

# Tests of True Spirituality

2021-07-04 by Ben Deaver at Tallgrass at The Well on 1 John 2:3-14

## Announcements:

- Happy 4<sup>th</sup> of July!
- Give online or in the Black Box or the Joy Box.
- Better Together Fund
- Teams
- Worship Team Jam Session
- Better Together Lunch

## 1 John 2:3a And by this we know that we have come to know him...

- Encouragement and Exhortation—This letter has been referred to as a masterpiece in edification. John writes to “make our joy complete”, “so you won’t sin”, and “so that you may know that you have eternal life” (1:4; 2:1; 5:13). How can we build confidence in our faith?
- The Deceivers—But he’s also writing about “those who would lead you astray” (2:26). John says, “Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray” (3:7). This letter was likely written to the Ephesian church. Paul had warned that “fierce wolves will come in among you” (Acts 20:29-30; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 4:3-4). John calls them “false prophets” (4:1), “deceivers” (2 John 7), and “antichrists” (2:18-22; 4:3; 2 John 7). How can we discern those who are not truly spiritual?
- John is teaching us how to test claims of spirituality and how to build confidence in our own faith.
- Strong heart example: Pretend you are a cardiac specialist and someone comes to you and claims to have a strong heart but they also have high blood pressure, chronic low energy, and can’t do aerobic exercise without passing out. You would reject their claim to have a healthy heart. This would be your diagnosis but not your treatment.

## John’s Threefold Test of True Spirituality

1. Head—Doctrinal or Theological (the test of belief in Christ)—Believe in Jesus. Do you believe Jesus is the Son of God and came in the flesh? (2:22-23; 3:23; 4:2-3; 5:5, 10, 13)
  - 2:22-23 <sup>22</sup> Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. <sup>23</sup> No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.
  - 3:23 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.
  - 4:2-3 <sup>2</sup> By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, <sup>3</sup> 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.

- 5:5 Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?
  - 5:10 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.
  - 5:13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.
2. Heart—Social (the test of love)—Love like Jesus. Do you love like Jesus? Experience the love of Jesus. Do you experience the love of Jesus? (2:7-11)
  3. Hands—Moral or Ethical (the test of obedience)—Walk like Jesus. Do you live like Jesus? (2:3-6)
- These three tests correspond with the way the Gnostic culture is affecting us today that Josh introduced last week.
    - Questioning the exclusivity of Jesus Christ
    - The rise of expressive individualism
    - Denying the pervasiveness of sin
  - No one does this perfectly. However, this is the desired trajectory of the true follower of Christ's life.
  - 1 John 2:1-2 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. <sup>2</sup> He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

## Pray!

1 John 2:3-6 <sup>3</sup> And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. <sup>4</sup> Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, <sup>5</sup> but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: <sup>6</sup> whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

- "And by this we know that we have come to know him" = experiential knowledge
  - Marriage example: On November 26, 2005 I became a husband but I am spending the rest of my life becoming a husband.
  - Whoever says, "I do" but does not pursue the marriage is a liar...
  - Abide in my marriage. Remain in my marriage.
  - There's always more relational depth to be had. There's always more love to be experienced. But marriage is not just about one day. It's about a lifetime. And the same is true for true spirituality.
- Tone is so important here. Who is John suggesting may be a liar?
- This is not teaching works-based righteousness. This definitely is not teaching that the way to come into relationship with God is to keep his commandments. But one of the ways you can know that you've come to know God is if you keep his commandments.
- Whoever says, "I know him" but doesn't keep his commandments is actually a liar.

- Whoever says, "I abide in him" ought to walk as Jesus walked.
- Integrity—Whoever says he abides in Jesus ought to walk like Jesus walked.

### Test Three—Hands—Moral or Ethical (the test of obedience)

- Walk like Jesus. Do you live like Jesus taught and lived? (2:3-6)
- 1 John 3:23 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.
- 1 John 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.
- John 6:28-29 <sup>28</sup> Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" <sup>29</sup> Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."
- "keep his commandments" "keeps his word" "walk in the same way in which he walked"

Jesus' ethical teaching is multifaceted but has three key foci:

### Jesus' Sexual Ethics, Economic Ethics, and Power Ethics

- What do we do with our sexuality? With our money? And with our power?
- Jesus sets the standard and then provides the pathway both for forgiveness and growth towards that standard by the blood of the cross.

