

1 John 4:2 Commentary

PREVIOUS

NEXT

CLICK VERSE

To go directly to that verse

[INDEX FOR ALL VERSES ON 1 JOHN](#)

[1 John 4:1](#)
[1 John 4:2](#)
[1 John 4:3](#)
[1 John 4:4](#)
[1 John 4:5](#)
[1 John 4:6](#)
[1 John 4:7](#)
[1 John 4:8](#)
[1 John 4:9](#)
[1 John 4:10](#)
[1 John 4:11](#)
[1 John 4:12](#)
[1 John 4:13](#)
[1 John 4:14](#)
[1 John 4:15](#)
[1 John 4:16](#)
[1 John 4:17](#)
[1 John 4:18](#)
[1 John 4:19](#)
[1 John 4:20](#)
[1 John 4:21](#)

FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD AND HIS CHILDREN
Click chart to enlarge
Charts from [Jensen's Survey of the NT](#) - used by permission
Another Overview Chart - [1 John](#) - Charles Swindoll

BASIS OF FELLOWSHIP		BEHAVIOR OF FELLOWSHIP	
Conditions of Fellowship	Cautions of Fellowship	Fellowship Characteristics	Fellowship Consequences
Meaning of Fellowship 1 Jn 1:1-2:27		Manifestations of Fellowship 1 Jn 2:28-5:21	
Abiding in God's Light		Abiding in God's Love	
Written in Ephesus			
circa 90 AD			
From Talk Thru the Bible			

STUDY GUIDE

1 JOHN 4

What is this? On the photograph of the Observation Worksheet for this chapter you will find handwritten 5W/H questions (Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?) on each verse to help you either personally study or lead a discussion on this chapter. The questions are generally very simple and are stated in such a way as to stimulate you to observe the text to discern the answer. As a reminder, given the truth that your ultimate Teacher is the Holy Spirit, begin your time with God with prayer such as Psalm 119:12⁺

"Blessed are You, O LORD; Teach me Your statutes." (you can vary it with similar prayers - Ps 119:18, 26, 33, 64, 66, 68, 108, 124, 135, 171, etc) The questions are generally highlighted in yellow and the answers in green. Some questions have no answers and are left to your observations and the illuminating/teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. Some qualifying thoughts - (1) Use "As is" - these are handwritten and will include mistakes I made, etc. (2) They may not be the best question for a given verse and my guess is that on some verses you will think of a far superior 5W/H question and/or many other questions.

Dr Howard Hendricks once gave an assignment to his seminary students to list as many observations as they could from Acts 1:8. He said "So far they've come up with more than 600 different ones! Imagine what fun you could have with 600 observations on this passage. Would you like to see Scripture with eyes like that?" (P. 63 [Living by the Book](#) - borrow) With practice you can! And needless to say, you will likely make many more observations and related questions than I recorded on the pages below and in fact I pray that the Spirit would indeed lead you to discover a veritable treasure chest of observations and questions! In Jesus' Name. Amen

Why am I doing this? **Mortimer Adler** among others helped me develop a questioning mindset as I read, seeking to read actively rather than passively. Over the years I have discovered that as I have practiced reading with a 5W/H questioning mindset, it has yielded more accurate interpretation and the good fruit of meditation. In other words, consciously interacting with the inspired Holy Word of God and the illuminating Holy Spirit has honed my ability to meditate on the Scripture, and my prayer is that this tool will have the same impact in your spiritual life. The benefits of meditation are literally priceless in regard to their value in this life and in the life to come (cf discipline yourself for godliness in 1Ti 4:8+.) For some of the benefits - see Joshua 1:8+ and Psalm 1:2-3+. It will take diligence and mental effort to develop an "inductive" ([especially an "observational"](#)), interrogative mindset as you read God's Word, but it bears repeating that the benefits in this life and the rewards in the next will make it more than worth the effort you invest! Dear Christian reader let me encourage you to strongly consider learning the skills of [inductive Bible study](#) and spending the rest of your life practicing them on the Scriptures and living them out in your daily walk with Christ.

Although Mortimer Adler's advice is from a secular perspective, his words are worth pondering...

Strictly, all reading is active. What we call passive is simply less active. Reading is better or worse according as it is more or less active. And one reader is better than another in proportion as he is capable of a greater range of activity in reading. (Adler's classic book [How to Read a Book is free online](#))

[John Piper](#) adds that "Insight or understanding is the product of intensive, headache-producing meditation on two or three verses and how they fit together. This kind of reflection and rumination is provoked by asking questions of the text. And you cannot do it if you hurry. Therefore, we must resist the deceptive urge to carve notches in our bibliographic gun. Take two hours to ask ten questions of Galatians 2:20+ and you will gain one hundred times the insight you would have attained by reading thirty pages of the New Testament or any other book. Slow down. Query. Ponder. Chew.... (John Dewey rightly said) "People only truly think when they are confronted with a problem. Without some kind of dilemma to stimulate thought, behavior becomes habitual rather than thoughtful."

"Asking questions is the key to understanding."

--Jonathan Edwards

That said, below are the [5W/H questions](#) for each verse in this chapter (click page to enlarge). This is not neatly typed but is handwritten and was used for leading a class discussion on this chapter, so you are welcome to use it in this "as is" condition...

--	--

1 John 4:2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God:

Greek - en touto ginostete (PAI) to pneuma tou theou pan pneuma o homologeï (PAI) lesoun Christon en sarki eleluthota (RAP) ek tou theou estin (PAI):

KJV 1 John 4:2 Hereby **know** ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: (Notice that KJV translates "**know**" as an imperative, which a few modern scholars agree with, but most do not, instead favoring this as an indicative. The latter feel John was instructing and not commanding in this verse.)

BGT 1 John 4:2 ν το τ γιν σκετε τ πνε μα το θεο · π ν πνε μα μολογε ησο ν Χριστ ν ν σαρκ ληλυθ τα κ το θεο στιν,

NET 1 John 4:2 By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses Jesus as the Christ who has come in the flesh is from God,

CSB 1 John 4:2 This is how you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit who confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.

ESV 1 John 4:2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,

NIV 1 John 4:2 This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,

NLT 1 John 4:2 This is how we know if they have the Spirit of God: If a person claiming to be a prophet acknowledges that Jesus Christ came in a real body, that person has the Spirit of God.

NRS 1 John 4:2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,

NJB 1 John 4:2 This is the proof of the spirit of God: any spirit which acknowledges Jesus Christ, come in human nature, is from God,

NAB 1 John 4:2 This is how you can know the Spirit of God: every spirit that acknowledges Jesus Christ come in the flesh belongs to God,

YLT 1 John 4:2 in this know ye the Spirit of God; every spirit that doth confess Jesus Christ in the flesh having come, of God it is,

MIT 1 John 4:2 Here is how we ascertain the spirit of God. Every spirit from God will affirm the humanity of Jesus Christ.

GWN 1 John 4:2 This is how you can recognize God's Spirit: Every person who declares that Jesus Christ has come as a human has the Spirit that is from God.

BBE 1 John 4:2 By this you may have knowledge of the Spirit of God: every spirit which says that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God:

RSV 1 John 4:2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God,

NKJ 1 John 4:2 By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God,

ASV 1 John 4:2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:

Wuest - In this you know experientially the Spirit of God. Every spirit who agrees that Jesus Christ in the sphere of flesh is come, is of God.

John Piper's paraphrase - By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which sincerely confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh and which has a corresponding disposition of loving reverence and submission to Jesus Christ, is of God.

- **every spirit** - 1Jn 5:1 John 16:13-15 1Co 12:3
- **come** - 1Jn 4:3 John 1:14 1Ti 3:16
- [1 John 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- Related Resource: Critiques of Online Resources for First John

Related Passages:

Matthew 7:21-23+ (A "CONFESSION" THAT DOES NOT COUNT!) "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. 22 "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'

Luke 6:46+ (THIS IS THE MORAL TEST OF GENUINE BELIEF!) "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do (present tense = speaks of direction not perfection) what I say?

Acts 19:15+ And the evil spirit answered and said to them, "I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?"

1 Corinthians 12:3+ Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

1 John 2:22 Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.

1 John 2:23 Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.

1 John 4:15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

1 John 5:1 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him.

1 John 5:5 Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

John 16:14 "He (THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH) will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. (NO GLORIFYING JESUS = NO SPIRIT OF GOD PRESENT! THE SPIRIT ALWAYS HONORS THE SON OF GOD!)

Matthew 10:32-33+ Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. 33 "But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.

THE DIVINE TEST: CHRISTOLOGICAL CONFESSION

Hiebert on 1Jn 4:1-6 - These verses show no close connection with what follows and are best viewed as an elaboration of the reference to "the Spirit which he hath given us" in 3:24. The conflict now presented forms the final aspect of the conflicts that mark the Christian life which John has been depicting since 2:18. He has already dealt with the conflict between truth and falsehood (2:18-28), the conflict between the children of God and the children of the Devil (2:29-3:12), and the conflict between love and hatred (3:13-24). This section points to the supernatural character of this conflict as ultimately involving "the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error." It sets forth the crucial importance of the proclamation of a sound Christology for assurance and victory in the Christian community. ([1 John 4:1-6](#))

Steven Cole explains why John gives the divine test - A false teacher may be gentle and loving. He may speak prophecies that come true. He may even perform miracles or cast out demons or speak in tongues (Mt. 7:22; Ex. 7:11, 22; 8:7; Dt. 13:1-3). But, the question is, does he lead people to follow a false god? ([Spiritual Discernment 1 John 4:1-6](#))

By this (en touto) - Always pause and asks a question like **what does by this mean?** To what is the author referring? To something he has stated before or something he is going to state subsequently? In this case **by this** refers to that which follows. John gives the believers a straightforward test to prove whether a prophet is energized by the Holy Spirit. John uses the phrase **by this** 12 times in First John (out of a total of 41 NT uses) - 1 John 2:3, 5; 3:10, 16, 19, 24; 4:2, 6, 9, 13, 17; 5:2.

*Every spirit will either be approved
or rejected based on the Christological test*
-- Danny Akin

By this you know ([ginosko](#) in present tense - can recognize) **the Spirit** ([pneuma](#)) **of God:** NLT - "This is how we know if they have the Spirit of God." That is, we know that **the Spirit of God** is indwelling them if they accept and acknowledge the full Deity and full Humanity of Jesus Christ. As an aside, this underscores the importance of all preachers of God's truth to be empowered by the Spirit of Truth (Jn 14:17+, Jn 15:26+, Jn 16:13+)! The preacher is to be a vessel of honor (2Ti 2:21+), not the one who receives the glory (cf Ps 115:1+). I am reminded of stories I have received of pastors who are preaching almost verbatim the words of other men! While they are not preaching false doctrine, they could hardly be preaching under the influence of the **Spirit of God** in their "plagiarized preaching!" **You know** ([ginosko](#)) means you perceive or **know** by experience and present tense indicates their continual knowing of this truth. **Vine** adds that John is saying "*you know by experience of facts*" and so are able to recognize. The experience is comprehensive and belongs to all true believers."

As an aside, here are a few more tests for spirits and prophets - Is. 8:20; Jer. 28:9; Matt. 7:20.

[John Trapp](#) on **by this you know** - Bring it to this test. Gold may be rubbed or melted, it remains orient; so doth truth. Whereas error, as glass (bright, but brittle), cannot endure the hammer of fire.

M M Thompson writes that " the problem that the author has to deal with is not a blatant rejection of Jesus; it is a distortion of the acknowledgment that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh." (Borrow [1-3 John](#)).

*Jesus did not just APPEAR to be human.
He was fully human and fully God!*

Every spirit ([pneuma](#)) **that confesses** ([homologeō](#) in present tense) **that Jesus** ([Iesous](#)) **Christ** ([Christos](#)) **has come in the flesh** ([sarx](#)) **is from** ([ek](#) = out of) **God** - Now John explains how you can **know**. **Every spirit** indicates that this test is to be universally applied, so that all are either approved or rejected on the basis of the confessional test in 1Jn 4:2. "Not only is the test comprehensive, but it is also confessional." (Akin)

*The legitimacy of a prophet should be determined
by the content of his message, his confession about Jesus.*
-- Danny Akin

Confesses is in the present tense which means this is not just a one time confession in the past, but is a continual, unwavering confession. It is it just intellectual assent, for demons do that (Jas 2:19+) as do men who by their acts demonstrate they are unbelievers (Titus 1:16+ where "profess" is [homologeō](#) in present tense). Confession "is not mere words or some glib statement (but) is heartfelt, mind engaged and soul committed. It is the outward expression of inner faith." ([Akin](#)) In other words, confession of **Jesus** involves more than just acknowledging His identity (as the demons did Mt 8:28, 29+; Mk 1:24+; Mk 3:11+) but includes submission to His sovereignty as shown by one's godly conduct (referring to direction not perfection).

