles belong (v6)? Who hears them? Who does not hear them? How does the end of v6 summarize this section?*

**How can we test for true Christianity?** 1John 3:24–4:6 prepares us for the second serial reading in public worship on the Lord’s Day. In these seven verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that **we may test for true Christianity by righteousness and love, by the doctrine of a true incarnation of Christ, and by adherence to the teaching of the apostles.**

As the apostle continues giving his readers tests by which they may know that they believe, he now gives three of them that relate to the Spirit’s work in the believer.

**Test one: righteous works and brotherly love, v24.** In the previous section, we learned that working righteousness and loving others is a mark of the children of God. Now, v24 sheds some light on how this gives us assurance: the only way that we could become commandment-keeping lovers of the brethren is by union with Christ (v24a). And it is God’s own Spirit Who gives us the faith that unites us to Christ, and Who produces Christ’s own righteousness and love in our lives (v24b). If you have faith in Christ, then you are united to Him, and it is His own Spirit Who has done this.

**Test two: true incarnation of true God, v1–3.** Sadly, even in the apostolic period, there were those who claimed to be speaking from the Spirit, who did not produce righteousness and love (v1, cf. Mt 7:15–27). So, the apostle commands that the spirits be tested. Some tests take longer than others to indicate one way or another, but he gives a “rapid test” to his readers that was especially useful in his day.

At the time of writing, there were false teachers that taught that the physical is inherently evil and that Jesus, therefore, had not been genuinely incarnated. These same false prophets also taught that Jesus was not fully God, the second Person of the triune God. So, they could very easily tell a false spirit of a false prophet, because he would not be preaching that Jesus is God the Son, Who took to Himself a true human body and a true human soul (v2–3a). Just as he had said in 2:18–19, he reminds them that we have been warned by God that such antichrists would appear and preach in the churches (v3b).

The distinguishing doctrinal mark of true Christianity is that the true God has become true man to redeem sinners. Dear reader, is this the heart of your theology?

**Test three: listening to the world vs listening to the apostles, v4–6.** It is very important that we guard against the temptation to judge a preacher as true because he has a wide appeal. Praise God that the Spirit’s dwelling in believers (v4) makes them listen to and heed the apostles, prophets, and evangelists of Christ (v6a, 6c; cf. Eph 2:19–22, 4:11). It is only the Spirit Who can make someone hear and heed them (v6b). But the whole world will listen to those whose preaching and power are worldly (v5). Let us be watchful against the sort of teaching that even a worldling can approve of.

What are the evidences of the Spirit’s work in your life? In your doctrine? In your teaching ‘preferences’?

*Sample prayer: Lord, forgive us, for we have often shrunk from or slacked off in keeping Your commandments. And, when we have kept Your commandments, we have often failed to conscientiously acknowledge that this comes only by union with Christ. Forgive us for having been too tolerant of those who question either His true deity or His true humanity. And forgive us for being willing to hear the sort of teaching that the world can get onboard with. When we have done these things, we have foolishly sabotaged our own assurance. So, grant us repentance, by Your Spirit, and thus assure us again that we are abiding in Christ, and He in us, we ask in His Name, AMEN!*

Suggested songs: ARP118A “Because He’s Good, O Thank the Lord” or TPH406 “Jesus, with Thy Church Abide”

(The following is a machine-generated transcription. PLEASE BE AWARE of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are invited to listen to the audio recording via [hopewellarp.org](http://hopewellarp.org))

First John 3 verse 24 through 4 verse 6. These are God’s words. No, he who keeps his Commandments abides in him. And he in him. By this, we know that he abides in Us by the spirit, whom he has given us. Beloved, do not believe every Spirit, but test the spirits.

Whether they are of God. Because many false prophets have gone out into the world. But this, you know, the spirit of God every spirit that confesses That Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. Is of God. And every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ. Has come in the flesh.

Is not of God. And this is the spirit of antichrist, which you have heard was coming and Is now already in the world. You are of God little children and have overcome them. Because he who is in you is greater than he was in the world. There of the world.

Therefore they speak as of the world. And the world hears them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us. He who is not of God does not hear us. By this, we know the spirit. Of Truth. In the spirit of error. So far the reading of gods inspired and And Aaron toward, Well, we heard at the end of the last section, when we were trying to distinguish between The children of God.

The children of the devil and Receive assurance that we are the children of God. That those who are his Are the ones who keep has commitment. In verse 23 that we believe in the name of his son, Jesus Christ. And so that’s really just first great commandment. Love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.

