

**IS DOCTRINE IMPORTANT?**

1 John 4:1-3

**Intro:** For the past fourteen weeks, in our Sunday morning services, we have been studying together the NT epistle of 1 John. Although the Apostle John's name does not appear in this letter, there is no doubt, following all of the study that has been put into this subject on this epistle, but that the Apostle John was the writer. Like all of the other books of the Bible, the Holy Spirit was the Author, but, in this case, the Apostle John was the writer.

He also wrote four other NT books: They are the Gospel of John, the second and third epistles of John (which follow 1 John in our Bibles), and the book of The Revelation of Jesus Christ, the last book of the Bible.

At the time that John wrote these books it was close to the end of the first century after Christ. He was the sole survivor of the apostles. His writings represent his mature understanding of one who had loved the Lord for many years, and who had served the Lord faithfully. He did not have an easy life. When he wrote The Revelation he was in exile on the Isle of Patmos, as he said in Revelation 1, "for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:9). So his love for the Word of God and for Jesus Christ has cost him his personal liberty.

We don't know who were the original recipients of this first epistle. We know that they were believers because he indicates that all through the epistle, and he specifically stated it in 1 John 5:13. There you will read, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the Name of the Son of God." That describes a Christian. A Christian is one who is not only believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, but he is trusting in Jesus Christ as his Savior from the penalty and power of his sins. No other person has any right to call himself a Christian. The Apostle Paul said in Romans 10, verses 9 and 10,

9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (Rom. 10:9-10).

But, if you have your Bible open to 1 John 5:13, you have your Bible open where you can read 1 John 5:13, you will see that it tells us *why* the

Apostle John wrote this letter. You see it in the words, “that ye may know that ye have eternal life.” So in this statement we see that he was writing to a group of Christians toward the end of the first century *who needed assurance that they were saved*. I have quoted a well known Bible teacher of a previous generation who said concerning salvation, “If you can get saved and not know it, then you could lose it and never miss it.” There were undoubtedly people in that generation, as there are in our generation, who were saying that only a very proud person would say with certainty that he knew that he was saved. Others probably were saying that we can’t really say that we are saved until after we die. So this must have been a problem among believers in that day as it may be, or has been with some of you today.

But the Apostle John makes it very clear that if you and I are saved, there are going to be certain evidences in our lives that will give us that assurance. He gave them certain tests for them to apply to their lives that would give them the assurance that they were looking for.

But I want to make one point clear that I have not been stressing in this series because we have not gotten to it until today. And that is the work of the Holy Spirit in giving us this assurance that is so necessary. You will find it in the first words of 1 John 4:2 where the Apostle John wrote, “Hereby know ye the Spirit of God.” By this he meant that by this you can identify the work of the Holy Spirit. By what? By those who declare to you “that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.” It is the Spirit of God Who convicts us of our sin. It is the Spirit of God Who teaches us about the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is the Spirit of God who draws us to Christ, and Who gives us the faith to trust in Christ.

Perhaps you remember these familiar words which the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Rome concerning salvation and the assurance that we are saved. Listen to what he wrote:

16 The Spirit itself [Himself] beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

17 And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together (Rom. 8:16-17).

This is not a blessing that we have to seek. In the heart of every true child of God we have the witness of the Holy Spirit with our spirit that we have been born into the family of God. We are the children of God. This is an inner witness that the Spirit of God gives to us that we really belong to the

Lord. That is a witness that we have in our hearts. But, in addition to that inner testimony, there are the outward evidences that the Apostle John has given us in this epistle to give us further confirmation that we really know the Lord, that our sins are forgiven, that we have been saved, and that some day we are going to be with the Lord in heaven.

I want to mention what those tests are again this morning. The Apostle John mentioned them as he began his letter. And that is in chapters 1 and 2. Then in that part of the epistle where we are now he is mentioning them again. And before we are finished he will go over them a third time. They are not always in the same order, but it seems that the Apostle John wanted, with the Spirit's help and blessing, to drive these points into the hearts of his readers so that they would never forget them *because, as most of us know, doubts have a way of coming back.*

*Now here are the tests:*

- 1) The test of sin and our experience with it.*
- 2) The test of obedience to the Word of God.*
- 3) The test of our love for the people of God.*
- 4) The test of our relationship with the world.*
- 5) The doctrinal test.*
- 6) The test of abiding in Christ, our fellowship with Christ.*

There are a lot of people in the United States who think that they are Christians, but they would fail each of these tests, one after another, because they do not manifest the characteristics of a person who has been born again, of one who has eternal life. Every time I teach a book of the Bible I feel that every professing Christian needs to read and digest that book. What a difference it would make in our world if everyone who professed to know God would show it by the way he or she is living. These are what we might call *the vital signs of a Christian*. I remind you again that the Apostle Paul was really saying the same thing when he wrote to the church in Corinth the words that we find in 2 Corinthians 5:17-18a:

17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

18 And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ . . .

Now what the Apostle John has told us in 1 John is that if you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, you are a new creature, a new creation. What you were is gone, never to return. What you are now is new, and it

will never end. There is no rehabilitation, no reformation, that can even begin to compare with regeneration. Whatever man does is imperfect and temporary; what God does is perfect and eternal. You will never find a perfect Christian in this life, but what you will find is a true Christian, is a new creature in whom God is working to make him, or her, to be like the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now as we come this morning to the first three verses of chapter 4 in 1 John, we come again to *the doctrinal test*. All of the other tests have deal in one way or another with *how we live*; the doctrinal test has to do with *what we believe*. And I have given my message this morning the title, “Is Doctrine Important?” What is doctrine? Doctrine is teaching! Of course, when I ask that question I am really asking, “Is Bible Doctrine Important? I have known Christians who have said, “Don’t give us doctrine; give us practical teaching.” But practical teaching is doctrine. How would you like to fly from here to Seattle with a couple of men sitting in the pilots’ seats who didn’t know a thing about the plane that you and dozens of others have boarded? How would you like to be operated on by a man who knew nothing about the doctrine of the human body? Why do you think that God would give us the Bible if He didn’t intend for us to accept His teaching? One reason we have so many crazy things going on in our churches today, is because those who are responsible have not taken the time to learn the teaching of God’s Word, the doctrine of the Bible. One of man’s greatest problems is ignorance, especially ignorance of God, but also ignorance of man, his nature, and God’s will for the human race.