Note the phrase **in the flesh** is critical. **Jesus** did not only come to the earth (which He did), but He came **in the flesh** (fully Man, "*God con carne*"), which was essential so that **Jesus** might be fulfill His mission as the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29+). While the focus in this verse is on Jesus' humanity, the verb **has come** clearly implies He came from Heaven, so that when one confesses Jesus as fully Man, he in effect confesses Him as God, echoing John's definitive christological statement of 1Jn 1:1-3+ (which clearly teaches Jesus' humanity and deity, cf also 1Jn 4:15+). Note also that John emphasized Jesus as humanity and deity by combining both names, **Jesus** (speaking of His humanity) and **Christ** (speaking of His deity). (6x, at least once per chapter - 1Jn 1:3, 2:1, 3:23, 4:2, 5:6, 5:20, cp 2Jn 1:3, 7+ and twice John used the phrase **Jesus is the Christ** - 1Jn 2:22, 5:1)

Finally, note that **has come** is in the perfect tense which speaks of past completed action (born of a virgin) and ongoing effect (Jesus continues to be God in the flesh in His glorified state), thus underscoring the permanence of the incarnation of Christ. In other words, there is a "Man" in heaven Who was not there in the same sense in eternity past, for now Jesus, the Lamb of God, appears as the One Who forever bears the covenant marks (assuring our eternal salvation) on His body (read Rev 5:6, 9, 12+) Kistemaker adds "Jesus came in human nature and even now in heaven He has a human nature. That is, in addition to His divine nature He also has a human nature."

*To be saved, one must believe that Jesus is eternal deity,
the second person of the Godhead who became a man.*

John MacArthur gives a good summary of the christology writing that "Jesus Christ proceeded from God the Father as the living Word of God (John 1:1–2) who became flesh (Luke 1:31; John 1:14; cf. Col. 2:9). He is one with the Father (John 10:30, 38; 14:7–10), manifested to humanity as the second person of the Trinity (a correct understanding of Christology will inevitably be Trinitarian), the Son of God (Isa. 9:6; John 3:16; cf. John 1:18; Heb. 1:5, 8). According to the plan of God, Jesus came in the flesh so that He might die a substitutionary death as a man for the sins of other men. That is the only way He could redeem all who would believe (Gal. 4:4–5; Heb. 2:17; cf. 1 Tim. 2:5; 1 John 2:1–2)." John repeatedly emphasizes the deity of Christ and teaches the massive truth with vast implications—that no one can honor the Father without honoring the Son (2:22–23; John 5:23; 2 John 3, 7, 9) because they share the same divine, perfect nature (3:21–23; 5:6, 20). To be saved, one must believe that Jesus is eternal deity, the second person of the Godhead who became a man. He is not merely a created being (contrary to what ancient false teachers taught and the modern-day sects, such as the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, teach). But mere intellectual assent to that truth saves no one (cf. James 2:19); to be saved one must also acknowledge Jesus as Lord (Ro 10:9–10). (See [1-3 John Commentary Page 157](#))

Cornerstone Bible Commentary adds that "A person must confess that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh." This means that a person must acknowledge Jesus' divinity and preexistence as the Son of God (that he "**has come**"; cf. 1Jn 4:15), as well as Jesus' incarnation and true humanity (that he has come "in the flesh"). This truth is made explicit in John 1:1 and Jn 1:14—"the Word was God ... the Word became human." It is also affirmed in John's prologue to this epistle (1Jn 1:1–4). (See [The Gospel of John, 1-3](#))

*This is the first test of a true teacher: they acknowledge and proclaim
that Jesus is God incarnate in human flesh*

--John MacArthur

Vine on every spirit - The phrase **every spirit** does not refer to other beings than human, but to the person whose spirit is acted upon by the Holy Spirit, through whose instrumentality he confesses the truth. ([Collected Writings](#))

*The fundamental Christian doctrine which can never be compromised
concerns the eternal divine-human person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

-- John Stott

Steven Cole on confesses ([homologeo](#))- To **confess** that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh means to agree with that statement, but it also means something more. The demons all agree that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who has come in the flesh (Mk 1:24; 3:11; 5:7). To **confess** this truth about Jesus implies submitting your life to Him as Lord (Ro. 10:9-10). ([Spiritual Discernment 1 John 4:1-6](#))

NKJV study Bible (borrow) - Jesus Christ has come in the flesh: This test seems to be aimed at [Docetists](#). They taught that Christ did not have a physical body. The test may also be aimed at the followers of Cerinthus who claimed that Jesus and "the Christ" were two separate beings, one physical and the other spiritual. In this letter, John is careful to use the name and title of **Jesus Christ** together to clearly express the complete union of the two titles in one person.

*In John's day, people had trouble believing Jesus was human;
today more people have problems thinking He is God*

-- Bruce Barton

C H Spurgeon - If the doctrine of the incarnation of God in Christ is denied, as it was by the first heretics, we may conclude that the Spirit of God is not in such teaching. Any doctrine which dishonours Christ,-whether in his person, or his offices, or his atonement, or in any other way,-you may at once conclude is not of God, for that which comes from the Spirit of God glorifies Christ. Did not our Lord himself say, concerning the Holy Spirit, "He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall skew it unto you"? ([Spurgeon on 1 John-Pt2](#))

William MacDonald - It is not so much the ***confession of the historical fact***, namely that Jesus was born into the world in a human body, but rather it is the ***confession of a living Person***, Jesus Christ come in the flesh. It is the confession that acknowledges Jesus as the Christ Incarnate. And confessing Him means bowing to Him as Lord of one's life. Now if you ever hear a person presenting the Lord Jesus as the true Christ of God, you will know that he is speaking by the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God calls on men to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and to commit their lives to Him (1Cor 12:3) The Holy Spirit always glorifies Jesus. (Borrow [Believer's Bible Commentary](#)) (Bold italics added)

THOUGHT - One wonders if modern church leaders ever apply this test to those that are teaching under them? I have been a teacher for 40 years and no one has ever specifically given me this test. I once attended a Bible church where I was suspicious of the teachings of a seminary trained man and shortly after I begin attending his class (one that he knew I would not normally attend), he moved on within a few weeks to another local church! I did not even have to directly test him!

There must be a commitment of the life to this truth.

This is what the word confess means here

It is more than a mere acknowledgment

or a profession that this is true; it is a commitment.

Ray Stedman adds that **confession** means that "There must be a commitment of the life to this truth. This is what the word confess means here. It is more than a mere acknowledgment or a profession that this is true; it is a commitment. It means to actually trust this great declared fact and this great historic person. Anyone who does not actually trust it, and live by it, do not listen to them either. They may acknowledge it, but they must also confess it, that is the important thing. Remember that back in the Gospel accounts there were demons that acknowledged the deity of the Lord Jesus? When he appeared before them they said, "We know who you are, the Holy One of God," Mark 1:24+, Luke 4:34+). They acknowledged what the Jews were too blind to see, the full deity of Jesus Christ, as well as his humanity. But, though demons acknowledged this, they never confessed it. They never trusted him. They did not commit themselves to him, they did not live by this truth. Through the course of history there have been many religious leaders, popes, priests, and many others, Protestant and Catholic alike, who have acknowledged the deity of the Lord Jesus and his humanity, but they have never trusted it, they have never committed themselves to it, they have never confessed it. Therefore, even

though acknowledgment is there, there is failure, and it is the spirit of error that prevails... That question ought to be asked of every religious teacher, everywhere. Then: Do you follow him? Do you live by this? Are you committed to him -- is he your Lord, your strength, and everything you need? How many would fail if we gave that test? How many fail, even at the first question? ([When Unbelief is Right - 1 John 4:1-3](#))

*The sign of the Spirit's reality is not merely the truth of the words
coming out of the mouth of a prophet,
but also the disposition corresponding to that truth.*

John Piper - What Does "Confess" Mean? But this creates a problem for us. We know that there are people who can say true things about Jesus who are not in fact born of God or indwelt by the Holy Spirit. If we paid him enough, we could call someone off the street and get him to make any confession we wanted here in front of the whole church, and it would be no evidence at all of his belonging to God. And Jesus said, "**Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven**" (Matthew 7:21+). In other words, merely saying right things about Jesus is no sign of the Holy Spirit's presence... Signs of the Spirit's Reality - My conclusion is that what 1Jn 4:2 means is this: "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which sincerely confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh and which has a corresponding disposition of loving reverence and submission to Jesus Christ, is of God." So the sign of the Spirit's reality is not merely the truth of the words coming out of the mouth of a prophet, but also the disposition corresponding to that truth. ([Test the Spirits to See Whether They Are of God](#))

A T Robertson on **confesses** - describes Jesus as already come in the flesh (his actual humanity, not a **phantom body** as the **Docetic Gnostics** held [[What is Docetism?](#) = False belief that Jesus was a spirit who only seemed to be a true man]). See this same idiom in 2 John 1:7 with *erchomenon* (coming). A like test is proposed by Paul for confessing the deity of Jesus Christ in 1Corinthians 12:3 and for the Incarnation and Resurrection of Jesus in Ro 10:6-10.

Related Resources:

- [What is Christian Gnosticism?](#)
- [What is the definition of the term Gnostic?](#)

Vine makes a point that in John's day most did not have access to the full canon of Scripture so that "believers were encouraged, by the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, John 16:13, to compare utterances claiming to be spiritual, 1Corinthians 2:13+, and so to test the prophecy and the spirit that prompted it, 1Cor 14:29; 1 John 4:6; Revelation 2:2." ([Collected Writings](#))

*Had there been no incarnation, Christ would have been an [apothoeosis](#),
a man moving toward God...But there was an incarnation,
God moved toward man*

Roy Laurin remarks - Why is belief in the incarnation so important? It is the heart of Christianity. Had there been no incarnation, Christ would have been an [apothoeosis](#), a man moving toward God. Christianity would have been only another approach toward God. Christ would have been only a godlike man. But there was an incarnation, God moved toward man. Because of that Christianity is in reality God's approach to man. Christ is in fact a manlike God. The incarnation is what makes Christianity distinctly unlike any other system. A belief not founded on the incarnation is anti-christian. (BORROW [First John- Life at Its Best](#))

GOD IN THE FLESH

In John 1:1+ the apostle writes "In the beginning was the **Word**, and the **Word** was with God, and the **Word was God**." All orthodox writers would agree the Word refers to Jesus Who has always existed and has always been God. Then in John 1:14+ he writes that "the **Word became flesh**, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." So in a sentence John sums up the incarnation of the Word. Any spirit which denied (or denies today) the reality of the Incarnation was not of God which includes virtually every cult or so-called religion.

*The only man-made thing in heaven
will be the scars of the Savior!*

Has come (*erchomai*) was discussed above but is worth reiterating for this verb is in the perfect tense which signifies the permanent or abiding effect of Jesus having come at a point in time (incarnation) in the flesh. In the Revelation, John uses the perfect tense to describe the Christ "**as if slain**" (Rev 5:6, 12+) indicating He continues to bear the scars (immutable marks of the New Covenant-see discussion under The Oneness of Covenant - Co-mingling of blood) of Calvary and will do so throughout eternity. In fact it has been said that "the only man-made thing in heaven will be the scars of the Savior!" Hallelujah!