And if the Lord your God, Um, has displayed himself finally fully ultimately in the Lord Jesus. Then no one loves him. Who does not love. Believe in. The name of Jesus Christ. As God, the son. And, I think more about that when we get into. Verse. But, Love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.

Now especially means Believe in and love. Jesus Christ. Love your neighbor as yourself. Especially focuses on. Loving the neighbor who is in Jesus Christ, Jesus has separated Humanity into two. Those who are in him and those who are not. So love one another. As he is as he gave us Commandment.

Now, this is important not just because there’s a doctrinal test. Um, A, uh, two question exam when you Uh, come to enter at the gates of the Kingdom. This is important, we find in the beginning of our passive today.

Because,

Because,

Because it’s a matter of. Uh, Union. With Christ and indeed Union. With God, the son. And being indwelt by God, the spirit. And depending upon and belonging to God, the Father. And he says, now he who keeps his Commandments abides in him and he and him Um, In hymns, and

Are not specified. And so there are some who say well this is referring. Um, to God, this is referring to the son. Etc. But the fact of the matter is, It doesn’t differentiate

because Uh, Union with Christ, although only the son has a human nature. Union with Christ is Fellowship with the Living, God.

Remember that? The Lord Jesus taught us that. The Holy Spirit comes and dwells in. Let the father and the son also come. And make their home with us and in. By his Spirit. And so, this is something much greater than Um, do you have the right Theology? And do you do the right stuff?

That is your life United. To the life of Jesus. Do you have a shared life? With Jesus Christ. Do you have a shared life with The Triune God. So, the people that John is writing to, they may have been troubled by Um, people who are like, Uh, the theological liberals or the cultural Christians.

Or the cultists. Um, of today, and Uh, we'll think more about those. Uh, folks in a moment. They might have been troubled by them. Uh, but John here? That introduces a section that we're considering. Reminding them just how big a thing, just how great and glorious a thing. Genuine Christianity is That it is a shared life with Jesus in a shared life, with God, And so, Um, do not give in.

Accommodate tolerate. False Christianity. But listen, we know that he abides in us, he says by the spirit Him, he has given us. Now, praise God, when he gets, Uh, you have overcome them. He who is in. You is greater. Than he who is in the world, he's especially talking.

About God. The Holy Uh, who communicates to us. Our dwelling in. Uh, the Lord, our Union with the son and adoption. By the father. Therefore, Uh, it makes a great deal. A great difference to us, Uh, to listen to those things that come from this, same person of the godhead, God, the Holy Spirit.

Dwells in. Than the father and the son by the spirit with the spirit. Dwell in.

We wanted to listen to only that, which comes from him. We don't want to Uh, confuse or dilute. Or even diminished and corrupt. Uh, what the God. The holy spirit is teaching us by listening to others. So he says, beloved do not believe every spirit and there will be people and you might even be tempted to be Uh, one of them, we are not all entirely rid of superstition.

But there will be people who talk about. Surprising coincidences, or Um, Uh, strain spiritual feelings and intuitions or a real piece that they have. And they'll try to use that to back up, whatever spiritual or theological thing, that they're saying even job's friends. Did that. Talking about how they heard a whisper in the night time and, um, tried to Justify your bolster, strengthen the force of what they Uh, what they were saying in in such a way inherently.

All theological or spiritual talk has a spiritual origin and that is not necessarily a good thing. Because the spiritual origin is not always the Holy. In fact, it is only the holy Spirit of his from scripture. It is only the Holy Spirit, if it gets Jesus correctly, it is only the Holy Spirit.

If the teaching puts Jesus in his correct place, In relation to it. And she says, beloved do not believe every spirit and we need to be liberated from feeling like we have to believe every When people come to you, Um, with their spiritual ideas, their theological ideas. That's very personal.

It's very dear to them. And you may feel a lot of relational pressure to believe whatever they say. But you must not. Because not every spirit is of God. And it's not of God, it's of the other. This comes in the context and that we have just had in second F of chapter three, differentiating children of God from Children of the devil.

And so when he says, don't believe every spirit and he says on the one hand, there's that which is the spirit of God Alternative is Spirit of the devil or as Uh, going to say in verse 3, Spirit of antichrist. So Beloved do not believe every Spirit, but test the spirits.

Whether they are of God. Because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This was true. And Jesus is sorry. This was true in John's day and it is true still in our day. And so he gives us the great test by this, you know, the the spirit of God, every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in, the flesh is of God.