#### 1. Jesus' Sexual Ethics

- a. Matthew 5:27-30 <sup>27</sup> "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' <sup>28</sup> But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. <sup>29</sup> If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. <sup>30</sup> And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.
- b. Matthew 19:3-6 <sup>3</sup> And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" <sup>4</sup> He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, <sup>5</sup> and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? <sup>6</sup> So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."
- c. Media consumption for Christians?
- d. Teaching on sexuality by spiritual leaders and celebrities?
- e. What influences in your life are posing as spiritual but don't meet the way of Jesus' sexual ethics?
- f. Are you moving towards or away from Jesus' path for your sexuality?

## 2. Jesus' Economic Ethics

- a. Matthew 6:19-20, 24 <sup>19</sup>“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, <sup>20</sup> but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. <sup>24</sup> “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.
- b. What influences in your life are posing as spiritual but don't meet the way of Jesus' economic ethics?
- c. Are you moving towards or away from Jesus' path for your use of money?

## 3. Jesus' Power Ethics

- a. Jesus was always using His power to build up those around him, whether they were women, Gentiles, Samaritans, fishermen, sinners, or tax collectors. He wasn't using His power to demand His own individual rights.
- b. Mark 10:42-45 <sup>42</sup> And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. <sup>43</sup> But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup> and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. <sup>45</sup> For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”
- c. What influences in your life are posing as spiritual but don't meet the way of Jesus' power ethics?
- d. Are you moving towards or away from Jesus' path for your use of power?

1 John 2:7-8 <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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.

- “Beloved”—Term of endearment. Notice the tone. The tone of 1 John is very important.

1 John 2:9-11

<sup>9</sup> Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. <sup>10</sup> Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. <sup>11</sup> But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

## Test Two—Heart—Social (the test of love)

- Love like Jesus. Do you love like Jesus? Experience the love of Jesus. Do you experience the love of Jesus? (2:7-11)
- Whoever says, “I am in the light” but hates his brother is actually still in darkness.

- Old Commandment vs. New Commandment
  - “Love your neighbor as yourself.” vs. “Love one another as I have loved you.”
  - Old Commandment could be to love one another as Christ has loved you and the New Commandment is the Holy Spirit’s ongoing personal instruction on how to love.
  - Either way, we are to love one another...deeply...with Jesus example as the model.
- 1 John 3:11 For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.
- 1 John 3:16-18 <sup>16</sup> By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. <sup>17</sup> 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? <sup>18</sup> Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.
- 1 John 4:19-21 <sup>19</sup> We love because he first loved us. <sup>20</sup> If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. <sup>21</sup> And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.
- Someone in the church once said that there was nothing wrong with their church that a few funerals wouldn’t fix. That’s not loving!

## Two Ditches

- The Gnostics (John’s opponents) vs. The Judaizers (Paul’s opponents)
- Secret knowledge and everything else is fine vs. Legalistic righteousness; works-based righteousness
- Irreligion vs. Religion
- “Paul’s first concern was *works of Jewish ritual that were thought to earn some benefit from God*. Paul can at once say that the Christian life should display *good works* and yet we are not saved *by works*. Paul endorsed no compromise to the believer’s pursuit of righteousness. The same is true of Jesus. In his Sermon on the Mount he said that our righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees (Matt. 5:20)... This is a difficult paradox: Personal righteousness and obedience are an essential component of our faith and yet do not form the bases of our salvation.” –Gary M. Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary: Letters of John*, p. 106
- John 1:14 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.
- Matthew 11:18-19 <sup>18</sup> For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ <sup>19</sup> The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ But wisdom is proved right by her deeds.”
- Galatians 5:1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.
- John 8:31-32 <sup>31</sup> So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, <sup>32</sup> and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

## John's Threefold Test of True Spirituality

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2. Heart—Social (the test of love)—Love like Jesus. Do you love like Jesus? Experience the love of Jesus. Do you experience the love of Jesus? (2:7-11)
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### Application:

1. What's one influence in your life that is fake spirituality?
  - a. Something you've seen on Facebook or Instagram or TikTok.
  - b. The influence of a friend or family member.
  - c. A celebrity.
2. What's one area of growth for your head, heart, or hands?
  - a. Belief in Jesus as the Son of God who came in the flesh.
  - b. Love like Jesus.
  - c. Live like Jesus, especially as it relates to your pocketbook and your sexuality.
  - d. What if we continued to come to know Jesus more and more?
  - e. What if we loved more and more like Jesus loved?
  - f. What if we lived more and more like Jesus taught and lived?