*The incarnation was not a temporary event
but the permanent union of God and Man in Jesus Christ*

-- I Howard Marshall

Wuest adds that **has come** is "in the **perfect tense** in the Greek text. From the foregoing it follows that the statement speaks of the God of the Old Testament Who in the Person of His Son became incarnate in human flesh without its sin, died on the Cross to satisfy the just demands of His law which man broke, and raised Himself from the dead in the body in which He died, to become the living Saviour of the sinner who places his faith in Him in view of what He did for him on Calvary's Cross. The person who teaches that, John says, is actuated by the Holy Spirit. Likewise, the teacher who does not agree to that doctrine is not of God. He is actuated by the spirit of Antichrist who denies and is against all that the Bible teaches regarding the person and work of the Lord Jesus. This is **Modernism**." (See [Discussion of Modernism](#); since "modernism" was followed by "postmodernism" see [What is post-modern Christianity?](#) and [What are the dangers of postmodernism?](#))

Vine on in the flesh - As the Gospel states, "the Word became flesh" (Jn 1:14+). Christ "was born of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Ro 1:3+). Cp. Galatians 4:4+. Christ partook of flesh and blood (Heb. 2:14+) ... All the Gnostic sects denied this truth. They maintained a distinction between Christ (whom they called an aeon) and the man Jesus. The apostle maintains the truth that Jesus Christ is one inseparable person and that He has become flesh. Compare Colossians 2:9+ - "For in Him all the fullness of *Deity dwells in bodily form*." ([Collected Writings](#))

D Edmond Hiebert observes what a difference on small preposition makes pointing out that "In saying that Jesus Christ came **"in flesh"** (en sarki), rather than **"into flesh"** (eis sarka), John repudiates Cerinthian Gnosticism. Cerinthus (c. A.D. 100), a late contemporary of John the Apostle at Ephesus, separated Jesus from Christ. He taught that the "Christ spirit" came upon the man Jesus, the son of Joseph and Mary, at his baptism and empowered his ministry but left him before his crucifixion; it was only the man Jesus who died and rose again. Cerinthus thus rejected the doctrine of the incarnation and consequently obliterated the Christian doctrine of the atonement... (**ED: IN OTHER WORDS CERINTHUS TAUGHT Jesus and "the Christ" were two separate beings, one physical and the other spiritual.**) This permanent union of the divine and the human in the person of Jesus Christ qualifies Him to be the mediator between God and men (1Ti 2:5+). He is the all-sufficient Saviour. The Apostolic teaching concerning the incarnate Christ "gathers within its total significance the other great doctrinal truths such as the Virgin Birth, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection. The Incarnation is the essential creed of Christianity; on this doctrine all else which calls itself Christian stands or falls."" ([1 John 4:1-6](#))

Simon Kistemaker - Sixteenth-century German theologian Zacharias Ursinus asked whether these two natures are separated from each other. This is his answer: "Certainly not. For since the divinity is not limited and is present everywhere, it is evident that Christ's divinity is surely beyond the bounds of the humanity he has taken on, but at the same time his divinity is in and remains personally united to his humanity." ([New Testament Commentary - James. Epistles of John, Peter, and Jude](#))

Craig Keener - The issue may be the secessionists' denial that Jesus has come as the Christ (if the opposition is Jewish); more likely it is a [Docetic](#) denial that Jesus was actually human and actually died (see introduction), a heresy an eyewitness would be well positioned to refute. It may simply be a relativizing of Jesus' role to the position of a prophet like John the Baptist, which allows enough compromise to avoid persecution. Whatever the error, the secessionists are claiming the authority of inspiration for it, as do some similar cults today. John does not deny the reality of the inspiration; he merely denies that the spirit working in them is God's Spirit. (See [The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament - Page 713](#)) (Bolding added)

John MacArthur - John accentuates the crucial importance of sound doctrine expressed in God's Word as the only absolute and trustworthy standard (cf. Isa 8:20). (Borrow [MacArthur Study Bible](#))

David Guzik - Today, some groups deny that Jesus is really God (such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Muslims). But way back in John's day, in this time closest to the actual life and ministry of Jesus on this earth, people didn't have a hard time believing Jesus was God. They had a hard time believing that he was a real Man. This false teaching said Jesus was truly God (which is correct), but really a "make-believe" Man. Today, we are passionate about saying, "Jesus is God," and we should be. But it is no less important to say, "Jesus is a Man," because both the deity and humanity of Jesus are essential to our salvation.

Ray Stedman - Jesus is his human name. He never was called Jesus when he was the eternal Son of God, before the incarnation. It was only when he was born as a babe in Bethlehem and grew up in Nazareth that he bore the human name of Jesus; Jesus of Nazareth. But the whole teaching of Scripture is that this Jesus of Nazareth, this historical Jesus, this man who grew up and lived

and ate and slept and walked with men, who prayed and talked and taught them, is the Messiah of the Old Testament, the predicted One, the Son of God who was to come, the eternal One, God himself, who would come into human history -- they are one and the same. This is the Spirit of truth. Jesus is the Christ, come in the flesh. Jesus of Nazareth is identical with and indivisible from that promised Messiah of the Old Testament. Have you noticed that Jesus makes this claim about himself? In John 10, he says of certain who have gone before him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber [i.e., if someone comes to you by another process than the predicted way, the way that has been announced, he is a thief and a robber; he is a false prophet, he is a false Christ, he is an antichrist]; but he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens; the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out," (John 10:1-3 RSV). Then he says, "I am that good shepherd. I came in the predicted way, the way the prophets announced. I was born in the right place, at the right time, in the right way. I came exactly as it was announced. I am the door; I am the shepherd of the sheep," John 10:14 ff). Now any teacher of spiritual matters who confesses this, John says, is of the truth, is of God. But any teacher who stands up and professes to teach men about God but who does not confess this, is not of God. Do not listen to him, pay no attention to him. Regardless of how beautifully he talks, he is not of God. He is of the spirit of error, the spirit of antichrist, that has already gone out into the world. Plain language, is it not? It is amazing how we have forgotten and neglected it. This is the paramount doctrine which can never be compromised, the divine-human person of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the one thing that is basic and fundamental to all Christian faith. He appeared in the flesh, he came as a man, humbled himself, and became obedient unto the death of the cross... Now, measure some of these voices today: Here is the Christian Scientist, who says that Jesus -- as a man upon whom the Spirit of Christ came -- the Spirit of Christ is the eternal One and he came upon Jesus at his baptism and left him again before he died upon the cross. Jesus, therefore, was born as a mere man and died as a mere man, and the only part of his ministry that is worth anything to us is his public ministry of teaching when he was influenced by the Spirit of Christ. That is not what John says. John says that the spirit which confesses that Jesus is the Christ, that the two are identical, one and the same, never to be separated -- that is the Spirit which is of God. Anything else is the spirit of error and of antichrist. Take the gospel of the Mormons. They say that Jesus never was the eternal unchangeable God, but he was a man who became God and came to show us how we, too, might become gods some day. Is that the gospel? Of course not. It is the spirit of error, of antichrist... There are even many who are orthodox in doctrine and who say, "Yes, of course we believe Jesus is the Christ come in the flesh. We have that in our creed, we can show it to you. It is written in our hymn books. We confess it every Sunday morning when we stand up in church, 'We believe in God the Father Almighty, and in Jesus Christ, His Son, our Lord.'" But do they confess Him, do they live by Him? Have they committed themselves to this One in whom they profess to believe? This is the searching question John asks. If they do not confess Him, if they do not live by Him, then do not follow them, their error is as deadly as those who deny that he came in the flesh. Many young people are finding today that dead orthodoxy has no more power to deliver than heresy and apostasy has. It is those who live by him, follow him, obey him, live by his life -- these are the ones to follow. If you do not do that you can never be my teacher. I do not want to listen to any voice that professes to talk about the inner things of man's life and his relationship to an eternal God, which does not confess that Jesus is Christ come in the flesh, or who does not demonstrate in his life that he lives by that principle. Test it. ([When Unbelief is Right - 1 John 4:1-3](#))

*"What think you of Christ? is the test
To try both your state and your scheme.
You can never think right of the rest
Until you think highly of Him."*

As **Paul** wrote "And by common confession great is the mystery (mysterious and even foolish to the unregenerate world and made visible to the eyes of one's heart ONLY be the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, cp Eph 1:9-note) of godliness: **He who was revealed in the flesh**, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Beheld by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory. (1Ti 3:16)

THOUGHT - [David Guzik](#) makes a very interesting comment that "The devil doesn't care at all if you know Jesus or love Jesus or pray to Jesus -- as long as it is a false Jesus, a make-believe Jesus, a Jesus who is not there, and who therefore cannot save." (ED: ONE CULT EVEN USES HIS NAME - **CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER DAY SAINTS!** MORMONISM USES THE NAME "JESUS" BUT THEIR "JESUS" WILL TAKE YOU STRAIGHT TO HELL FOREVER AND EVER. O MY!")

John MacArthur sums up 1Jn 4:1-6 - John sets forth three familiar tests for determining whether a teacher and his message reflect the Spirit of God or the spirit of Satan. These tests are **theological** (Does the person confess Jesus Christ?), **behavioral** (Does the person manifest evidence of the fruit of righteousness?), and **presuppositional** (Is the person committed to the Word of God?). True teachers are thus characterized by a confession of the divine Lord, a possession of the divine life, and a profession of the divine law. Those who fail to exhibit these traits prove that they are not from God. (See [1-3 John Commentary - Page 156](#)) (Bolding added)

The Incarnation: Deity and Humanity in the one Person of Christ

Dr Wayne Grudem

Below is an excerpt from **Dr Wayne Grudem's** outline on the [The Humanity of Christ](#). ([Listen to Dr Grudem's in depth Mp3](#))

See also Dr Grudem's full discussion in **Chapter 26 The Person of Christ - How is Jesus fully God and fully man, yet one person?** scroll down to page 456 in [Systematic Theology- An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine](#)

1. Three inadequate views of the person of Christ

a. [Apollinarianism](#) (Apollinaris became bishop in Laodicea about A.D. 361)

- (1) Christ had a human body only
- (2) mind and spirit of Christ were from divine nature
- (3) example: meeting "Mickey Mouse" at Disney World (see Fig. 26.1)
- (4) Problem: our minds and spirits need salvation too! (such a Christ: not really true man to represent us)
- (5) Christ had human mind, spirit: Lk 2:52; Jn 12:27; 13:31; Heb 4:15; 5:7, etc.
- (6) Rejected by several church councils

b. [Nestorianism](#) (Nestorius was a popular preacher at Antioch; after 428: bishop of Constantinople)

- (1) Christ was 2 distinct persons in one body: (a) the human person; (b) the divine person
- (2) Example: circus "horse" (see Fig. 26.2)
- (3) Problem: Gospels show Jesus as "I" not "we"-- never seen as two persons in Gospels
- (4) Nestorius probably never taught the heretical view that goes by his name

c. [Monophysitism](#) (Eutychianism) (Greek monos, "one", and physis, "nature") (Eutyches - 378-454) was the leader of a monastery at Constantinople)

- (1) Human nature absorbed into divine nature
- (2) Something entirely new resulted (greater than human, less than divine)
- (3) Example: drop of ink in water (see Fig. 26.3)
- (4) Problem: both humanity and deity are lost!

2. Solution to the controversy: Chalcedonian Creed (see below) (Chalcedon: a city near Constantinople) Affirmed by Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant churches ever since

3. Combining specific texts on Christ's deity and humanity

a. One nature does some things that the other nature does not do ("the property of each nature is preserved" ... see below for Chalcedonian Creed)

- (1) Jesus' human nature ascended to heaven and is no longer in the world, but His divine nature is everywhere present. (John 16:28; 17:11; Acts 1:9-11; Mt. 28:20; Jn 14:23)
- (2) Jesus was 30 years old (Luke 3:23), but also eternally existed (John 1:1-2; 8:58)
- (3) Jesus was weak and tired in his human nature (Mt. 4:2; 8:24; Mk 15:21; Jn 4:6), but his divine nature was omnipotent (Mt. 8:26-27, Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3)
- (4) While Jesus was asleep in the boat (Mt. 8:24) he was also "continually carrying along all things by his word of power" (Heb. 1:3).
- (5) Jesus' human nature died (Lk 23:46; 1 Cor. 15:3), but his divine nature did not die, but was able to raise himself from the dead (John 2:19; 10:17-18; Heb. 7:16)

b. To preserve the reality of Jesus' human nature, we must say that Jesus had two wills (a human will and a divine will) and two centers of consciousness (human and divine)

(1) Jesus' human consciousness did not know the time of his return (Mark 13:32), but his divine consciousness knew all things (John 16:30)

(2) Jesus' human will was tempted (Heb. 4:15) but his divine will could not be tempted (James 1:13)

4. Anything either nature does, the person of Christ does

Jn 8:58 "Before Abraham was, I am"

Jn 16:28 "I am leaving the world"

Matt 28:20 "I am with you always"

1 Cor. 15:3 "Christ died for our sins"

(Excerpt from [The Humanity of Christ.](#)) ([Listen to Dr Grudem's in depth Mp3](#))

THE CHALCEDONIAN CREED (451 A.D.) "We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body; consubstantial [homoousios-- "same nature"] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.

