

Listen Not to the Liars!

Part 2

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Have you ever heard of the '**Theological Declaration of Barmen?**'

"Ewww, Sam, that can't be the best introduction you can find, surely. I think a few people fell asleep as soon as you said '**Theological Declaration.**'"

Ok, how about **Adolf Hitler?** Have you heard of him?

World War two.

Nazi oppression.

Of course you have! And **now** I have your **attention!**

Almost immediately after Hitler's seizure of power in 1933, Protestant Christians faced pressure to "Aryanize" the Church, in other words, to expel Jewish Christians from the ordained ministry and adopt the Nazi "Führer Principle" as the organizing principle of church government.

A lot of the German churches succumbed to these pressures, and some Christians embraced them willingly.

This led to a movement within German churches called the '**pro-Nazi German Christian movement.**'

Hitler was glorified as a '**German prophet**' and preached that racial consciousness was a source of revelation alongside the Bible.

There were many Christians in Germany however who opposed this movement; this encroachment of Nazi ideology on Orthodox Church doctrine.

This is why the 'Theological Declaration of Barmen' was written.

The Barmen Declaration, written in 1934, was a call to **resistance** against the theological claims of the Nazi state.

At Barmen, that's a place in Germany, this emerging "**Confessing Church**" as it was called, adopted a declaration drafted by two theologian's named Karl Barth and Hans Asmussen, which repudiated the claim that other powers apart from Jesus Christ could be sources of God's revelation.

Not all Christians courageously resisted the regime, but many who did—like the Protestant pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, were arrested and executed in concentration camps.

That's a harsh punishment for a statement of faith!

Wouldn't it have just been easier to simply go along with the majority?

How did they really know that the Nazi's were wrong in what they were doing anyway?

A lot of Nazi soldiers were completely unaware of how far down the moral compass they had slid. Many thought they were doing the world a service ridding the world of Jew's.

How can we really know what is true and what is false?

Let's see what John has to say about this.

We are up to 1 John 4:1-6.

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognise the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

Pray!

I have titled this sermon 'Listen not to the Liars.' **PART 2!**

If you were here on the 2nd of January, you may recall that the title of my sermon on that occasion was: **God is light: Listen not to the Liars.**

During this sermon we were introduced in greater detail to the situation that the Johannine community were in.

There had been some **false teaching** by individuals.

These individuals had **left the community.**

John called them **Antichrists!**

John was then warning those left not to fall back into the influential lies that these antichrists had been spreading.

How did he do this?

1. By encouraging them to hold onto what they had heard from the beginning.
And;

2. By encouraging them to listen to the Holy Spirit within them who would guide them into all truth.

We then took these points and then similarly as a church made a New Year resolution:

To remain in the TRUTH and;

To remain in the SPIRIT.

So here again in the 4th Chapter, John returns to this idea of false teaching and antichrists. But this time he equips his listeners with something more in which to combat these false teachings.

He wants his listeners to be able to discern between the Spirit **of God**, and the spirits (lowercase 's') **of this world**.

So he gives them **two weapons for their arsenal**.

Two pieces of litmus paper.

Two TESTS.

Here he begins. Chapter 4:1: ***Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God.***

If find the New Living Translations (NLT) more enlightening: ***Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God.***

This less literal translation is both **HELPFUL** and **LIMITING** at the same time.

It's **helpful** because we understand exactly what John is getting at if it is put like this.

Have you ever had anyone pray over you and say:

"God's word for you is . . ." ? or

"I sense the Spirit saying that . . ." ?

No doubt most of us have. And this is not **necessarily** a bad thing, though we must be very careful when using such words.

So the NLT is **helpful** in thinking of this sort of context, i.e. we must **test** what is said when someone says this to us.

However I also think the NLT is **limiting** here, because I don't think John was referring only to situations like this. I believe these words on '**testing the spirits**' have far wider applications.

But before we get to that, it is important to understand better the context in which John was writing.