Doctrine is extremely important, and that is especially true of Bible doctrine. How can we live the Christian life if we don’t really know what it is. A lot of people assume that they know, but their lives display the greatest ignorance. Doctrine, teaching, is the foundation upon which a life of fellowship with the Lord, and our fellowship with each other in the Lord is established. When the Apostle John said in chapter 1 of this epistle that “God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all,” he was teaching doctrine. And when he went on to say that “if we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.” That is doctrine. Every word of chapter 1 is doctrine. In fact, the whole epistle is doctrine. Over and over again the Apostle kept saying things that he wanted them to know, things he wanted them to believe. The Christian life is not what we think it ought to be; it is what God says in His Word that it is. You and I will never understand human nature unless

we understand the Bible. We don't know why we are here, and how we got here, unless we read the Bible. I am amazed, and I am sure that most of you are too, that with all of the terrible things that are going on in the world today, and the many plans that are devised to find a solution, that our leaders, that is, the majority of them, will not allow anybody to even suggest that the Bible has the answer. You can't even get through Romans, chapter 1, without seeing that all of the wickedness that characterizes our world is because people don't want to have anything to do with God, or His Word. And we would be just as blind, and just as ignorant if God in His grace had not given us ears to hear what He has said in His Word, and hearts that want to know His Word.

The first three verses of chapter 4 are a repetition of the emphasis that the Apostle John made in chapter 2, verses 18 through 23 (and some say to the end of chapter 2). And so first, again, we have:

### **I. A WARNING (1 John 4:1).**

Not many of our politicians, and hardly any of the leaders of the nations, have any idea that there are unseen, evil forces in this world. They have no idea that, as the Apostle Paul said in his Ephesian epistle, "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12). Behind all of the evil that is in this world, are Satanic, demonic forces, who, as we have learned before in this epistle are out to deceive and seduce everybody they can, but their main targets are those who are "of God." That is what the Apostle John said in verse 4 of this 4<sup>th</sup> chapter. "Ye are of God, little children, . . ." (See the whole verse.) Everybody else is "of the world" over which the Devil is now "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4). And those unseen, but very real "spirits" are represented by false prophets which have "gone out into the world."

Every prophet who does not recognize the Lord Jesus Christ, is a false prophet. And it doesn't make any difference how few or how many are their followers, if they do not recognize Jesus Christ as The Prophet of God, their religion is false. They are out to conquer the world, and it looks at times like they are going to be successful *unless you know the teaching of God's Word*. This is where the real battle is being fought today. And now we come through Scripture to know what is the major doctrine of Scripture which only those who know the Bible can under-

stand.

## **II. IDENTIFYING THE SPIRIT OF GOD (1 John 4:2).**

And here I want to make a statement about the doctrines of Scripture that I hope you and I will never forget. The Bible teaches us many wonderful and glorious truths. But both in 1 John 2 and 1 John 4, the Apostle John tells us that the doctrine which rises above all others is what the Bible teaches us about Jesus Christ – the doctrine, the teaching about Jesus Christ. Any religion that is wrong about Jesus Christ, can't possibly be true about anything else. And that eliminates everything, every other religion, but the Christian faith. Jude expressed it in these words:

3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

4 For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ (Jude 3-4).

What did the Apostle John mean when he said, “Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God”? He was speaking of the true doctrine of Christ. He meant that the truth is that Jesus Christ was God incarnate, and that coming to earth as a Man in no way lessened or changed the fact that in the flesh He was God the Son, and that He came as Jesus, to save His people from their sins. Cf. Matt. 1:21. He is the Christ, the One anticipated throughout the whole OT as “the seed of the woman.” Some religions recognize Jesus as a prophet, or a great teacher, but they stop short of saying that He was God incarnate, the only Savior that the world has ever known, or will ever know.

Just a word about verse 3.

## **III. THE SPIRIT OF ANTICHRIST (1 John 4:3).**

If a person denies what the Bible teaches about Jesus Christ, or modifies it in any way, or ignores the Lord altogether, it is the voice of one who is antichrist. Have nothing to do with him. Angels don't die. Evil spirits are fallen angels, demons, and they never die. And therefore the same evil, unseen spirits who sought to turn people away from Jesus Christ in

the days of the Apostle John, are still busy seeking to corrupt everybody they possibly can.

**Concl:** Let me close with the words the Apostle Peter used to close his second epistle. He described the only way we can be protected against the many false prophets who are in the world today. I am referring to 2 Peter 3:17-18:

17 Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.

18 But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

Is doctrine important? True doctrine is always important. But when it comes to Scripture, doctrine is extremely important, and the foundation of all that the Bible teaches, is what it teaches about our Lord Jesus Christ. May the prayer of each of our lives be expressed by that wonderful hymn, "More about Jesus would I know."

Learning about Jesus is not only primary, but it is always delightful. If our minds and hearts are saturated with the truth about our Lord, we will never go astray.