Related Resources:

- [Is Jesus God in the flesh- Why is it important that Jesus is God in the flesh?](#)
- [Why is the humanity of Jesus important?](#)
- [What is the meaning of the Incarnation of Christ?](#)
- [What does incarnate mean? How was Jesus God incarnate?](#)
- [How can the Incarnation be reconciled with God's immutability?](#)
- [What is the hypostatic union? How can Jesus be both God and man at the same time?](#)
- [Cerinthus - Wikipedia](#)

Steven Cole notes that - John's test requires believing in the true deity and humanity of Jesus. **'Has come'** implies His preexistence as the eternal Son of God. Jesus stated His own preexistence when He told the Jews, "Before Abraham was born, I am" (John 8:58). Or, as John begins his gospel (John 1:1), "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

When John states (1John 4:2) that **'Jesus Christ has come in the flesh,'** he is referring not only to His true deity, but also to His true humanity. The [Docetists](#) taught that matter is evil; thus Jesus was only a spirit-being who seemed to be a real man. The Cerinthian Gnostics, whom John was probably combating, taught that Jesus was a mere man, but that "the Christ," a divine emanation, came upon Him at His baptism, but left just before His crucifixion. John's test refutes both of these heresies. Jesus is the Christ (the Anointed One, or Messiah) who was conceived supernaturally by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary. He had a human body, although apart from sin.

To deny that Jesus is true God and at the same time true man is to deny the Christian faith. To deny either Jesus' deity or His humanity is to deny that He is our Savior. If He were not God, He would have been a sinner and His death on the cross could not have atoned for anything beyond His own sins. If He were not man, He could not have assumed our sins on the cross (Heb. 2:14-17). Thus faith in Him to save from sin would be worthless. Thus any teaching that denies that Jesus is true God and true man, that as the second person of the trinity, Jesus took on human flesh in the incarnation, is a doctrine of demons. It is the spirit of antichrist.

Implicit in John's warning here is that the content of our theology matters greatly! The difference between a person in a false cult who is going to hell and a true believer in Jesus Christ, who is going to heaven, is largely one of theology. Cultists are often more zealous and more knowledgeable about what they believe than we

are. But, they deny that Jesus is true God in human flesh; we affirm it. John Calvin observes (Calvin's Commentaries [Baker], on 4:2, p. 232), "Yet he only repeats here what we have met with before, that as Christ is the object at which faith aims, so he is the stone at which all heretics stumble. As long then as we abide in Christ, there is safety; but when we depart from him, faith is lost, and all truth is rendered void." So I encourage you to study sound doctrine, especially with regard to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Thus John has shown us why we must be discerning, because Satan and his forces are actively trying to deceive us on essential biblical truth. He has shown us that the basis for discernment is a person's confession about Jesus Christ as true God and true man. ([Spiritual Discernment 1 John 4:1-6](#))

ILLUSTRATION - John MacArthur illustrates the danger of drifting from the solid foundation of the truth about Jesus Christ - "There once was an old church in England. A sign on the front of the building read "We preach Christ crucified." After a time, ivy grew up and obscured the last word... "We preach Christ." The ivy grew some more, and motto read, "We preach." Finally, ivy covered the entire sign, and the church died. Such is the fate of any church that fails to carry out its mission in the world." (See [1 & 2 Timothy Commentary](#))

William Barclay gives us an interesting historical context for John's warning about the spirit of the world - Behind this warning is a situation of which we in the modern church know little or nothing. In the early church there was a surging life of the Spirit which brought its own perils. There were so many and such diverse spiritual manifestations that some kind of test was necessary. Let us try to think ourselves back into that electric atmosphere.

(i) Even in Old Testament times men realized the perils of false prophets who were men of spiritual power. Deuteronomy 13:1-5 demands that the false prophet who sought to lure men away from the true God should be put to death; but it frankly and freely admits that he may promise signs and wonders and perform them. The spiritual power is there, but it is evil and misdirected.

(ii) In the early church the spiritual world was very near. All the world believed in a universe thronged with demons and spirits. Every rock and tree and river and grove and lake and mountain had its spiritual power; and these spiritual powers were always seeking entry into men's bodies and minds. In the time of the early church all men lived in a haunted world and men were never so conscious of being surrounded by spiritual powers.

(iii) That ancient world was very conscious of a personal power of evil. It did not speculate about its source, but it was sure that it was there and that it was seeking for men who might be its instruments. It follows that not only the universe but also the minds of men provided the battleground on which the power of the light and the power of the dark fought out the issue.

(iv) In the early church the coming of the Spirit was a much more visible phenomenon than is common nowadays. It was usually connected with baptism; and when the Spirit came things happened that anyone could see. The man who received the Spirit was visibly affected. When the apostles came down to Samaria, after the preaching of Philip, and conferred the gift of the Spirit on the new converts, the effects were so startling that the local magician, Simon Magus, wished to buy the power to produce them (Acts 8:17-18). The coming of the Spirit on Cornelius and his people was something which anyone could see (Acts 10:44-45). In the early church there was an ecstatic element in the coming of the Spirit whose effects were violent and obvious.

(v) This had its effect in the congregational life of the early church. The best commentary on this passage of John is, in fact, Corinthians 14:1-40. Because of the power of the Spirit men spoke with tongues. That is to say, they poured out a flood of Spirit-given sounds in no known language, which no one could understand unless there was someone present who had the Spirit-given power to interpret. So extraordinary was this phenomenon that Paul does not hesitate to say that, if a stranger came into a congregation in which it was in action, he would think that he had arrived in an assembly of madmen (1Corinthians 14:2; 1Corinthians 14:23; 1Corinthians 14:27). Even the prophets, who delivered their message in plain language, were a problem. They were so moved by the Spirit that they could not wait for each other to finish and each would leap to his feet determined to shout out his Spirit-given message (1Corinthians 14:26-27; 1Corinthians 14:33). A service of worship in an early Christian congregation was very different from the placidity of most modern church services. So diverse were the manifestations of the Spirit that Paul numbers the discerning of spirits among the spiritual gifts which a Christian might possess (1Corinthians 12:10). We can see what might happen in such a case when Paul speaks of the possibility of a man saying in a spirit that Christ is accursed (1Corinthians 12:3).

When we come further down in Christian history we find the problem still more acute. The Didache, The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, is the first service order book and is to be dated not long after A.D. 100. It has regulations on how to deal with the wandering apostles and prophets who came and went amongst the Christian congregations. "Not every one who speaks in a spirit is a prophet; he is only a prophet if he walks in the ways of the Lord" (Didache 11 and 12). The matter reached its peak and ne plus ultra when, in the third century, Montanus burst upon the Church with the claim that he was nothing less than the promised Paraclete and that he proposed to tell the Church the things which Christ had said his apostles could not at the moment bear.

The early church was full of this surging life of the Spirit. The exuberance of life had not been organized out of the Church. It was a great age; but its very exuberance had its dangers. If there was a personal power of evil, men could be used by him. If there were evil spirits as well as the Holy Spirit, men could be occupied by them. Men could delude themselves into a quite subjective experience in which they thought--quite honestly--that they had a message from the Spirit.

All this is in John's mind; and it is in face of that surging atmosphere of pulsating spiritual life that he sets out his criteria to judge between the true and the false. We, for our part, may well feel that with all its perils, the exuberant vitality of the early church was a far better thing than the apathetic placidity of so much of the life of the modern church. **It was surely better that men should expect the Spirit everywhere than that they should expect him nowhere.** ([Daily Study Bible](#))

A man is not saved by assenting to a church creed.

He is saved by trusting Jesus Christ and bearing witness to his faith

Warren Wiersbe - George Whitefield, the great British evangelist, was speaking to a man about his soul. He asked the man, "Sir, what do you believe?" "I believe what my church believes," the man replied respectfully. "And what does your church believe?" "The same thing I believe." "And what do both of you believe?" the preacher inquired again. "We both believe the same thing!" was the only reply he could get. - A man is not saved by assenting to a church creed. He is saved by trusting Jesus Christ and bearing witness to his faith (Ro 10:9–10). False teachers will often say, "We worship the Father. We believe in God the Father, even though we disagree with you about Jesus Christ." But to deny the Son means to deny the Father also. You cannot separate the Father and the Son, since both are one God. Jesus says, "I and My Father are One" (John 10:30). He also makes it clear that true believers honor both the Father and the Son: "That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent Him" (John 5:23). If you say you "worship one God" but leave Jesus Christ out of your worship, you are not worshiping as a true Christian. ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

Know (1097) [ginosko](#) English derivatives - prognosis, gnostic, Gnosticism) means to acquire information through some modality, as through sense perception (hearing). However **ginosko** involves experiential knowledge, not merely the accumulation of known facts. **Ginosko** is one of the major verbs of the Bible and because of its numerous uses, it is not surprising that Greek lexicographers ascribe a number of nuances of meaning including to get to know, come to understand, to ascertain, to have intimate relations with another, etc. The various meanings are outlined, discussed and illustrated in the notes that follow. Keep in mind that the basic meaning of **ginosko** is to know by experience.

Knowledge possessed through the intellectual process of learning is one thing. Knowledge gained by experience, by an active relationship between the one who knows and the person or thing known, is far superior to the former. **Ginosko** describes the latter quality of knowledge and is what every Christ follower should desire as their personal, permanent possession regarding the Person of Christ (e.g., see **ginosko** in Jn 8:32, Jn 17:3, Php 3:10).

In many of the NT uses **ginosko** refers not just to knowledge in a secular sense but to spiritual knowledge. As Puritan **Stephen Charnock** said "A man can be theologically knowing (Ed: "Pharisee-like") and spiritually ignorant. (See discussion of [Jn 7:17](#) below which clearly links spiritual gnosis or knowledge with obedience.) In a related aphorism **Charnock** quipped that "Knowledge in the head is as money in the purse; knowledge in the heart is as money for our use."

Confesses (acknowledges) ([3670](#)) (**homologeō** from **homos** = one and the same or together with+ **legō** = to say; confess from **con** = together, **fateō** = to say) literally means to say the same thing as another and so to agree with another's statements. As discussed above (see especially Ray Stedman's remarks), this confess is not merely a verbal acknowledgement. Hiebert adds that "The verb "confesseth" (**homologeō**, literally, "is saying the same thing") denotes not mere verbal acknowledgment but an open and forthright declaration of the message as one's own position. The present tense marks it as an ongoing acknowledgment, made whenever appropriate. Such a confession is crucial for a vital Christian faith (Rom. 10:9–10; 1 John 2:23; 4:15)."

Bob Utley - The Greek term "confess" is a compound from "the same" and "to speak," meaning "to say the same thing." This is a recurrent theme in John (cf. John 1:9; 2:23; 4:2-3; 4:15; John 9:22; 2 John 7). This term implies specific, public, vocal acknowledgment of one's affirmation of and commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ...This was not a minor issue. Jesus is truly one with humanity and one with God.

Marvin Vincent on **homologeō** - The fundamental idea of confess is that of saying the same thing as another; while profess (pro = forth, fateor = to say) is to declare openly. Hence, to profess Christ is to declare Him publicly as our Lord: to confess Christ is to declare agreement with all that He says. When Christ confesses His followers before the world, He makes a declaration in agreement with what is in His heart concerning them. Similarly, when He declares to the wicked "I never knew you" ("then will I profess"), a similar agreement between His thought and His declaration is implied. The two ideas run into each other, and the Rev. is right in the few cases in which it retains profess, since confess would be ambiguous. See, for example, Titus 1:16+.