We've already been talking about these **antichrists**.

We've already in past sermons mentioned that these antichrists denied the **deity of Jesus**, the man from Nazareth; for those with theological literacy, it was '**incarnational Christology**' that was in question.

This is serious stuff!

Jesus is both 100% human and 100% God **at the same time**. This is a core fundamental tenet of orthodox Christian doctrine.

If he is more of one and less of the other, then the ramifications are **enormous** for the Christian faith!

This is why John gives a very specific confession to be made in the case of such false teaching. Verse 2: ***Every Spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.***

Two important elements are in this acknowledgement or confessions as the New King James Version (NKJV) puts it:

1. First, that John says '**Jesus Christ,**' not just '**Jesus.**'
In attaching the title 'Christ' to the name of Jesus, this affirms him as the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah. That he is indeed **God's sent one. God's Son! Deity!**
2. Second, John says that this '**Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.**'
In other words, he was a **real living breathing HUMAN BEING!**

So both of these elements essentially state that again Jesus was both 100% God and 100% human.

THIS WAS JOHN'S FIRST TEST!

Test *numero uno!*

Is there a confession that Jesus is both God and came in the flesh as a human?

John's second test is a little less obvious. It is revealed in verses 5 and 6. See if you can spot it:

They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us.

Did you see it?

Essentially, whoever is **'of the world'** listens to and accepts teachings that are **'of this world.'**

Whereas whoever is **'of God,'** listens to and accepts teachings that are **'of God.'**

So what John is saying is that the 'response of the church' is the **second weapon** for testing the spirits.

Gauge the response of the people of God.

The second Litmus,

The second TEST.

Numero Due

Test one: **Is there a confession that Jesus is both God and came in the flesh as a human?**

Test two: **Gauge the response of the people of God.**

Great! If this Johannine community apply these spiritual principles to their current situation then they are sure to remain on the correct path of truth. But the important question for us is:

Are these two principles enough to 'test all the spirits' in our time and age?

If we are trying to defend ourselves from the false prophets and spirits of our age, are these two weapons in our arsenal enough?

This is where things get **difficult!**

You see there are plenty of heresies or false teachings that would pass both of those tests!

Mormonism for example, it **not** accepted as an orthodox Christian faith, yet it would pass these tests.

Where does it go wrong?

There is a sizable 'church body' of believers amongst its ranks who adhere to set doctrinal teachings.

70% of the population of Utah in fact, is Mormon.

However, though it would accept that Jesus was wholly human and wholly divine, it believes that **his divinity is not unique to him alone.**

That we all had the opportunity to be God's, and when we die, we can become God's. That **we too** can effectively be **wholly human and wholly divine.**

The Mormon Church holds the Bible as one of their sacred and inspired texts as well. So how are we to discern whether their beliefs are right or wrong?

The problem does not stop here however.

Though there may not be as many examples of 'obvious false teachings' within our society, there is plenty of deceptive lies that permeate through the walls of the church, into the pews and even onto the pulpit.

How are we supposed to discern what is **right** and what is **wrong**?

what is **orthodox** and what is **not**?

what is **truth** and what is **lies**?

what is **of God** and what is **of this world**?

This world in which we live currently rejects the idea that there is even such thing as **ABSOLUTE TRUTH!**

The 'Barna Research Group' have come up with a list of 6 mega-themes that they have seen emerging in 2010. You won't be surprised to hear what the number one theme is. Let me read it to you:

The Christian Church is becoming less theologically literate.

What used to be basic, universally-known truths about Christianity are now unknown mysteries to a large and growing share of Americans--especially young adults. For instance, Barna Group studies in 2010 showed that while most people regard Easter as a religious holiday, only a minority of adults associate Easter with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Other examples include the finding that few adults believe that their faith is meant to be the focal point of their life or to be integrated into every aspect of their existence. Further, a growing majority believe the Holy Spirit is a symbol of God's

presence or power, but not a living entity. As the two younger generations (Busters and Mosaics) ascend to numerical and positional supremacy in churches across the nation, the data suggests that biblical literacy is likely to decline significantly. The theological free-for-all that is encroaching in Protestant churches nationwide suggests the coming decade will be a time of unparalleled theological diversity and inconsistency.

