

“The Core Teaching: Beware of Heresy”

INTRODUCTION: In John’s first letter (epistle), the apostle is setting forth the seven basic reminders for Christians and the Church, in all times...

1. Things the saints in Asia Minor and the Roman Empire were facing in 98 A.D.
2. And things believers in Charlotte, NC and in America are facing in 2015.
3. We’ve looked at three of these basic reminders already:
 - a. The Central Truth: **God is Light**
 - i. *This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. (1 John 1:5)*
 - ii. And the two spiritual realms in which all people dwell: Light and darkness
 - iii. *In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. (John 1:4-9)*
 - iv. *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. (John 3:16-19)*
 - b. The Primary Command: **Walk in love**
 - i. *Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. (1 John 2:7-10)*
 - ii. And the two ways in which all people relate to one another: Love or hate
 - iii. *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34-35)*
 - iv. *This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:12-13)*
 - c. The Key Counsel: **Abide in the Anointing**

- i. *Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life. I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him. (1 John 2:24-27)*
- ii. Two ways to relate to Jesus Christ and the Christian Faith: abiding or forsaking
- iii. *Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. (John 15:4-9)*

d. **Tonight: The Core Teaching: Beware of Heresy**

- i. *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. (1 John 4:1-3)*
- ii. Heresy: Fake doctrines that can rob you of salvation, true Christian faith, and eternal life.
- iii. *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’” For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the father’s side, he has made him known. (John 1:14-18)*
- iv. *And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (John 17:3)*

- 4. Believers in any and every age need *assurance of faith and salvation*, and never more so than when...
 - a. Opposition to the faith is rising,
 - b. Many are leaving the church and forsaking historic faith,
 - c. False teachers with aberrant doctrines abound
 - d. *All three things were true in 98 A.D. and are once again true in 2015 A.D.*
- 5. So the apostle John writes in this *central section* of his first epistle to give us assurance, confidence, renewed faith.
- 6. He says these three things...

- a. “Do not be surprised...” (3:13)

Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. (1 John 3:13)

- b. “By this we know... (3:16 and 3:19)

By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him. (1 John 3:19)

- c. “Beloved, do not believe...” (4:1)

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. (1 John 4:1)

7. Behind our lack of certainty about spiritual truth, and our lack of assurance about our own souls, there always lies false teachers and false ideas that shake us to the core.

8. This was the case in John’s day. The first spiritual challenger of Christianity was a heresy known as **Gnosticism...**

- a. “Gnosticism” from the Greek word *gnosis* (knowledge)

- b. It affected the New Testament church early on (c. 65 A.D.)

- c. *O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called “knowledge,” for by professing it some have swerved from the faith. Grace be with you. (1 Timothy 6:20-21)*

- d. Pagan Greek ideas imported into Christianity

- e. Many of the early church fathers wrote about and against this *Gnostic Heresy*.

- f. e.g., Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Tertullian, Epiphanius of Salamis, Eusebius, Dionysius of Alexandria

9. **Raymond Brown:** “*Gnosticism is notoriously hard to define*”

10. And there were *several strains* of this early Gnostic heresy.

- a. Ebionites: Jewish set of Gnostics

- b. Nicolaitans: Book of Revelation (Cerinthian Gnostics, Asia Minor)

- c. Sethianism: Greek, pagan, mysticism

- d. Valentianism: Christian form of Gnosticism

11. The key elements of Gnosticism were these (generally speaking):

- a. Creation: the world was created by an inferior god known as the *Demiurge* (but not God)

- b. Radical Dualism: matter is bad, spirit is good

- c. Sin: not found in man’s soul but in the physical creation

- d. Cosmology: the created order has various and gradual levels of beings, with an emphasis on the highest being – angels. (*Stoichia*)

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on

in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. (Colossians 2:16-19)

- e. Anthropology: 3 classes of people: pneumatics (spiritual ones), psychics and hylics
 - f. Eschatology: no new creation but a private kingdom inside of each pneumatic (spiritual one)
 - g. *Gnosis*: knowledge was salvation; an esoteric and existential knowledge about spiritual things; not from God's revelation but from the cult of the pneumatic (denial or apostolic inspiration)
 - h. Flesh and Spirit: either extreme asceticism or licentious indulgence
 - i. Ethics: freedom from law; the sins of the body do not affect the soul
 - j. Feminism: leadership roles for women, female images and references to God (e.g., *Gaia* = Goddess Earth), rebellion against male authority at home and in the church.
 - k. Key heresy: since flesh is evil and spirit is good, God could not have become incarnate (en-fleshed; embodied) in Jesus of Nazareth
12. The notorious Gnostic leader, in Ephesus and Asia Minor, in John's day, was a man named **Cerinthus**, and his followers were known as the *Cerinthians*. Hence: the *Cerinthian Gnostic Heresy*.
13. **Polycarp** tells of John leaving a public bath in Ephesus when Cerinthus entered the premise: "*Let us flee, lest even the bath fall, because Cerinthus, the enemy of truth, is within.*"
14. Here's what **Irenaeus** wrote about Cerinthus (*against heresies*)