NIDNTT notes that in the secular use of **homologeō** "The legal connotation is dominant. A man agrees with another's statement, concedes or confesses something (e.g. his guilt before a judge), agrees to something (e.g. another's wish) and so promises. This agreement expresses itself in an act of commitment, promise, or confession in a court or legal contract. The religious use of the words is probably derived primarily from their use in the language of treaties and the law-courts. The man who binds himself by an oath (homologeō) enters into a treaty relationship with the deity. This concept was then transferred from the solemn confession of wrong-doing before a court of law to the confession of sin to the deity. These concepts were used especially in the oriental cults, as may be seen from Lydian and Phrygian expiatory inscriptions. In modern Gk. the concept has come to mean sacramental confession to a priest: exomologeomai, I make my confession; oēxomologe, I hear a confession. (Click for how to use this online resource - [Brown, Colin, Editor. New International Dictionary of NT Theology](#))

Jesus (2424) (**Ιησους** is [transliteration](#) of the Greek Ιησους, which in turn is the transliteration of the Hebrew name [Jehoshua](#) ([Yehoshua](#)) or [Jeshua](#) ([Yeshua](#)) which mean Jehovah is help or Jehovah is salvation. Stated another way the Greek Ιησους corresponds to the OT [Jehoshua](#) ([Yehoshua](#)) which is contracted as [Jeshua](#) ([Yeshua](#)).

Wuest adds that "The name "**Jesus**" is the English form of the Greek Ιησους, and this is the Greek form of the Hebrew name "Jehoshua" which means "Jehovah saves." "**Christ**" is from Christos, "the Anointed One." ([Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used by permission)

Christ (5547) (**Χριστος** from **chrīo** = to rub or anoint, consecrate to an office) means one who has been anointed, symbolizing appointment to a task. The majority of the NT uses refer to Jesus (exceptions = "false Christs" - Mt 24:24, Mk 13:22).

From (1537) (**ἐκ**) a primary preposition denoting origin (the point whence action or motion proceeds), from, out (of place, time, or cause, literal or figurative. Out of, from, by," suggesting "the source from which something is done," is sometimes rendered "by means of," e.g., Luke 16:9, RV, "by means of (the mammon of unrighteousness);" AV, "of;" 2 Cor. 1:11, "by (the) means of (many)."

1 John 4 has 8 phrases that begin with **"from"** (**ἐκ**) - 1 John 4:1, 1 John 4:2, 1 John 4:3, 1 John 4:4, 1 John 4:5, 1 John 4:6

GINGRICH Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament - EK before vowels ex prep. with genitive (possessive) = **from, out of, away from—**

1. to denote separation Mt 2:15; 26:27; Mk 16:3; Jn 12:27; 17:15 ; Ac 17:33; Gal 3:13; Rev 14:13; **from among** Lk 20:35; Acts 3:23.

2. to denote the direction from which something comes from, out from Mt 17:9; Mk 11:20; Lk 5:3; in answer to the question where? at, on Mt 20:21, 23; Ac 2:25, 34.

3. to denote origin, cause, motive reason from, of, by Mt 1:3, 5, 18; Jn 1:13, 46; 1 Cor 7:7; 2 Cor 5:1; Gal 2:15; 4:4; Phil 3:5. **Because of, by** Mk 7:11; 2 Cor 2:2; Rev 8:11. **By reason of, as a result of, because of** Lk 12:15; Ac 19:25; Ro 4:2; **with** Lk 16:9. **Of, from of source or material** Mt 12:34; J 19:2; 1 Cor 9:13; Rv 18:12. **According to, in accordance with** Mt 12:37; 2 Cor 8:11, 13. **ek toutou for this reason, therefore** Jn 6:66. οἱ ἐκ νομοῦ partisans of the law Ro 4:14.

4. in periphrasis for the partitive gen. Mt 10:29; 25:2; Lk 11:15, which may even function as subject of a sentence ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν some of the disciples Jn 16:17; used with εἶναι = belong to someone or something Mt 26:73; Ac 21:8; 1 Cor 12:15f. After verbs of filling with Lk 15:16; J 12:3; Rev 8:5. For the gen. of price or value for Mt 20:2; 27:7; Ac 1:18.

5. **of time from, from this or that time on** Mt 19:12; Mk 10:20; J 9:1, 32; for Lk 23:8; **after** 2 Pt 2:8.

Gilbrant - This extremely versatile preposition can be found in almost all of Greek literature. (Ex is used before words starting with vowels.) The discussion below will focus on its function as an independent preposition, though it is a regular component of a compound verb. In its simplest definition it means “from, away from” or “out of.” But under different circumstances the preposition has different shades of meaning.

New Testament Usage

First, it particularly denotes the point of departure or separation such as “to rise from (ek) the dead” (e.g., John 12:1,9,17; Acts 3:15; 4:10; etc.). “Out of (ek, before a vowel ex) Egypt have I called my son” (Hosea 11:1; Matthew 2:15) should also be understood in this way. Ek also indicates a separation between persons or objects; Jesus prays that His disciples be “(kept) from (ek) the evil one” (John 17:15, RSV).

A second basic function of ek is to designate direction: Two possessed by demons came “out of” the tombs (Matthew 8:28). “He came up (anabainō [303]) out of (ek) the water” (Mark 1:10, RSV).

Third, ek suggests the source or reason for some event or act, including the “source” of someone. This is evidenced in Nathaniel’s question, “Can there any good thing come out of (ek) Nazareth?” (John 1:46). In this sense ek speaks of something as part of a larger whole such as in the frequent rhetorical question, “Which of you . . . ?” (e.g., Luke 11:5,11; 12:25; 14:28; 15:4; 17:7). Similarly, righteousness comes ek God and is by faith (Philippians 3:9; i.e., God is the source of righteousness).

Fourth, ek can imply cause or reason. Paul asked, “Did you receive the Spirit by works (ex ergōn) of the law?” (Galatians 3:2,5, RSV). It may refer to a condition or state of being. Paul admonished Timothy, “The goal of this command is love which comes from (i.e., results from the condition of) a pure heart” (1 Timothy 1:5, NIV). The term may also suggest a basis for some action. “For the tree is known by (ek) his fruit” (Matthew 12:33; cf. verse 37).

Fifth, ek marks a point in time. According to Matthew 19:12 some men are eunuchs having been “so born from (ek) their mother’s womb.” The rich ruler explained to Jesus that he had kept the commandments ek neotētos, “from youth.” And Herod had hoped to see Jesus ex ikanōn chronōn, “for a long time.” Sixth, ek expresses means or agency. It may parallel hupo (5097) plus the genitive (after passive verbs or after any voice when accompanying the perfect verb). Some examples are Mark 7:11; 12:30,33 (with active verbs); the James series in 2:18 (active verb) 21,22,24,25; 1 Peter 1:23; Revelation 2:11. A similar pattern can be noted with apo (570) plus the genitive in Luke 7:35; 16:18; James 1:13; 5:4; Jude 23. Dia (1217) plus the genitive exemplifies the same basic idea under yet another imagery. It seems that Hellenistic Greek is simply adding ways of expressing agency through the use of additional prepositions for this purpose, which is in keeping with the growing use of prepositions in places where earlier Greek relied on case alone together with the nature of the circumstance or topic.

Also in keeping with the trend toward the proliferation of prepositions in Hellenistic Greek, on occasion ek and apo appear to be little more than pleonastic descriptive genitives roughly equivalent to our usage of “of” to link one noun adjectivally to another.

Many other fine distinctions of definition may be drawn (see [Bauer](#)), but the basic functions of ek are outlined above. Context in conjunction with grammar always makes the best guide for determining this preposition’s meaning. ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

John MacArthur - DISCERNMENT BETWEEN TRUTH AND ERROR 1 JOHN 4:1–3

God’s children are able to discern false doctrine.

A sure mark of every false religious system is doctrinal error, particularly about the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Those systems deny that He is Savior and Lord, God in human flesh, the only way to the Father (John 14:6) because salvation comes only through Him (Acts 4:12).

A sure mark, then, of all true children of God is that they believe the truth about Jesus Christ and do not deviate into doctrinal error. Although they may be temporarily duped by false teaching, they will not be permanently deceived by it. The apostle John wrote, “[False teachers] are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error” (1 John 4:5–6).

When you were saved, you were clear about who Christ was. "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ," writes John, "is born of God" (1 John 5:1). Had you not passed that doctrinal test, you wouldn't have been saved. God's children distinguish spiritual truth from doctrinal error because the Spirit of truth (John 14:16) indwells them.

"O Timothy," Paul exhorted his beloved son in the faith, "guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called 'knowledge' " (1 Tim. 6:20). I pray that you will guard the precious treasure of truth entrusted to you in the Scriptures and so assure your heart that you belong to the God of truth.

Suggestions for Prayer: Thank God for revealing His truth to us in the Bible.

For Further Study: Read John 1:1; Philippians 2:5–11; Colossians 2:9. What do they teach about the Person of Christ? (See [Strength for Today: Daily Readings for a Deeper Faith - Page 19](#))

Danny Akin - Recently, Christian rapper and friend Shai Linne stirred quite a controversy with his song "Fal\$e Teacher\$." It is a critique of "the prosperity gospel," and in it he does the unacceptable in our hyper-tolerant/non-critical day: he names names. In the song Shai particularly calls on Christians outside of America not to be deceived by these "wolves in sheep's clothing," the words of Jesus (Matthew 7:15), who export their heresies around the world. To be specific, he says,

Don't be deceived by this funny biz, if you come to Jesus for money, then he's not your God, money is!

Jesus is not a means to an end, the Gospel is.

He came to redeem us from sin, and that is the message forever I yell!

If you're living your best life now you're heading for hell!

Turn off TBN that channel is overrated. The pastors speak bogus statements, financially motivated.

It's kind of like a pyramid scheme. Visualize heretics Christianizing the American dream.

It's foul and deceitful, they're lying to people, teaching that camels squeeze through the eye of a needle!

John Piper via twitter said of the song, "My my, Shai, this is good."

Calling out and identifying false teachers is neither fun nor popular. It is, however, both biblical and necessary. They are often more dangerous and more plentiful than many Christians realize.

Walter Kaiser - Who Are the Heretics? - [Hard Sayings page 700](#)

We live in an age in which all sorts of people call themselves Christian, even if their continuity with historic Christianity is tenuous at best. This is not a new problem. All three of the Johannine letters deal with problems with schismatic groups, and in 1 and 2 John one of the characteristics of these groups is that they are heretical. But what are we to make of the heresy described in 2 John 7? In what way might a group call itself Christian and still "not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh"? Even the vast majority of our semi-Christian heresies acknowledge Jesus. What does it mean to "come in the flesh" anyway?

As I have noted, the Johannine community was struggling with heretical teaching. In 1 John 4:1 we read that "many" false prophets have left the church community for the world. In 2 John 4 we read that "some" of the Christians are walking in the truth, while in 2 John 7 we learn that there are "many deceivers." The impression is that the majority of the church is defecting and going "out into the world," probably to form their own groups based on their own doctrines.

The root of the heresy in both 1 John 4:2–3 and 2 John 7 is the denial of "Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh." There is a grammatical difference between the two passages that may indicate a shift in emphasis, but the root concept is the same in both. In Johannine terminology to confess something is not simply to agree that it is correct, but to acknowledge one's allegiance to it. So to confess Jesus Christ would be to state that one is committed to him as Lord. But why does John use the double title "Jesus Christ" and "in the flesh"?

This phrase in 2 John is designed to rule out christological heresy. Two types of heresy appeared in the second century, arising out of roots already apparent in the Johannine writings in the first century. The docetic heresy, on the one hand, argued that Jesus was not a real human being (not truly "in the flesh"), but only appeared to be human. He was truly Christ; the Christ was a spirit that appeared to materialize. Being a spirit, of course, he did not die on the cross, but in one way or another only appeared to suffer and die. (The term docetic comes from the Greek word meaning "to seem or appear.") The Cerinthian heresy, on the other hand, argued that Jesus was really a human being, but that at his baptism the Christ spirit came upon him, forsaking him at the crucifixion. Therefore the Christ did not die, although Jesus did. Although we do not know exactly what the heretics John is fighting believed (and some of them may have believed an early form of both of these heresies), the phrase in 2 John guards against both of them. According to John, a true Christian pledges allegiance to Jesus Christ, not just the Christ. And the believer acknowledges that this whole entity, "Jesus Christ," has come from God and is really human. The form of the phraseology in 1 John 4:2–3 stresses Jesus'

having come from God and becoming truly incarnate. The form here in 2 John 7 stresses that Jesus remains incarnate and did not in some way "split apart" at death or the ascension. In John's view, an incarnate, truly human, truly divine Jesus Christ presently exists.