Now, there is a test of theological Orthodox heat here. That Jesus Christ. Is God, the son who now has added flesh to himself. So, If they say that Jesus Christ is only flesh. Then they're not of God if they deny his divinity. No, he has come in the flesh.

So, if this is only a man then they're not of God, And if they say, he's only God. That he hasn't been truly incarnated. He's not a man. Then they also are not of God. But this is not just a That theological test of the Incarnation. This is a theological test of the centrality of Jesus Christ.

God's revelation to us and God's saving of So they confess that Jesus Christ is Jesus. Yahweh saves. Remember in Matthew? The scripture tells us he received this name to fulfill the prophecy. That he would be called Emmanuel. And so one of the implications for the name, Jesus, is that Jesus is God, In the Flesh who is with us?

To save. Okay, so there's a centrality. Of God, revealing himself in his son and there's a centrality. In God saving. Through his son's mediatorial work where he has this title Christ, anointed that he is the forever King. That he is, the great high priest. That he is the last and ultimate Prophet greater than Moses.

For whom the world had been waiting. Especially for whom the people of God have been waiting. So, The, the true preacher, the true Prophet his myth is going to be full. Of Jesus, as living and true God, Jesus as Um, true man. Uh, incarnate. But also his mouth is always going to be full of Jesus.

As the great Revelation of God himself to us, the one in whom we know and have and abide in God. And his mouth is always going to be full. Of Jesus as the one. Who rules us, and who leads our worship, and brings us to God and who instructs us.

All of the teaching will be full of Union with Christ. All of the teaching will be full of the Gospel. All of the teaching will be full of the Trinity. And of the Divinity of Christ and of the greatness of Christ. As the first of a new Humanity. The last Adam, The first greatly true man.

To whom all. Will be true men forever. Are conformed. And so Antichrists. Will come either denying. As we hear in verse 3, Delivery Spirit. Sorry, verse 2 and diverse 3 every Spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God. And every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in, the flesh is not of God, and this is the spirit of antichrist, which you have heard was coming.

And is now already in the world. And so the spirit of antichrist is in denying one of these truths about Jesus, But the spirit of antichrist is also very subtly. In any teaching or preaching or thinking. That does not then give Jesus. The. In that thinking and the place in that preaching that belongs to him.

It is. Self-Contradictory. To say that Jesus is God In the Flesh and then speak little Of Jesus as the one in whom we know the Triune God. It is self-contradictory. To say that Jesus is the Christ. And not have. All of our teaching preaching thinking. Um our hearts interacting with God, our submission to him our obedience to him.

Much focused. On belonging to Jesus being instructed to Jesus being brought near to God by Jesus being ruled by God through Jesus. And in Jesus, And so, There is. The spirit of the Antichrist. Very much today. Now those who deny the Lord, Jesus. Um, These definitions and this centrality.

In all Christian thinking. Uh, maybe represented in many groups, one is the theological liberals. You know, the ones who think they are naturalists the, the great evolution of humanity, now that we've ascended to the ones who know better than superstitious things like God who becomes man and the Virgin birth and creation out of nothing by the word of his power in the space of six days.

So, those are the folks that we refer to. When we say theological liberals, We don't believe Jesus is God at all. Another group are the people from the Cults. You know, the ones. Uh, used to a lot more and still do to some extent. You go out in pairs and knock on doors and pass out, uh, Watchtower literature.

Uh, or Uh, Mormon stuff or Um Unitarian stuff Unitarians are usually not very uh Evangelistic for their false gospel. But another group, a big group and a large part of the visible. For people who, Either speak little about Jesus at all or whatever they say about Jesus. Isn't related.

To the greatness of his divinity, and The way that he saves and rules. But it's They distorted Jesus all about their feelings and all about how he feels about them. And, Um, A very kind of. Uh, superstitious Uh, emotion based. Real Christianity, of course, has a great effect places, great demands upon the emotions.

And God produces them but it's not a motion based. And so, there's There's a lot of False religion that goes under the name. Of Christianity. And if it didn't go under the name of Christianity, Then, the Apostle wouldn't have to warn them. Beloved, do not believe every Spirit, Now, knowing that there is So much danger.

How will we be protected? And that's what he deals with. Uh in verses four through six. He says, you are of God. Little children and have overcome them. Because he who is in, you is greater than he who is in the world. I praise God. Genuine Christianity is true.

God himself, really has sent his son. Come in the person of his son into the world to save us. And God himself. Now really does. Especially by the person of his Spirit. Uh, come to help us. To believe into the son to know our relation to the father, So that when Jesus says that, Those who are his will come to him.

