

1 John 4:1-3 (NIV)

(1) Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

(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,

(3) but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

Many Christians use the above verses in an attempt to prove that one must believe that Jesus is God in order to be saved. We assert that this is not at all what the verses are saying. To understand them, it is most important that we read what is written, and not add our interpolation to the text. Then, to really understand why they were written the way they are, we must understand the cultural context in which they were written, as well as the overall context of 1 John itself.

Verse 2 says that “every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.” Why the emphasis on Jesus Christ having “come in the flesh”?

One of the false belief systems rivaling Christianity at the time 1 John was written was Gnosticism. The Gnostics believed that all matter is evil, and therefore they taught that Jesus Christ was not actually a human being of flesh and blood, but rather some kind of phantom or spirit being. Thus the Gnostics did not believe Jesus had come “in” the flesh.

By saying that Jesus had come “in” the flesh, the Bible is saying that Jesus was a flesh and blood human being. To not believe that Jesus was a human being is to be of the antichrist. In light of that, the assertion of some Christians that anyone who teaches that Jesus is not God is not saved and is of the antichrist is questionable indeed. Biblical Unitarians (such as those of us at Spirit & Truth Fellowship International) believe that Jesus is the Son of God, a man, and that he definitely came in the flesh.

Verse 2 is not saying that Jesus is God incarnate or God in human flesh. Rather, it is saying that those who acknowledge that Jesus Christ was born, grew up, carried out his ministry, and was a real human being, have the spirit of God within them. He came in the flesh indeed, just like every other flesh-and-blood human being.

The remainder of Chapter 4 contains the same fabulous truth found in the world’s most famous verse, John 3:16:

1 John 4:9-15 (NIV)

(9) This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

(10) This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

(11) Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

(12) No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

(13) We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

(14) And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

(15) If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.

A careful reading of verse 15 shows that it is not about whether or not Jesus is God, but about acknowledging him as the *Son* of God. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the *Son* of God, God dwells in him.

Chapter 5 begins by affirming this same truth:

1 John 5:1 (NIV)

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the *Christ* is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well.

Let us read carefully as we closely examine the following verses:

1 John 5:5-8 (NIV)

(5) Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the *Son of God*.

(6) This is the one who came by water and blood [meaning that he was born]—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood.

(7) And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.

(8) For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.

Verse 5 says that Jesus is the Son of God. Verse 6 says that he was born of a woman like every other human being since Adam and Eve (“by water and blood”). Then he received the spirit of God upon him. If you are familiar with the KJV, you know that there is a discrepancy between it and the NIV in verses 7 and 8. See the discrepancy of 1 John 5:7-8.

So the point is that Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, was a true human being, a spotless lamb from out of the flock, and any teaching that claims he is anything other than fully human is against Christ, that is, against the truth of who he is.

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