Cerinthus, again, a man who was educated in the wisdom of the Egyptians, taught that the world was not made by the primary God, but by a certain Power far separated from him, and at a distance from the Principality who is supreme over the universe, and ignorant of him who is above all. He represented Jesus as having not been born of a virgin, but as being the son of Joseph and Mary according to the ordinary course of human generation, while he nevertheless was more righteous, prudent, and wise than other men. Moreover, after his baptism, Christ descended upon him in the form of a dove from the Supreme Ruler, and that then he proclaimed the unknown Father, and performed miracles. But at last Christ departed from Jesus, and that then Jesus suffered and rose again, while Christ remained impassible, inasmuch as he was a spiritual being.

15. **Please notice:** The Gnostic ideas are prevalent today: Feminism and the feminizing of Christianity, emphases on emotion and experience over Scripture, preference for psychology over theology, weird ideas about angels, low view of sin, esp. sexual sins, compatibility of homosexuality and Christianity, emphasis on knowledge, esp. science over revelation, etc.
16. **Peter Jones**, retired Professor of New Testament at Westminster Seminary in California, wrote a book in 1992: *The Gnostic Empire Strikes Back* (pp. 6-7).
- When the Christian gospel moved beyond Judaism, it came face to face with another religious world, that of Greco-Roman paganism. Back then there were few (if any) atheists; everyone was a believer in some form of deity. The confrontation between religious beliefs was total, the shock often violent. Pagans either rejected the gospel out of hand, which often led to the persecution and physical elimination of Christians, or forsook their pagan gods, burned their magical books and amulets on the spot, and adopted the Christian faith. Certain "Christian" teachers sought to accommodate the faith to this pagan religion. The resulting*

perversion, “Christian Gnosticism,” made great strides throughout the Western world until it was exposed by the untiring work of certain church fathers as a pernicious and diabolical heresy. With the 20/20 vision of hindsight, the analysis of ancient Gnosticism, both in its pagan and Christian forms, gives us a complete picture of the underlying coherence of its humanistic world-and-life view. When that is set alongside New Age beliefs, the results are alarming. We are suddenly confronted with a many-headed monster intent on obliterating Christian faith.

17. John, along with Paul and the other apostles, confront this ancient heresy –

- a. *Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. (Jude 3-4)*
- b. John calls us to three certainties
- c. The Knowledge of a Loving Life (3:13-18)
- d. The Confidence of a Believing Heart (3:19-24)
- e. The Truth of Christ’s Incarnation (4:1-6)

18. **Note:** John says that assurance of true faith and genuine salvation comes from three things –

- a. *And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us. (1 John 3:23-24)*
- b. Love for the Brethren
- c. Belief in the Historic Christ
- d. The Gift of the Indwelling Holy Spirit (holy life)

I. THE ASSURANCE OF A LOVING LIFE (1 John 3:11-18)

For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. (1 John 3:11-18)

1. John picks up where he left off: *abiding in love for others.*

2. This is John's "circular style": to loop around, again and again, interweaving his **five main themes** into an interrelated message.
 - a. Living in the light
 - b. Walking in love
 - c. Abiding in God
 - d. Believing in Christ
 - e. Keeping God's commandments

3. Here is an interesting question: What words most occur in First John? In fact, in all John's 3 letters?
 - a. *Love* (48 times) e. *Command/commandment* (17)
 - b. *Know* (38 times) f. *Witness/testimony*(12)
 - c. *True/truth* (27 times) g. *Walk* (10)
 - d. *Abide* (23 times) h. *Believe* (9)

4. Here's my point in all this: If you divide these words into three categories, they reinforce, perfectly, John's five emphases.
 - a. *Walking in love for fellow Christians* (48 times)
 - b. *Knowing and Believing the Truth* (77 different times)
 - c. *Obeying God's commandment and leading a holy life* (30+ times)
 - d. *Abiding in God and in the Spirit* (26 times)
 - e. *Living in the Light (walking)* (10 times)

5. In an age when evangelicals have tried, for 30 years, to reduce Christianity to one facet – **Grace** – John says, "Nope, the genuine Christian must..."
 - a. *Live in the Light*
 - b. *Walk in Love*
 - c. *Believe in Christ*
 - d. *Abide in the Spirit*
 - e. *Keep God's Commandments*

6. John says, "Here's point #1 – *The Christian loves the Brethren.*"
 - a. He is not like Cain, full of anger, hate and murder.

