



"True Confession" - 1 John 4:1-6, 14-15

by Pastor Tim Dodson on April 12th, 2015

at Jesus Fellowship of Believers in Menomonie, WI

(1) *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. (2) By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, (3) 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 the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. (4) 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. (5) They are of the world. Therefore*

they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. (6) 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. (14) And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. (15) Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

"Beloved..."

John...beginning once again with an assurance of heart toward the readers of this letter...those whom he considers to be either a genuine redeemed brothers or sisters in the Lord, or at least those who are amongst them seeking answers. Either way, John was expressing God's love for *them* all as well as his *own*. This is a worthwhile acknowledgment in that what John has been saying for 3 chapters no doubt is hitting a nerve amongst the original recipients of this letter as well as with some of us. Some of us may hear John's teaching and feel attacked or at least unduly confronted, and we may be apt to sense that John is somehow 'kicking us under the bus.' Apparently perceptive of such a heart, John is reminding them that they are all "beloved," just as sure as you all are here.

With that being said, we must also acknowledge that John seems to have an underlying theme throughout this letter. While the letter has overt principles presented...*ideas such as manifested love, expressed holiness and abiding under His grace*, there is still the clear message underneath it all that things are not always what they appear when it comes to what we hear, what we believe, what is truly in our hearts and our response to Christ. Certainly one must see that John was teaching us about spiritual clarity. About discerning between what many refer to as the "sheep and the goats." (Matthew 25) About evaluating spiritual position and eternal standing. About knowing where we really are in relation to our Lord and Savior.

I believe that this issue...*the surety of our salvation*, is one of the most critical considerations within the greater church today. Because the fact is that so very many people are filling the pews of America's churches today, that frankly...according to this letter, quite simply have never been born again. But the 'mile wide and an inch deep' theology...the Jesus-lite-revisionist-historian position that is so widely accepted as Christianity today, in truth bears very little resemblance to the Bible. Men have attempted to rewrite the path to salvation and eternal life, and such is merely based on a modernist culture and the 'new deal' we attempted to make with our Creator. There has been a 'soft coup' along the way, and so very many of us just simply do not recognize that today.

So while it may appear that John shifts subjects here, but in true context, he has not. In fact, he in reality is pushing into this model even further, telling us to not just accept things on face value, but rather to "test them." Like a lighthouse, he has graphically drawn a picture of a redeemed life...what it looks like, what it acts like, ...all in a loving attempt to wave us off from crashing on the reef. Now true to form herein, we as a church fellowship have so

intensely found that not only is John likely to ‘take it on the chin’ for his words here, but we have also been on the ‘receiving side’ of such for daring to adhere to them. I have heard it all over the years. Every crazy reason for departing from this church community that could possibly be thought up, and generally so void of the truth that it is darkly comedic. I suppose they feel they can get away with such stories because they figure that they will never run into any of us, but sadly that is an error in the fact that it is a very small town we live in!

The fact is...after 25 years of ‘doing church’ here, there is one overwhelming reason for people running away, and that is what John has so prescribed in this first verse: *along the way, their ‘spirit was tested.’* Meaning that as they desired to move beyond the pew into service and/or position, or even to simply be included in the covenant body of believers, there was instituted a higher level of expectation. The same as in every ‘real life’ scenario that exists in this world, but mysteriously are apparently to be ignored by the church. They may have claimed sainthood, and wore a super-hero cape, but the practical aspects of their life and lifestyle came under scrutiny, and when expectations and personal perceptions did not match positional requirements, suddenly pride and anger burst forth like the movie ‘Alien’ and things got messy in a hurry.

The reality is we so VERY often think we are more than we are in reality! We want to believe we are pastors and evangelists, teachers and ‘leaders of men’, when in fact often we have so many miles to travel before actually being able to consistently stand in example without publically falling on our spiritual faces! So we feel we have been ‘dis’d’ by the people in the church, and we all go in one day from ‘the best church around’ to a ‘cult.’ Not because of what we teach or how we operate, but simply because we follow the Bible and love them too much to let them die forever, even when it is frankly often uncomfortable to intervene.