SCARY STUFF don't you think?!?!??

So what can we learn from John's words to his community of believers regarding the false truth they were facing?

Though John's wisdom was very specific to the heresy he was facing at the time, I believe we can still take two very similar fundamentals away from his words.

John's tests were:

First: **Is there a confession that Jesus is both God and came in the flesh as a human?**

Second: **Gauge the response of the people of God.**

In the same fashion but in a more broad sense in order to test any spirits we may face in our culture:

1. **We must look for a CONFESSION IN CHRIST!** And;
2. **We must look to the CONFESSION OF THE CHURCH.**

I know it's taken us a while to get to these points, but let me briefly expound on both of them. First:

LOOKING FOR A CONFESSION IN CHRIST:

Let's briefly see what is meant by '**CONFESSION.**'

In 4:2 John says that: ***every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.***

A more accurate literal translations of the Greek word used here is '**Confess,**' instead of acknowledge. The New Revised Standard Version and the King James Version reveal this.

This word **confess** is significant.

The Greek use of the word was that of an **oath!**

Second:

WE MUST LOOK TO THE CONFESSION OF THE CHURCH:

What do I mean by this?

One of the downfalls of the protestant reformation in the 16th century, is that we have become incredibly **individualistic** in our search for truth.

I do think it is good that we place the Bible in **higher** authority than the **Church** and its **traditions**, but this doesn't mean that we should totally ignore the **Church** and its **traditions**.

For literally 2000 years people have been studying, exploring and exegeting scripture, and we must continue to. We must try and apply the timeless truth of scripture to our contemporary generation, but there is still an absolute wealth of understanding to be gained from those who have journeyed the Christian life before us.

This is part of the **Confession of the Church**.

Not only is it about calling on the knowledge and understanding of those who have gone before us, but still today, corporately pooling our knowledge and understanding to best determine the truth from the lies.

And not limiting that to simply this church either.

But the **Church** with a capital 'C.'

The **Confession of the Church**, with a capital 'C,' is a gauge for the truthfulness of the teaching!

What do I mean by '**Church**' with a capital 'C?'

I **don't mean** just one individual believer and his opinions.

I **don't mean** just one individual's interpretation of scripture.

I **don't mean** just a few people gathered at a weekly home group.

Though all of these people make up the church.

I MEAN a gathered body of believers professing and proclaiming the name of Christ Jesus.

I MEAN an eldership and leadership prayerfully seeking the Holy Spirit's guidance.

I MEAN support and advice given from the governing body of our denomination: the Baptist Union.

I MEAN beliefs and practices that have been passed down from generation to generation in this great tradition of Christian faith!

I MEAN creeds and doctrines that have been expressed and confessed since the founding of the Christian faith!

**AND ALL OF THIS CENTERED AROUND THE HOLY AND INSPIRED WORD
OF
GOD!**

This is the second filter we must run these ‘spirits’ through in order to determine whether they are of God or of this world.

We must not go it alone;

WE MUST LOOK TO THE CONFESSION OF THE CHURCH.

Perhaps you’re wondering about the relevance of this morning’s message.

Perhaps you’re thinking your theology is reasonably sound, and you’re reasonably safe from being deceived by the spirits of this world.

If that is the case, then I must remind you of something:

1 Peter 5:8 & 9: ***Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.***

We must **NEVER** drop our guard.

We must **ALWAYS** keep alert.

We must **TEST ALL SPIRITS!**

Look for a **CONFESSION IN CHRIST** and

Look to the **CONFESSION OF THE CHURCH**

And don’t forget John’s famous words in 1 John 4:4 NASB:

Greater is HE who is in YOU, than HE who is in THE WORLD!!!