For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. (1 John 3:11-12, 15)
 - b. The world hates Christ and Christians; always has.

Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. (1 John 3:13)

If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.' (John 15:18-25)

I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you. (John 16:1-4a)

- c. When we were born again in the Spirit, we were given the grace, power, and life of Christ to love one another.

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. (1 John 3:14)

- d. If we do not love our church or the people in our church, we “*abide in death*” (v. 14b).

- 7. But this love is **not** a mere sentiment, an emotional state, or a shallow slogan, “Oh, I love everybody”! Nonsense!

- a. Love is measurable: *Sacrifice is the measure of love*

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. (1 John 3:16)

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:12-13)

- b. And this love cannot be merely “*in word or talk*”
- c. It must be honest and practical: “*in deed and in truth*”

Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. (1 John 3:18)

- d. How so? In helping our fellow Christians in need:

But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? (1 John 3:17)

- e. Open heart, practical help, love indeed...

- 8. John challenges us to ask ourselves, “What am I doing on a daily basis to show my genuine love for the people in my church? *Such love gives us assurance that we are born again.*”

II. THE CONFIDENCE OF A BELIEVING HEART (1 John 3:19-24)

By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us. (1 John 3:19-24)

1. John speaks here of a second source of assurance of our salvation –
 - a. Source #1 – *a life of practical love for others*
 - b. Source #2 – *The inner assurance of our hearts (or consciences)*
2. **Robert W. Yarbrough:** *Letters of John: ECNT; p. 208.*

Having summoned readers to love in 3:9-18, and having employed some strong language in doing so, John now pauses to dispense encouragement. But the comfort he offers is bracing, not saccharine. To be confirmed in love is to assess the state of one's heart before God, never a light matter. On the contrary, it is weighty, because the heart can be a means of both assurance (3:19) and accusation (3:20). Reaching a point of justified boldness before God (3:21), while attainable, must always be regarded as elusive.

3. Let me clarify what John is saying in these verses:
 - a. First: We know we are of the Truth of the Gospel and have been born again when we love our fellow Christians (*"By this we shall know..."*)
 - b. Second: Our *heart* (conscience) will either approve of our love or condemn us of sin –
 - i. It remains the power of God's inner revelation.
 - ii. Just as the apostle Paul said it would do...

They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus. (Romans 2:15-16)

- iii. John's version of the same truth goes like this...

By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. (1 John 3:19-22)

- c. **Simple law of humanity:** *When we break God's laws, we feel **guilty**, and when we obey God's laws, we feel **approved** by God – at least until the conscience becomes “scarred” or hardened!*
- i. *But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (Hebrews 3:13)*
 - ii. *Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared. (1 Timothy 4:1-2)*
 - iii. *Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. (Ephesians 4:17-19)*
 - iv. *But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. (2 Corinthians 3:14)*
4. God grants to us a sincere, good and affirming conscience if we believe in Christ, walk in love and seek to obey His Commandments.
- a. *So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man. (Acts 24:16)*
 - b. *Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. (1 Peter 3:13-16)*
 - c. *Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 3:21)*
 - d. *The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. (1 Timothy 1:5)*
 - e. Faith in Christ, baptism into the church, the inner work of the Holy Spirit (grace), and an obedient life – all these build us a *good conscience*.
5. **John Calvin** explains the importance of what John is saying here, in this paragraph –
- a. *...in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him. (1 Peter 3:19-24)*

b. *He reminds us in these words, that faith does not exist without a good conscience; not that assurance arises from it or depends on it, but that then only we are really and not falsely assured of our union with God, when by the efficacy of His Holy Spirit, He manifests Himself in our love. For if anyone is conscious of guilt, and is condemned by his own heart, much less can he escape the judgment of God. It hence follows, that faith is subverted by the disquiet of an evil conscience.*

c. A good conscience is **one facet** of our assurance of salvation, along with faith and love.

6. God surrounds us with a **triad of confidence** in our Christian life:

Faith in Jesus Christ (mind)

Love for other Christians (body/actions)

Obedience to God's Commandments (heart)

7. When these three converge, they give us the **confidence** in our souls that we need to live the Christian life and to rest in the assurance of salvation.

8. Will they **ever** in this life be in perfect **balance** so that we never experience doubt, fear, guilt or insecurity? No! But if we **grow in grace**, and as we **mature in faith**, and as we **develop in love**, we will grow stronger in conscience and in assurance of salvation.