In 1 John 4 the heretics claim to be inspired by the Holy Spirit when they teach what they do about Jesus. This does not mean that they were under direct Spirit-control at the time of their speaking, but that they were claiming that this was what the Spirit had taught them. John says that one can tell the true Spirit of God by the doctrine he teaches. The true Spirit has the right doctrine; the spirit that does not lead people to pledge their allegiance to the orthodox Christ is in fact not the Holy Spirit, but the spirit of antichrist. This statement is not grounds for calling up spirits and trying to get them to speak through people and making them affirm or deny that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, but it is grounds for examining the doctrine of the person who claims prophetic inspiration and seeing if it corresponds with the orthodox confession.

In 2 John we do not hear of the spirit-inspiration of the heretics, but they are themselves called deceivers and antichrist. It appears that they were trying to infiltrate the orthodox house churches and were actively recruiting people to their way of thinking. That is why they are deceivers and why the people need to "watch out" that they do not lose what they have in Christ (2 Jn 8).

The Christian church finds its unity not around this or that doctrine, but around Jesus Christ. To reject the real Jesus, either by denying his true humanity (being "in the flesh") or by denying his divinity (by denying that Jesus was really the Christ), is to break with the faith and to split from the church community. It is not that doctrine is the key issue, but that it expresses the distinguishing characteristics of the person to whom one is committed. The one not committed to the real Jesus Christ does not know either the Father or the Son, according to John. Unfortunately the church often has not kept this fact central. On the one hand, it has been willing to accept some who do deny its Lord, and, on the other hand, it has been willing to split over doctrinal differences that do not call into question real commitment to the true Jesus Christ. This letter reminds us of what is really central. It is Christ who unifies his church. Without him we have no unity. With him we have a unity that no human being dare try to destroy

Norman Geisler - 1 JOHN 4:2-3—Does this refer to Jesus being in the flesh before or after His resurrection? - [When Critics Ask page 456](#)

PROBLEM: John declares that those who deny "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" are of Antichrist. While all orthodox Christians take this to mean Jesus was fully human, including having a physical body of flesh before His resurrection, some contend that Jesus was not raised from the dead in the same body of flesh and bones in which He died, but in a body that was not essentially material. What does this verse mean?

SOLUTION: John uses the perfect tense here in Greek, meaning past action with continuing results in the present. Thus, he affirms that Jesus came in the flesh in the past and continues in the flesh in the present (i.e., when he is writing, which was after the Resurrection).

This is further clarified by John's use of the same phrase, only in the present tense. He declared that many deceivers do not "confess Jesus Christ as coming [present tense] in the flesh" (2 John 7). From this it is clear that, even after the Resurrection when John wrote, he insisted that Jesus was still continuing in the flesh.

Finally, in addition to these two passages in John's epistles, there are two other NT texts which explicitly declare Christ's resurrection body to be one of flesh. Referring to the resurrection of Christ, Peter declared that "nor did His flesh see corruption" (Acts 2:30-31). Jesus Himself said to His disciples in one of His post-resurrection appearances, "Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have" (Luke 24:39).

Henry Morris - (1 John 4:2).

The great truth associated with Christmas is the glorious fact of the incarnation, that the eternal Word of God, without whom "was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3) "was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). The Bible warns, therefore, that anyone who denies the human nature of Christ "is not of God" but rather is of the "spirit of antichrist" (1 John 4:3).

This problem is very real because "many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1)—that is, those "New Age" teachers, gurus, rabbis, and mullahs who deny that Jesus and the Christ are eternally one, and that the Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose again, and that this was a physical death and bodily resurrection.

The real message of Christmas is not about a baby or gift-giving or good will, though these elements are all there, but about the God/man, who once came "in the likeness of sinful flesh" to die in our place, and thereby "condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3). It will not do to say that any person can become a "Christ" or any other compromise that dilutes either the humanity or the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. As the apostle John testified, "For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us" (1 John 1:2).

That living Word of God "was made in the likeness of men... and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him.... That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:7-11) (Days to Remember)

Jack Arnold - All heresy can be tested by one's belief in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Christian Science: They say that Jesus was a mere man upon whom the Spirit of Christ came. The Spirit of Christ is the eternal One and he came upon Jesus at his baptism and left him again before he died upon the cross. Thus Jesus was born a mere man and died a mere man. Thus the only thing of real value is the moral teachings of Christ.

Jehovah Witnesses: They believe that Jesus Christ was the first created being from Jehovah and then everything after that was created through Christ. They deny the deity of Christ.

Mormons: They say that Jesus never was the eternal, unchangeable God, but he was a man who became God and came to show us how we might become God's someday. They deny Christ's eternality as the Son of God.

Modern Day Liberals In The Professing Church They say that the Jesus of history is not important to us; that His virgin birth, His miracles, His resurrection, and even His crucifixion are but myths, legends gathered about the figure of the man, Jesus highly exaggerated ideas that the early church added to the facts. The facts of the historical Jesus are not important. The important thing is his moral teachings. Liberals deny the deity of Christ.

The Psychedelic Cult: Dr. Timothy Leary, the high priest of the psychedelic cult, the father of the New Age movement, is constantly urging young people to try LSD. He calls his organization, using the letters "LSD", "League of Spiritual Discovery". He claims that LSD can open your eyes to the world of reality about God and life. And what does this apostle of pot have to say about the Lord Jesus? Why, that he was a man who was "turned on" by psychedelic drugs, and that is why he spoke in such an amazing way. He, too, was a user of LSD, in some form or another.

The Outsider "The Anglican clergy who belong to the Modern Churchmen's Conference are pledged 'to proclaim the Christian Gospel in the light of modern knowledge and in the idiom of today.' Last week, the idiom was at least controversial as Canon Hugh Montefiore, a respected theologian, calmly told a conference meeting at Oxford University that Jesus might have been a homosexual. After all, the graying New Testament scholar argued, 'Women were his friends, but it is men he is said to have loved. The homosexual explanation is one we cannot ignore.' One modern churchman who thought it should be ignored was Dr. Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury, who promptly issued a statement affirming that 'Christ's dealing with both men and women were those of a perfect man.' The canon was also accused by a conference delegate of words that 'smear our Lord.' But Montefiore, author of such books as 'Awkward Questions on Christian Love,' defended his suggestion as 'serious and reverent.' In fact, he believes his theory helps to explain God's efforts, through Jesus, to identify with society's outcasts. 'Jesus was identified from conception to death with the outsider. Whether or not we accept the so-called virgin birth, no one can deny that he was born out of wedlock.'

SIGNS OF THE CULTS

Bruce Barton - borrow [Life application New Testament commentary](#)

Following are some common characteristics of the teachings of cults that attack Christianity. Knowing about them will help Christians stand firm.

1. Allow a central authority to make the decisions.

Cults find their authority, not in the Bible, but in a powerful and dictatorial leader.

2. Claim to have "new truth" from special prophets or special revelation.

Because of so-called problems in the Bible or in Christian doctrine, cults appeal to new authorities or new spiritual revelation to counter Christianity.

3. Attack the Christian church.

Cults take great pains to point out that Christian denominations show the disunity of the Christian church. A cult may point out immorality, racism, and hypocrisy in the Christian church in order to "prove" that it is not the true church.

4. Twist Christian doctrine.

To establish their authority, cults try to prove the “unreasonableness” of Christian doctrine. They especially attack the doctrine of the Trinity and of the deity of Christ.

5. Undermine Scripture.

Cults will string together unrelated verses or twist the Scripture’s grammatical or textual background in order to “prove” some way-out viewpoint.

6. Promote salvation by works.

Cults stress the actions necessary—meetings, training, doing the work of the group—as essential to acceptance by God.

7. Undermine the assurance of eternal life in God’s grace.

Cults teach that salvation exists in adherence to their teaching and practice, not in the merciful love of God through Jesus Christ.

Related Resources:

- [What is the definition of a cult? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [What is the difference between a sect and a cult? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [Who are the Jehovah’s Witnesses and what are their beliefs?](#)
- [Is Mormonism a cult? What do Mormons believe?](#)
- [How can I help someone to leave a toxic cult?](#)

OLD TESTAMENT TESTS FOR FALSE PROPHETS

In the Old Testament, various signs or works pointed to a true or false prophet. Many of these can be applied today.

1. Does the prophet use fortune-telling?

Divination was expressly forbidden by God (Deuteronomy 18:9–14). No true teacher or prophet would use fortune-telling or have any dealings with spirits of the dead (Jeremiah 14:14; Ezekiel 12:24; Micah 3:7).

2. Have the prophet’s short-term prophecies been fulfilled?

Deuteronomy 18:22 used this as a test. Do predictions come to pass?

3. Is the prophet marked by a desire to say only what pleases people?

Many false prophets told people what they wanted to hear. A true prophet serves God, not people (Jeremiah 8:11:14:13:23:17; Ezekiel 13:10; Micah 3:5).

4. Does the prophet draw people away from God?

Many teachers draw people to themselves or to the system or organization they have built (Deuteronomy 13:1–3).

5. Does the prophet’s prophecy confirm the Bible’s main teaching?

If a prophecy is inconsistent with or contradictory to Scripture, it is not to be believed.

6. What is the prophet’s moral character?

False prophets were charged with lying (Jeremiah 8:10; 14:14), drunkenness (Isaiah 28:7), and immorality (Jeremiah 23:14).

7. Do other Spirit-led people discern authenticity in this prophet?

Discernment by others who are led of the Spirit is a key test (1 Kings 22:7). The New Testament speaks of this a great deal (John 10:4–15; 1 Corinthians 2:14; 14:29, 32; 1 John 4:1).

Bruce Barton - borrow [Life application New Testament commentary](#)

William MacDonald - Years ago almost every home had a large family album in the living room. It had a stuffed leather cover embossed in gold. A leather strap with clasp extended from the right edge of the back cover over to the right side of the top cover where the clasp latched securely into its socket. The pages were of stiff, glossy paper-board, ornamented with floral patterns and gilt edges. On each side of a page were cut-out sections where photographs were inserted. When visitors looked through the album,

they would often remark that “Josh looks just like his grandpa” or that “Sarah surely has the family likeness.”

John’s first epistle reminds me of that old family album because it pictures those who are members of God’s family and who have the family likeness. However, here it is a matter of spiritual and moral resemblance rather than physical.

There are at least eight ways in which Christians are spiritual “look-alikes.”

The first is that they all say the same thing about Jesus. **They confess that He is the Christ, that is, the Messiah or Anointed One** (1 Jn. 4:2; 5:1). To them Jesus and Christ are one and the same Person.

All Christians love God (1Jn 5:2). Even though that love may often be weak and vacillating, there is never a time when a believer cannot look up into the face of God and say, “You know that I love You.”

All Christians love the brethren (1Jn 2:10; 3:10, 14; 4:7, 12). This is the hallmark of all who have passed from death to life. Because they love God, they love those who are born of God.

Those who love God characteristically keep His commandments (1Jn 3:24). Their obedience is motivated, not by fear of punishment, but by love to Him who gave His all.

Christians do not practice sin (1Jn 3:6, 9; 5:18). True, they commit acts of sin, but sin is not the dominating power in their lives. They are not sinless but they do sin less.

Members of God’s family practice righteousness (1Jn 2:29; 3:7). It is not just that they do not habitually sin—that could be negative and passive. They reach out to others with deeds of righteousness—that is positive and active.

The seventh characteristic of members of God’s family is that they do not love the world (1Jn 2:15). They realize that the world is a system that man has built up in opposition to God, and that to be a friend of the world is to be an enemy of God.

Finally Christians overcome the world by faith (1Jn 5:4). They see beyond the sham of passing things to those things that are eternal. They live for the things that are not seen.

Chris Tiegreen - 1 JOHN 4:2 - The One Year Hearing His Voice Devotional

In the apostle John’s day, the most dangerous falsehoods about Jesus centered on whether He was actually human or not. Some teachers claimed He was a spirit who only seemed to have a body; that He had not actually come in the flesh. Therefore, He did not live a human life or die a human death. Whoever suggests such a thing, said John, is speaking from an anti-Christ spirit.