I have had people around that fancy themselves to be prophets when their bondage to porn was very nearly crippling and their spiritual graces were like that of an toddler and their scriptural education was so severally lacking that they struggled with the most basic of Christian practices. Messed up marriages, drug issues, anger issues, broken families...and yet they still felt equipped to direct others in their life journey! As a family community, if you take a stand as a Christian here and yet engage yourself in openly ungodly pursuits, someone is no doubt going to call you on it. And that is when the ‘push comes to shove.’ The proverbial ‘other shoe drops’ and we are quickly “de-friended.” But sadly, we are so incredibly slow to question ourselves on these matters and pride consumes us to the point where we are unable to be so loved by a brother or sister to receive their perceptions of us, and we are quite unwilling to look critically at ourselves.

John in this letter is not merely dealing however with service and position in the church, but about our very salvational standing. Our eternal “grade” for which there is extreme consequences to say the least! This all has deep and far reaching implications. From making personal decisions...dealing with the swampish quandary of our desires, feelings and fickle emotions and ascertaining what God’s will for us is. For many, the “open door” of God’s divine always ironically and mysteriously is exactly what we want! Wow! That’s handy! Lucky for us that God never says ‘no’ or calls us to do anything uncomfortable, or allows any pain to come into our lives! Unless there is some criteria for testing situations and real life manifests of an indwelling Holy Spirit, then we will always stand precariously on the precipice of disaster.

The single individual must consider in all of this, the grander aspects of knowing whether even a church or fellowship or even a religious stance is right on or skewed in some manner. The world has a criteria for this. It generally involves what they would call ‘tolerance’ but in fact it is demanded acceptance, as well as public opinion, social equality, and a pleasing emotional outcome. We here however use a different model which is simpler, although it is certainly not simpler to execute, navigate, or apply. We call it the Bible. That is our singular goal in that we seek to run everything we do through that narrow sieve.

So are we to understand this passage in 1 John as saying that as long as you acknowledge that “Jesus historically came in the flesh” that you are ‘good to go’...all is square with God and you receive your plastic “Christian” badge in the mail in 6 weeks? Is that what John is saying? Because frankly I have heard as much said by a lot of folks that are essentially today burning villages and pillaging homes. So, how can the ‘bar’ be so low as to essentially allow anyone without what we would see as legitimate qualifiers being in place? Because we could no doubt go hire some folks off the street to stand up front and say just about anything we want them to say. How does verbal affirmation equate to anything concrete? It doesn't, and frankly we *know* it doesn't. So how are we to read this passage?

The problem...as it often does, lies in understanding what certain words really mean, because our culture has an interesting habit of changing the meanings to fit the outcome. Even demons firmly believe and accept that Jesus is of God and came in the flesh, and I don't look for demons to be living next to me in eternity. (James 2:19) What actually is John saying then? What actually is "confession?" The modern dictionary renders that term as: *a written or spoken statement in which you say that you have done something wrong or committed a crime. The act of telling people something that makes you embarrassed, ashamed, etc. The act of telling your sins to God or to a priest.* Thus, by modern definition, confession is essentially a verbal affirmation.

Yet Strong's Concordance...a dictionary dealing with the original language terminology renders "confess" as: "*to say the same thing as another, to agree with. To concede. Not to refuse, to promise. Not to deny. To profess.*" And finally it even encompasses this: "*to praise, to celebrate.*"

Ahhh...very different terms, with very different applications! Far from a mere verbal declaration, the Strong's description could never be thoroughly exercised without physical participation. To "*profess...to say the same thing as, and agree with*" Jesus, I must actually do what He requires and attempt to live as He lived.

As Ray Stedman points out (*Expository Studies in 1 John* [Word], p. 296), “It is significant that this warning comes in the midst of John’s discourse about love, because false spirits tend to make a great deal of the subject of love. Every cult, every deviant group, every false movement makes its appeal in the name of love.” Yet as we have emphasized throughout this book, we must ask 'by who's definition of love?'

Paul also warned us concerning false teaching and false teachers. “*But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.*” (1 Timothy 4:1) Therefore we cannot just be leery of false *teaching* but also false *teachers*, because deceitful spirits and their demonic doctrines teach through *people* who advocate the false teaching. Believers **must be** discerning in all spiritual matters.