Invite the band up.

John speaks over the believers these words of encouragement.

1 John 2:12-13a <sup>12</sup> I am writing to you, little children,  
because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.

<sup>13a</sup> I am writing to you, fathers and mothers,  
because you know him who is from the beginning.

I am writing to you, young men and women,  
because you have overcome the evil one.

1 John 2:13b-14 <sup>13b</sup> I write to you, children,  
because you know the Father.

<sup>14</sup> I write to you, fathers and mothers,  
because you know him who is from the beginning.

I write to you, young men and women,  
because you are strong,  
and the word of God abides in you,  
and you have overcome the evil one.

Let's pray!

## The Chopping Block:

- “‘Gnosticism’ is a broad term embracing various pagan, Jewish and semi-Christian systems, which did not come to full development until the second century. It was pagan in origin, combining elements of ‘Western intellectualism and Eastern mysticism’ (Law). Thoroughly syncretistic in its genius, a ‘theosophical hotchpotch’ (Dodd), it did not hesitate to fasten upon and to corrupt first Judaism and then Christianity.” –John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, p. 47
  - Impurity of matter and the supremacy of knowledge.
- “The middle and end of the twentieth century are an epoch of fundamental insecurity. Everything is changing; nothing is stable. New nations have constantly been coming to birth. New social and political patterns are continually evolving. The very survival of civilization is in doubt before the threat of nuclear war. These external insecurities are reflected in the world of the mind and of the spirit. Even the Christian church, which has received ‘a kingdom that cannot be shaken’ and is charged to proclaim him who is ‘the same yesterday and today and for ever’ (Heb. 12:28; 13:8), now often speaks its message softly, shyly and without conviction. There is widespread distrust of dogmatism and a preference for agnosticism or free thought. Many church members are filled with uncertainty and confusion. –John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, pp. 54-55
  - This was originally written in 1968.
- “Against this background, to read the letters of John is to enter another world altogether, for its marks are assurance, knowledge, confidence and boldness. The predominant theme of these letters is Christian certainty. Their characteristic verbs are ‘to perceive’ (twenty-five times) and ‘to know’ (fifteen times), while a characteristic noun is ‘confidence of attitude’ or ‘boldness of speech’. The certainty of Christian people is twofold—objective (that the Christian religion is true) and subjective (that they themselves have been born of God and possess eternal life). Both are expounded by John, who takes it for granted that this double assurance is right and healthy. His teaching about these certainties, their nature and the grounds on which they are build, urgently needs to be heard and heeded today.” –John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, p. 55

1 John 2:15-17

<sup>15</sup> Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup> For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. <sup>17</sup> And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

“In him” in Paul’s writing vs. “In him” in John’s writing

- Paul uses “in him” or “in Christ” to refer to our position in Christ that can’t be affected by our actions whereas John uses “in him” to refer to our relational disposition to Jesus.

- 1 John 4:4 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.

By this we know...

- 1 John 2:3 And **by this we know** that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.
- 1 John 2:5-6 <sup>5</sup> ...but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. **By this we may know** that we are in him: <sup>6</sup> whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.
- 1 John 3:16 **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 3:19-20 <sup>19</sup> **By this we shall know** that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; <sup>20</sup> for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.
- 1 John 3:24 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 4:2-3 <sup>2</sup> **By this you know** the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, <sup>3</sup> 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 4:6 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 4:13 **By this we know** that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.
- 1 John 5:2 **By this we know** that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.

We are writing these things...

- 1 John 1:1-4 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— <sup>2</sup> the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— <sup>3</sup> that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> And **we are writing these things** so that our joy may be complete.
- 1 John 2:1-2 My little children, **I am writing these things** to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. <sup>2</sup> He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.
- 1 John 2:21-23 <sup>21</sup> **I write to you**, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. <sup>22</sup> Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. <sup>23</sup> No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.
- 1 John 2:26 **I write these things** to you about those who are trying to deceive you.



- 1 John 5:13 **I write these things** to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.