The father will drag drag them and he and the father will not let them go when Jesus says, His sheep hear his voice, and he knows them. Uh, these things are especially accomplished by the work of the spirit. And so he says you have overcome them because he is, who is in, you is greater than he who is in the world, it is impossible.

That a Believer would not have the spirit of God and it is impossible. That a Believer who has the spirit of God would be Brought to denounce the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, there's a lot of Preaching. That doesn't give Jesus his place. And they may have large congregations. And people who really approve of receive and are glad about that preaching.

The Apostle. Uh, teaches us in verse 5. Not to be intimidated or worried about how well everyone speaks this way or everyone. You know, most of the churches do this or say that or Yeah. He says, they are of the world therefore they speak as of the world. And the world hears them.

And so, they're preaching isn't full of the Triune God. Their preaching isn't full of the glory of Christ. Their preaching isn't full of the work of Christ. The mediator, the Redeemer, and Uh, how he continues to apply that work to Believers. Um, by his holy spirit because it's not from God, it's not from Heaven.

And so it's not full of the things. That our priorities in glory. It's full of the things that our priorities in the world. Yeah, sort of been serious like 12, great dates. Yeah, you know, 10 lessons from films and Um, How-To type stuff. How to have good friendships, how to have a good marriage, how to make money.

How Um, Be healthy wealthy and well.

Ironically the genuine reality of those things is only in Christ. And so, it's all. Um, It all files short ones from the world. But they speak as of the world with the world's priorities. And the world's ideas. False ideas about Jesus. And of course the world hears them. We he says are of God.

And this isn't just him and his readers. It is, especially the apostles. Uh, to whom he referred at the beginning of the book when he said we're eyewitnesses and Um, we handled Yeah, we are the ones who he has given to be eyewitnesses and to give testimony. It says we are of God.

He who knows. God hears us. And so it's not surprising that. Uh, one of the rubbish ways that Uh people have denied true, Christianity, as saying we really like the gospels but the Epistles not so much. Well, that just shows that they haven't understood the gospels at all. Um, but it also is an exposing of them.

As not being of God, they are not of God. And so they don't listen to the apostles. So they don't listen. To Peter and John and Paul, and they don't listen to the prophets like James and Jude. And Mark, and Luke. They don't listen to the evangelists like Mark and blue and Matthew and John.

So it says we are of God. He who knows? God hears us, he who is not of God. Does not hear us by this, we know. The spirit of Truth and the spirit of error. And so, there may come moments or Maybe even a season of life in which you are especially bothered.

By the idea. How do we know? Seems like there are so many. Who believe differently, who are not? So serious about The Theology of who Jesus is and of the Trinity and how salvation um is accomplished and how salvation is applied. Um, you know, full of Uh, Union with Christ and the glory of Christ and everything.

They talk about and think about Uh, can it really be? That so many churches that are not full of these. Things are full of so many nice people. Who do so many kind things? And of course, we're Starting to mess up definitions of niceness and kindness and goodness. By uh, By thinking of them as apart from Christ rather than Um, Spared extended by God and common Grace, to those who have no claim upon such things.

But yes, it can be. The test is. How many? Apparently decent well-meaning people. Tolerate something. The test is, is it of God? Does it confess that Jesus? The Christ has come in the flesh. Because we don't want to be. Worldly people of a useful religion. Put useful in the air quotes there.

We want to be people who are from God who have a life from God. And a life that is shared with God in Jesus Christ by his Spirit as children of the father. And so may God the spirit, when whenever such thoughts or ideas arise from your Remaining flesh or can't you encounter?

Such challenges in the world in the work context or maybe one day in an educational context or a relational context. God, the spirit. Convince you. Of the greatness of the glory of the trying God. And of Jesus Christ, the son in whom he is revealed himself to us and saved us.

So that you will not. Um, be pulled in. By that, which comes from false Spirits. Spread.

Our heavenly father. How we thank you. That you have made us to know you as father By your spirit who makes us to call you Abba. When he pours out your love in our hearts. And who convinces us? Also, Of your son, our Lord Jesus says. The great revelation of yourself.

And we pray that. Your spirit. Not only give us to believe rightly about you. And to give you the right place and all our thinking, and teaching, and theology. But that he

would make us relate to you. Rightly, give you the right place. In our life. So help us, we pray Grant that he would write.

These truths which he caused to be inscripturated for our reading, our instruction, That he would write the same truths also. Now in our hearts, And make them to take root and to bear fruit in our lives. Before we ask it all in Jesus name, amen.