This was not the only heresy to infect the church throughout its history. Many other anti-Christ claims have been taught and practiced. The most serious ones erode our faith’s essential foundations: the nature of Jesus (both God and man); the nature of salvation (by grace through faith); or the nature of Scripture (fully reliable and inspired by God). Any voice that undermines one of these important tenets is not from God because it contradicts eternal truth that God has already revealed, and God cannot contradict Himself. He can give different people different instructions, of course —He adapts His methods for specific situations —but He does not change His mind about the nature of His person or His plan. His character and purposes are constant.

That’s a key for discerning God’s voice. His words will always honor His own character, the divinity of Jesus, the nature of salvation, and the integrity of His written Word. He will not speak blatant contradictions to us, nor will He aim at confusing us. We may encounter mysteries and have to sort them out over time, but we won’t hear glaring inconsistencies. God’s words are always true to who He is. (See [The One Year Hearing His Voice Devotional Page 122](#))

J. Vernon McGee says: This is a very important passage, but there is a danger of going off the deep end here and becoming rather fanatical. I believe that there is an abnormal preoccupation with the occult on the part of many Christians today which is a most dangerous thing, but we do need to know what the bible teaches about it. In the first six verses of this chapter, John gives a warning against false teachers, false prophets. He gives us this warning, having just established the fact that we have been given the Spirit of God and that we have been given an anointing to understand the things of God

Paul Van Gorder titles this section: “How to Spot the Devil’s Kids” Federal law is now calling for “truth in advertising.” The labels of products must contain an accurate listing of the ingredients. The consumer is encouraged to “read carefully before using.” A similar caution is given to believers in 1 John 4:1-6. Before a believer swallows all that is packaged “Christian,” he is advised to do some testing. Not everyone who comes in the name of Christ is a representative of the truth....Religious deceivers most certainly abound today! They have invaded our pulpits, our colleges, our theological seminaries, and even our homes. The false prophets of our day,

[Danny Akin](#) - "What do you believe about Jesus?" No question is more crucial or important. No question has received more confusing and mistaken answers. That is certainly true in our day, at the beginning of the 21 st century

- 1) "Jesus was a subversive sage. His witticisms tended to undermine the everyday view of things. Jesus taught them: If someone sues you for your coat, give them your shirt as well. In a two-garment society, that would have been funny." Robert Funk, founder of the Jesus Seminar
- 2) "I am inclined to the view that Jesus caught a glimpse of what the world is really like when you look at it with God's eyes. He endeavored to pass that glimpse along in short stories we call parables and in subversive proverbs we call aphorisms. But He did not spell out what He meant. My glimpse is informed by, but bypasses, the Jesus of the Gospels – the Christ superimposed by the evangelists on their own glimpse of the real Jesus. I am convinced that the New Testament conceals the real Jesus as frequently as it reveals Him." (Robert Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, Harper San Francisco, 1996).
- 3) "I asked my class, "Who was Jesus?" Most said he was a religious figure. Some said philosopher, comparing him to Socrates. Then there was Jesus as political leader, with one student comparing him to Mao and Stalin." Tyler Roberts, lecturer and head tutor of religion at Harvard University
- 4) "He was a feminist. He cured ill women, allowed them to become people who related his truths, forgave a repentant prostitute, allowed her to touch him. Women gave their money to support him. Mary Magdalene was the first witness to the Resurrection – what's more important than that, in Christianity? She was apostle to the apostles, told by Christ to go to tell them that he had risen. There should be a role for women to preach and teach today – a role too often denied." (Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalene: Myth and Metaphor*).
- 5) "It's in the scrolls if you really study the codes: It was not a resurrection. He was put on the cross. Those within his own party, trying to help him commit suicide, gave him poison – the sponge dipped in vinegar. He was unconscious but not dead. His side was pierced, blood came out. A dead body does not bleed, so his followers knew he was not dead. They put him in the cave. He lived until his seventies, and it was he – Jesus acting behind Paul – who led their party out of Judaism and to Rome. He married Mary Magdalene and had four children." (Barbara Thiering, *Dead Sea Scrolls interpreter*, author of *Jesus, the Apocalypse*).
- 6) "With the deepest respect for others and their beliefs, to my mind Jesus, and John the Baptist also, were mistaken and misguided 'end-time' prophets: Jesus was neither a mediator nor a savior, neither superhuman nor divine. The time has come to leave Jesus to his place in history, and to move on." The Rev. Andrew Furlong, Church of Ireland's dean of Clonmacnoise and rector of Trim and Athboy (RNS, 2002). He resigned from his post 3 days before he was due to appear before a church court on charges of heresy.
- 7) "Poll: **One fourth of Americans Believe Jesus Sinned on Earth.**" "A quarter of Americans feel strongly that Jesus sinned when he lived on earth," the Barna Research Group reports. Twenty-five percent of Americans surveyed this year said they strongly agreed that "when he lived on earth, Jesus Christ committed sins." (June 2002 RNS)

Such confusion and mistaken notions about Jesus do not stop with Him. If you get it wrong about Jesus it is certain you will get it wrong elsewhere. Listen to Eric Weight, a Mormon, who helped in the construction, with hundreds of others, in building a Hara Krishna temple in Spanish Fork, Utah, "You find out they're not that much different than we are. They're children of the Heavenly Father." (RNS, 3-5-02).

Hear persons like Jan Willis, named by Time magazine in the year 2000 as 1 of the 6 top Religious Innovators for the New Millennium who calls herself a "Baptist Buddhist." Her defense of such an odd combination: "It seemed to make sense because it was my experience." She adds: "If I have learned anything about myself thus far it is that in my deepest core I am a human being, graced by the eternal truths espoused both by Baptists and by Buddhists. And more than that, I am aware that it is not any particular appellation that matters. For ultimately, what I have come to know is that life – precious life – is not a destination. Life is the journey." (RNS, 2-22-02).

Cross the Atlantic to Great Britain where the Prince of Wales, Charles, heir to the throne, recoils from the historic title given to the monarch of England, "Defender of the Faith," opting rather for the title, "Defender of Faith." He says, "I personally would rather see it (his future role as king) as Defender of Faith, not just the faith (the Church of England), because it means just one particular interpretation of the faith, which I think, is sometimes something that causes a great deal of a problem." (RNS, 1-11-02).

Or return again to this side of the Atlantic and listen to God allegedly speaking to Neale Donald Walsch in his book *Conversations*

with God (quoted in "What in the World!", Vol. 24, No 7, 1998, page 2). "Listen to your feelings. Listen to your Highest Thoughts. Listen to your experience. Whenever any one of these differs from what you've been told by your teachers or read in your books, forget the words. Words are the least reliable purveyor of Truth."

There is a tendency to ascribe any unusual phenomenon to God. Such a lack of discernment opens the door for false teaching and provides an opportunity for demonic activity to invade the church. Remember: spiritual or religious activity is not necessarily godly activity! Watch and wait. Look and listen. Evaluate the message and the messenger by the Word of God. False prophets are deceptive in their message.....

Where there is truth, error will be lurking in the background. There are those who are deceptive by their message. Be on the lookout....

In Matthew 16:13 Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" Here is the million-dollar question, the inescapable question, the question every person who has ever lived must answer. John says you can basically divide all of humanity into 2 categories: those who get it right and those who get it wrong

Johnny Hunt - 1 JOHN 4:1, 2, 6

False prophets are everywhere it seems! They write books, preach in churches, have television shows, enjoy large crowds, knock on neighborhood doors, teach Sunday School classes, and promote great causes. Sadly, we have increasingly become Christians who know our Savior but who cannot discern God's truth from Satan's deception.

There are two major ways to determine if a person is of God. First of all, keep a general rule of not immediately believing everything you hear. Make a commitment to the Lord to have a healthy skepticism that will drive you to find out if truth is being spoken. Second, test what you hear directly with the Bible—and only God's Word! When you do, you'll be carrying out the two tests given in this passage that identify false prophets. First, does this person believe that Jesus has come in the flesh? It's not just an issue of believing that He has come; the full humanity and full deity of Jesus is an ultimate test of genuineness. Second, does this person speak the doctrine of the Bible as preached by the apostles? If not, this person is preaching and teaching a false doctrine. Be warned and be careful because the devil is a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Cling to God's Word, and you will steadily stand on truth.

EVENING Dear God, my heavenly Father, thank You for Your Word. I desperately want to know You more and ask that You would fill me with Your Holy Spirit. Help me to be strong in my faith. I humbly pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

HE TAKES OUR PLACE A valuable painting had been purchased by F. W. Boreham called "The Chess Player." It portrayed Satan playing the game with a young opponent, and the man's soul was at stake. The game had progressed to the point where it was the novice's turn, and there seemed to be no move he could make that would not mean defeat for him. Awful despair was on his face as he realized his soul was lost, and Satan was grinning as he anticipated victory. A champion player who had come to view the canvas studied the picture for a time and then called for a chessboard. Placing the pieces in exactly the same position as in the painting, he said, "I'll take the young man's place." He then made a move that showed how the devil's captive could have won and been set free.

Danny Akin - In *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (Eerdmans, 1989, p. 242), Lesslie Newbigin writes, "The gospel is news of what has happened. The problem of communicating it in a pluralist society is that it simply disappears into the undifferentiated ocean of information. It represents one opinion among millions of others. It cannot be 'the truth,' since in a pluralist society truth is not one but many. It may be 'true for you,' but it cannot be true for everyone. To claim that it is true for everyone is simply arrogance. It is permitted as one opinion among many."

Once again John makes it plain that Christianity is rooted and grounded in "the Christological question." What do you believe about Jesus? If he is just another enlightened religious teacher, he "is permitted as one opinion, one option, among many." If, however, He is the very incarnation of God, the gospel and only the gospel is true, and He is the only option for salvation amidst the millions of others.

QUESTION - [What is Docetism?](#) | [GotQuestions.org](#)

ANSWER - Docetism was an early Christian heresy that promoted a false view of Jesus' humanity. The word *Docetism* comes from the Greek *dokein* ([dokeo](#)), which meant "to seem"; according to Docetism, Jesus Christ only **seemed** to have a human body like ours.

Docetism allowed that Jesus may have been in some way divine, but it denied His full humanity. Hardcore Docetists taught that

Jesus was only a phantasm or an illusion, appearing to be human but having no body at all. Other forms of Docetism taught that Jesus had a “heavenly” body of some type but not a real, natural body of flesh. Docetism was closely related to [Gnosticism](#), which viewed physical matter as inherently evil and spiritual substance as inherently good.

The problem with Docetism is that it denies the core truths of the [gospel](#), namely, the death and resurrection of Christ. If Jesus did not have a real body, then He did not really die (Docetism teaches that His suffering on the cross was mere illusion). And, if Jesus had no physical body, He could not have risen bodily from the dead. Without the actual death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we have no salvation, we are still in our sins, and our faith is futile (1 Corinthians 15:17). **Docetism also denies the ascension of Christ (since He had no real body to make the ascent).**

On the matter of Jesus’ humanity, the Bible could not be clearer. Jesus went out of His way to prove His [bodily resurrection](#) to the disciples who thought at first they were seeing a ghost: “Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have” (Luke 24:39).

The apostle John warned the early church against the false doctrine of Gnosticism, which embraced Docetism’s error: “This is how you can recognize 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” (1 John 4:1–2). Note the apostle’s emphasis on Jesus being “in the flesh.” Denial of Jesus’ humanity was heresy. John repeats the warning in another epistle: “Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming **in the flesh**, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist” (2 John 1:7+, emphasis added).

Early church fathers fought valiantly against Docetism, especially [Ignatius of Antioch](#) (c. AD 35–107). Ignatius rightly taught that, if Jesus had not actually shed His blood on the cross, then His death was meaningless. Ignatius saw that there was no possible way to align the deception of Docetism with the truth of Christianity.

Docetism must be rejected because it is not a biblical view of Jesus’ nature. In fact, Docetism stands in flat denial of biblical truth. Jesus Christ did not simply *appear* human; He was [truly human](#), as well as truly God. He came from heaven and took on human flesh and bone, and He lived the life of a normal man in this world—a Spirit-filled man, to be sure, and a man who always obeyed the Father, but a man nonetheless. His suffering on the cross was real, and His death was an actual death. He shed real blood to pay the real price for our real sin in order to grant us real forgiveness.