The current thinking today seems to revolve around the idea that, “It doesn’t matter what you believe, as long as you believe in something.” Really? So if I believe I can jump off this building and flap my arms and fly, it will be a reality? Hardly. Believing such will have no effect on keeping me in the air. There will be those who would argue that there is a great difference between science issues and spiritual matters. They would say that science is *objectively* true, whereas spiritual matters are *subjectively* true. If it “works” for you, then it’s “true.” But again, Satan often presents himself as an "angel of light." Many things 'work' in the strictest sense, but what or whom is behind such? Water dowsing or water "witching" works, but through what power?

The contemporary thinking simply assumes that God is merely a projection of people's beliefs, rather than that He actually exists and that He is the creator of all that is and I believe it *because* of that fact. Meaning I believe it therefore it exists, not that it exists so therefore I believe it. The Bible teaches rather that God really exists and that He spoke the heavens and earth into existence. The Bible also teaches the actual existence of Satan and other fallen angels, called demons. John's says that behind all truth in the spiritual realm is the *Spirit of truth* and behind all spiritually false teaching is "*the spirit of error*," led by Satan, but including all of his demonic forces. Whether they know it or not, behind every false prophet or false teacher is an evil spirit promoting the errors that they teach. Paul also said that we should "*not despise prophetic utterances*," yet he added, "*But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good.*" (1 Thess. 5:20-21).

The fact today is that many of us simply have *chosen* to believe all this God stuff. If it has...or as long as it has, positive effect upon my life...or what I believe to be positive effects upon my life, I continue to "believe." When it 'fails me'...when it fails to give me what I want out of it, I often then *cease* to believe or I alter those beliefs. Yet facts and real truth do not change nor are they altered in any way by whether I believe them or not. This has so much to do with the 'failure' today of the faith of many! If it's hard, I cease to believe it is necessary. If it is no longer culturally expedient, I change my beliefs. If I want something bad enough, but scripture and God's Spirit says 'no', then I alter what is true and factual. We then take on a new belief that that is not what the Bible meant, or that such is no longer applicable, or that in my special case I am given a 'pass.' Again, this fact has cost countless lives over the years, and is behind nearly every departure from amongst us.

This practice has been from the beginning, and is today more widely accepted than ever. Many of us are active participants in such practice and thinking, yet we are sitting in pews this morning "believing" we are ok with God. But our "confession" of faith says something very different! From the day that Satan deceived Eve in the garden, until the last days, when the final antichrist will deceive the world (2 Thess. 2:3-12), evil spirits have promoted false teaching to lead people away from the living and true God. When John says, "*many false prophets have gone out into the world*," we should realize that these were not sinister, evil looking characters. They didn't blatantly encourage Satan-worship or child-sacrifice. They used Christian lingo and professed to believe in Jesus. No doubt, they had attractive personalities and convincing arguments. Yet Jesus called them "wolves in sheep's clothing." (Matt. 7:15). Paul warned that these men disguise themselves as apostles of Christ and servants of righteousness.

The bottom line in all of this is that to confess this truth about Jesus implies submitting your life to Him as Lord (Rom. 10:9-10) Obviously, to deny that "Jesus came in the flesh" would certainly place one in the "unbeliever" category. But to "believe" that He did indeed...to "confess" that He is God in flesh, requires that such is an unmovable and unchanging living aspect of our lives on this planet. Christianity...real redemption, is more than verbal affirmation or mental ascent. If I really believe that the roof of this place is ready to collapse, then the fact is I would get out of here in a hurry. If I don't, no one would say I really believe it. True confession demands true action.

"Greater is He that is in me than he that is in the world." What is actually "in" you today? Something you decided to believe in, or the presence of a never changing God that by His presence and activity you in response then "confess" in your lifestyle as well as your verbal affirmation? The real child of God hears the truth whether it is out of scripture or out of the mouths of your brothers and sisters. Truth is truth. Of course what they say must be scripturally backed, although much of what my brothers and sisters have done to guide me throughout the years doesn't have a chapter and verse but I stepped back and looked at both the source as well as the factual weight of it.

Real belief...real confession, will be more than just a speech or a reason to sit in a pew on Sunday. The real thing moves. What we really believe is expressed by the confession of our living.