9. John's bottom line here is this: *The Holy Spirit will produce a confident heart (good conscience) in the true Christian, as He produces the Fruit of the Spirit in us –*

Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us. (1 John 3:24)

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

(Galatians 5:22-25)

III. THE KNOWLEDGE OF A BELIEVING MIND (1 John 4:1-6)

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error. (1 John 4:1-6)

1. John now turns to his third and final source of assurance.

a. Source #1 – *The Life of Love* proving we are born again

- b. Source #2 – *The Obedient Heart* grounded in the Spirit
 - c. Source #3 – *The Believing Mind* rooted in truth of Christ
2. Here, in these six verses, John confronts the errors of the *Cerinthian Heresy*:
- a. That Jesus and Christ were two separate beings
 - b. Christ was a spiritual being from God
 - c. Jesus was a human being from Joseph and Mary
 - d. Christ came upon Jesus to “possess” Him and empower Him for ministry
 - e. But Christ left Jesus to die on the cross a mere human
 - f. Hence: *No virgin birth, no God Incarnate, no atonement*
 - g. Bottom line: *Jesus was not the Savior, He was just a good and great man. Special knowledge is what saves.*
3. John sets forth one simple truth: *The person who does not believe that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not a true believer, is not born of God, and is not saved.*
- a. Key words: “*has come in the flesh*”
 - b. *In-carno* = in the flesh (body)
 - c. Incarnation = Jesus was/is God in the flesh; God in a man.
 - d. *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.* (John 1:14)
 - e. *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.* (1 John 4:1-3)
4. Whoever does **not** believe in the incarnation of the Son of God in Jesus Christ is...
- a. Of the spirit of false prophets and the antichrist(s)
 - b. Of a spirit not from God
 - c. Of the spirit of the world
 - d. Of the spirit of error (the devil)
5. Notice how many times John uses the word *spirit* in these six verses –
- a. *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever*

knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error. (1 John 4:1-6)

- b. 8 times!
 - c. The (Holy) Spirit of God vs the spirit of error, the antichrist, the world
6. John is talking about a **choice** we all must make, in these six verses –
- a. **Either** we choose to believe that God has sent His Son into Jesus of Nazareth to make Him the Savior of the world; Jesus is God incarnate.
 - b. **Or** we choose to believe that Jesus was a good man but not God incarnate, and therefore salvation must be found elsewhere.
 - c. **There is no middle ground**
 - d. We either believe the Gospel or we don't!
7. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. (John 1:1-18)*
8. **Encouragement:** "Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world."
- a. i.e., the *Holy Spirit* who indwells believers is greater than Satan and his antichrists.
 - b. The Spirit is able to bring people to faith in Christ and cause them to be "born of God" (born of the Spirit; born again)
 - c. *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."* (John 3:3, 5)
 - d. **But** we must **choose** which spirit (voice) and which message we will believe!
9. This is John's life-long and unchanging message: **To believe in Jesus Christ is to be born again and to possess eternal life-**

- a. *And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. (1 John 4:14-15)*
- b. *Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. (1 John 5:1)*
- c. *Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5:5)*
- d. *Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. (1 John 5:10-12)*
- e. *And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. (1 John 5:20)*
- f. Justification by faith = salvation by faith

10. Knowing and believing the truth about Jesus Christ is THE key to eternal life.

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30-31)

Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. (Acts 16:30-33)

CONCLUSION: We live in the same world as that of John and his readers back in 98 A.D....

1. A world filled with *many antichrists*, and full of *false prophets*, and inundated with *many heresies*.
 - a. *Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. (1 John 2:18)*
 - b. *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. (1 John 4:1)*
 - c. *For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. (2 John 7)*
 - d. Note that, three times, "**many**"

2. There are “many voices” in our Christian world today: *Positive confession, Health and Wealth, Social Gospel, Contemporary Grace Movement, Emergent Church, Federal Vision Theology, Theonomy, Charismatic, Fundamentalist, Liberation Theology, etc.*
3. I want you to hear the voice of God, in the Spirit and the Word, and be **assured** and **secure** in your faith:
 - a. If you believe that God has come to us in Jesus Christ, who has died on the cross to save us from our sins, and...
 - b. If the indwelling Holy Spirit is producing Fruit of the Spirit in you, so that you are growing in your love for other Christians, and...
 - c. If your love for God causes you to strive to keep His commandments and become more holy, more like Jesus Christ, then...
 - d. *Your heart, mind and soul can be assured that you have been born of God, belong to Christ, and are of the Spirit.*
4. By these three things we **know** that we are saved:
 - a. *By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.* (1 John 3:16)
 - b. *By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him.* (1 John 3:19)
 - c. *And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given to us.* (3:24)
 - d. *By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error* (4:6)
5. What we **know** assures us of who we **are**: The Redeemed of the Lord.
6. What you **don't know** can hurt you; in fact, it can ruin your life and condemn your soul...forever!
7. We know Jesus Christ, we know that His commandments are true, and we know that we love one another.

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. (1 John 5:20)
8. **This is the assurance of our hearts before God!**