Related Resources:

- [What is Montanism? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [What is Apollinarianism?](#)
- [What is Ebionism?](#)
- [What is monophysitism? What is Eutychianism?](#)
- [What is Nestorianism?](#)
- [What is the hypostatic union?](#)
- [Does Christ have two natures?](#)
- [What is Arianism?](#)
- [Who were the Alogi?](#)

QUESTION - [How should a Christian view modernism? | GotQuestions.org](#)

*Religious skepticism and atheism
are hallmarks of modernism*

ANSWER - Modernism arose in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, due to some major changes in the world, including the rise of industrial societies, the development of larger, more populated cities, and the terrible tragedy of World War I. Because of a combination of these and other factors, people in Western society began to think and believe differently, and this shift in perspective has been labeled “modernism” by historians and philosophers. Religious skepticism and atheism are hallmarks of modernism. Sigmund Freud, who spoke of the drives of the unconscious mind; and [Friedrich Nietzsche](#), who believed that the human “will to power” was important in man’s evolution, were influential in the rise of modernism, and their ideas still help shape culture today.

Modernism can be seen most vividly in the world of art and literature, where it stimulated a complete break from the styles and forms of the past. “Modern art” rejected realism and objective thinking and began to lean toward expression of the subjective, inner world. Stream-of-consciousness writing styles and abstract forms of painting predominated. Self-consciousness and the expression of one’s self became major themes in art, as it had become in life.

A Christian should regard modernism from two angles: first, modernism provides a clue to understanding humanity. Modernism is humanity's attempt to understand itself and human life without the aid of God's revelation. Its rejection of God and focus on self are the results of society's embrace of falsehood. Christians are to be ambassadors for Christ, speaking the truth to a world that is lost and deceived by Satan. A Christian should treat those ensnared in untruths with gentleness, with prayer, and with speaking the truth in love (2 Timothy 2:24–26; Ephesians 4:15).

Second, a Christian should see modernism as another step toward the fulfillment of the prophecies in the Bible. Paul says that in the end times people will be "lovers of self" (2 Timothy 3:3). Peter mentions that a hallmark of the last days will be the presence of "scoffers" and skeptics (2 Peter 3:3), and Jude echoes the warning (Jude 1:18). Modernism, with its emphasis on self-expression and self-fulfillment and rejection of God, has nudged humanity that much closer to the final judgment.

Again, a Christian should view modernism as the expression of man's attempt to understand himself and as the partial fulfillment of prophecy. Christians should engage the culture influenced by modernism with courage and truth. The children of God should use their talents and intelligence to influence culture with art, literature, philosophy, and science based on the truth of God. We should refuse to keep our light covered (Matthew 5:14–16). This means injecting Christian thought into the culture rather than keeping it to ourselves to be enjoyed only by others like us.

QUESTION - [What is post-modern Christianity? | GotQuestions.org](#)

ANSWER - Post-modern Christianity is just as difficult to lock down in a concise definition as post-modernism itself. What started in the 1950s in architecture as a reaction to modernist thought and style was soon adopted by the art and literary world in the 1970s and 1980s. The Church didn't really feel this effect until the 1990s. This reaction was a dissolution of "cold, hard fact" in favor of "warm, fuzzy subjectivity." Think of anything considered post-modern, then stick Christianity into that context and you have a glimpse of what post-modern Christianity is.

Post-modern Christianity falls into line with basic post-modernist thinking. It is about experience over reason, subjectivity over objectivity, spirituality over religion, images over words, outward over inward. Are these things good? Sure. Are these things bad? Sure. It all depends on how far from biblical truth each reaction against modernity takes one's faith. This, of course, is up to each believer. However, when groups form under such thinking, theology and doctrine tend to lean more towards liberalism.

For example, because experience is valued more highly than reason, truth becomes relative. This opens up all kinds of problems, as this lessens the standard that the Bible contains absolute truth, and even disqualifies biblical truth as being absolute in many cases. If the Bible is not our source for absolute truth, and personal experience is allowed to define and interpret what truth actually is, a saving faith in Jesus Christ is rendered meaningless.

There will always be "paradigm shifts" in thinking as long as mankind inhabits this present earth, because mankind constantly seeks to better itself in knowledge and stature. Challenges to our way of thinking are good, as they cause us to grow, to learn, and to understand. This is the principle of Romans 12:2 at work, of our minds being transformed. Yet, we need to be ever mindful of Acts 17:11 and be like the Bereans, weighing every new teaching, every new thought, against Scripture. We don't let our experiences interpret Scripture for us, but as we change and conform ourselves to Christ, we interpret our experiences according to Scripture. Unfortunately, this is not what is happening in circles espousing post-modern Christianity.

QUESTION - [What are the dangers of postmodernism?](#)

ANSWER - Simply put, postmodernism is a philosophy that affirms no objective or absolute truth, especially in matters of religion and spirituality. When confronted with a truth claim regarding the reality of God and religious practice, postmodernism's viewpoint is exemplified in the statement "that may be true for you, but not for me." While such a response may be completely appropriate when discussing favorite foods or preferences toward art, such a mindset is dangerous when it is applied to reality because it confuses matters of opinion with matters of truth.

The term "postmodernism" literally means "after modernism" and is used to philosophically describe the current era which came after the age of [modernism](#). Postmodernism is a reaction (or perhaps more appropriately, a disillusioned response) to modernism's failed promise of using human reason alone to better mankind and make the world a better place. Because one of modernism's beliefs was that absolutes did indeed exist, postmodernism seeks to "correct" things by first eliminating absolute truth and making everything (including the empirical sciences and religion) relative to an individual's beliefs and desires.

The dangers of postmodernism can be viewed as a downward spiral that begins with the rejection of absolute truth, which then leads to a loss of distinctions in matters of religion and faith, and culminates in a philosophy of religious pluralism that says no faith or

religion is objectively true and therefore no one can claim his or her religion is true and another is false.

Dangers of Postmodernism - #1 – Relative Truth

Postmodernism's stance of relative truth is the outworking of many generations of philosophical thought. From Augustine to the Reformation, the intellectual aspects of Western civilization and the concept of truth were dominated by theologians. But, beginning with the [Renaissance](#) the 14th – 17th centuries, thinkers began to elevate humankind to the center of reality. If one were to look at periods of history like a family tree, the Renaissance would be modernism's grandmother and the Enlightenment would be its mother. [Rene Descartes](#)' "I think, therefore I am" personified the beginning of this era. God was not the center of truth any longer – man was.

The Enlightenment was, in a way, the complete imposition of the scientific model of rationality upon all aspects of truth. It claimed that only scientific data could be objectively understood, defined, and defended. Truth as it pertained to religion was discarded. The philosopher who contributed to the idea of relative truth was the Prussian [Immanuel Kant](#) and his work *The Critique of Pure Reason*, which appeared in 1781. Kant argued that true knowledge about God was impossible, so he created a divide of knowledge between "facts" and "faith." According to Kant, "Facts have nothing to do with religion." The result was that spiritual matters were assigned to the realm of opinion, and only the empirical sciences were allowed to speak of truth. While modernism believed in absolutes in science, God's special revelation (the Bible) was evicted from the realm of truth and certainty.

From modernism came postmodernism and the ideas of Frederick Nietzsche. As the patron saint of postmodernist philosophy, Nietzsche held to "perspectivism," which says that all knowledge (including science) is a matter of perspective and interpretation. Many other philosophers have built upon Nietzsche's work (for example, Foucault, Rorty, and Lyotard) and have shared his rejection of God and religion in general. They also rejected any hint of absolute truth, or as Lyotard put it, a rejection of a [metanarrative](#) (a truth that transcends all peoples and cultures).

This philosophical war against objective truth has resulted in postmodernism being completely averse to any claim to absolutes. Such a mindset naturally rejects anything that declares to be inerrant truth, such as the Bible.

Dangers of Postmodernism - #2 – Loss of Discernment

The great theologian Thomas Aquinas said, "It is the task of the philosopher to make distinctions." What Aquinas meant is that truth is dependent upon the ability to discern – the capability to distinguish "this" from "that" in the realm of knowledge. However, if objective and absolute truth does not exist, then everything becomes a matter of personal interpretation. To the postmodern thinker, the author of a book does not possess the correct interpretation of his work; it is the reader who actually determines what the book means – a process called deconstruction. And given that there are multiple readers (vs. one author), there are naturally multiple valid interpretations.

Such a chaotic situation makes it impossible to make meaningful or lasting distinctions between interpretations because there is no standard that can be used. This especially applies to matters of faith and religion. Attempting to make proper and meaningful distinctions in the area of religion is no more meaningful than arguing that chocolate tastes better than vanilla. Postmodernism says that it is impossible to objectively adjudicate between competing truth claims.

Dangers of Postmodernism - #3 – Pluralism

If absolute truth does not exist, and if there is no way to make meaningful, right/wrong distinctions between different faiths and religions, then the natural conclusion is that all beliefs must be considered equally valid. The proper term for this practical outworking in postmodernism is "philosophical pluralism." With pluralism, no religion has the right to pronounce itself true and the other competing faiths false, or even inferior. For those who espouse philosophical religious pluralism, there is no longer any heresy, except perhaps the view that there are heresies. D. A. Carson underscores conservative evangelicalism's concerns about what it sees as the danger of pluralism: "In my most somber moods I sometimes wonder if the ugly face of what I refer to as philosophical pluralism is the most dangerous threat to the gospel since the rise of the Gnostic heresy in the second century."

These progressive dangers of postmodernism – relative truth, a loss of discernment, and philosophical pluralism – represent imposing threats to Christianity because they collectively dismiss God's Word as something that has no real authority over mankind and no ability to show itself as true in a world of competing religions. What is Christianity's response to these challenges?

Response to the Dangers of Postmodernism

Christianity claims to be absolutely true, that meaningful distinctions in matters of right/wrong (as well as spiritual truth and falsehood) exist, and that to be correct in its claims about God any contrary claims from competing religions must be incorrect. Such a stance provokes cries of “arrogance” and “intolerance” from postmodernism. However, truth is not a matter of attitude or preference, and when closely examined, the foundations of postmodernism quickly crumble, revealing Christianity’s claims to be both plausible and compelling.

First, Christianity claims that absolute truth exists. In fact, Jesus specifically says that He was sent to do one thing: “To testify to the truth” ([John 18:37](#)). Postmodernism says that no truth should be affirmed, yet its position is self-defeating – it affirms at least one absolute truth: that no truth should be affirmed. This means that postmodernism does believe in absolute truth. Its philosophers write books stating things they expect their readers to embrace as truth. Putting it simply, one professor has said, “When someone says there is no such thing as truth, they are asking you not to believe them. So don’t.”

Second, Christianity claims that meaningful distinctions exist between the Christian faith and all other beliefs. It should be understood that those who claim meaningful distinctions do not exist are actually making a distinction. They are attempting to showcase a difference in what they believe to be true and the Christian’s truth claims. Postmodernist authors expect their readers to come to the right conclusions about what they have written and will correct those who interpret their work differently from what they have intended. Again, their position and philosophy proves itself to be self-defeating because they eagerly make distinctions between what they believe to be correct and what they see as being false.

Finally, Christianity claims to be universally true in what it says regarding man’s lost condition before God, the sacrifice of Christ on behalf of fallen mankind, and the separation between God and anyone who chooses not to accept what God says about sin and the need for repentance. When Paul addressed the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers on Mars Hill, he said, “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent” ([Acts 17:30](#)). Paul’s declaration was not “this is true for me, but may not be true for you”; rather, it was an exclusive and universal command (that is, a metanarrative) from God to everyone. Any postmodernist who says Paul is wrong is committing an error against his own pluralistic philosophy, which says no faith or religion is incorrect. Once again, the postmodernist violates his own view that every religion is equally true.

Just as it is not arrogant for a math teacher to insist that $2+2=4$ or for a locksmith to insist that only one key will fit a locked door, it is not arrogant for the Christian to stand against postmodernist thinking and insist that Christianity is true and anything opposed to it is false. Absolute truth does exist, and consequences do exist for being wrong. While pluralism may be desirable in matters of food preferences, it is not helpful in matters of truth. The Christian should present God’s truth in love and simply ask any postmodernist who is angered by the exclusive claims of Christianity, “So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?” ([Galatians 4:16](#)).