

Professor v/s Possessor

1 John 4:1-6

Grace Church / 1-09-11

Introduction:

I am not sure when you last travelled by airplane but anyone who has done so in the past nine years has had to prove who they were when checking in at the airport. If you are travelling internationally you have to show a valid passport before you are issued a boarding pass and allowed to go through security.

Your passport identifies who you are and to which country you belong as a citizen. It tells other people exactly who you are. It is a way of identifying people. Upon returning to the United States your passport is indispensable. Without it you will not get through customs. You can say "I am an American citizen" until the Cubs win the World Series and you will be no closer to convincing the security personnel that you are who you say you are. But if you have a passport with your picture and name then you have the ability to prove you are really who you say you are.

Now, what does that have to do with us this morning and our worship in the Word? Those here who are Christians are said to be citizens of heaven. However there is no Kingdom of Heaven passport you can carry around in your pocket and whip it out when needed to identify you as a true citizen of God's kingdom.

The tension presented to us in the text which I will read in a few minutes is that there are those who say they are one thing but in reality they are not. That is what has been happening throughout this letter written by the Apostle John. They claim to be a card carrying Christian but their actions and words betray them as being an imposter. It is the imposter which John wishes to protect us against.

We are once again with Zebra John, Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ and his message to the churches in Asia Minor and to us today. Much of what he has written has had to do with people saying one thing but acting differently. That is, they claim to be something they are not or claim to possess truth of which they do not have.

So how are we to identify those who are possessors of citizenship in the kingdom of God and those who only profess to be a citizen of heaven? The primary identification method is that of observation of character. How does this person live? How do they act under pressure? Does what they say match with what they do? Does what they say and do line up with what God has to say about what it means to be a child of His. We are to be discerning by testing the "spirits" to see if they are indeed from God or from the world. World here is understood as anything other than God who has sent his son Jesus Christ.

This conflict has been going on from the very beginning of the letter where opposites have been contrast. Truth versus error, light versus darkness, God versus Satan and love versus hate. The instrument of contrast is once again used for us this morning. It is the contrast of professor versus possessor.

That is the title of our worship in the Word this morning; "Professor versus Possessor". In each of the above contrasts we are given a test by which to determine the truth. There are different tests but the answer sheet is always the one which God provides.

Would you stand with me as I read the text before us. I will read 1 John 4:1-6.

1 John 4:1-6

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. 4 Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. 5 They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. 6 We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

There are two tests given. One is a heart test the other is a hearing test. One is a Christological test the other is an obedience test.

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but **test the spirits** to see whether they are from God,

We will first look at the heart test. Look with me at verse two.

2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that **confesses that Jesus Christ** has come in the flesh is from God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.

We are not to accept everyone who professes to be a follower of Christ, but we are to test them. No, we are not to be some secret spirituality police who go around testing everyone. We do not bring people to a darkly lit interrogation room. But we are to be discerning, for not everything is as it may appear.

God tells us in 1 Peter 1:3-9 (ESV)

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 **so that the tested genuineness of your faith**—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, 9 obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

This testing is to discern the genuineness of your faith and those around you. No, God has not appointed you judge and jury, He has only charged you to be discerning with those who claim to be a fellow-citizen and possibly are an imposter.

So this test which is given is stated in verse two; "every spirit that **confesses that Jesus Christ** has come in the flesh is from God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.

So the first test is a heart test. It is possible that already you feel the urge to call out "hey Ed, this is a speech test not a heart test". Good observation but just hang in here with me for a moment.

Matthew 15:18 (ESV)

18 But what comes **out of the mouth proceeds from the heart**, and this defiles a person.

Luke 6:45 (ESV)

45 The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for **out of the abundance of the heart** his mouth speaks.

So when an individual confesses Jesus it could be he is a Christian. It is not just a statement of "I believe in Jesus" rather it is a very specific statement of "I confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh". That is far different from the nebulous statement "I believe in Jesus". What is it that you believe about Jesus? That he was born in the Middle East? That he was crucified on a Roman cross? That he was a good man wrongly accused? All of these answers are correct but they are not the test question.

We all know people who say true things about Jesus but are not born of God which is to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit. With a fist full of dollars you could likely go out on the street this morning and find someone who would say anything you want as long as the price is right.

Jesus said in Matthew 7:21-23 (ESV)

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' 23 And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

John means much more than mere words which profess but words that possess. You see, the mouth can only speak what is in the heart, though it is possible that one could live behind a façade for a long time without others knowing it. Sooner or later the true intentions of the heart will be known. (cf Lk 6:45)

What is the implication here? That a true confession of Jesus is always accompanied by works of righteousness not lawlessness. You can hold your breath and swim under water for a period of time. But sooner or later you will come up for air.

What does it mean to confess? It has the meaning of conceding. On election night, even before all of the votes have been counted often a politician will concede the race to his or her opponent. They are confessing the reality that there is not enough votes to win. To confess is to admit the truth.

In 1:9 John says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins."

What does confess mean here? It does not mean merely mouthing the words, "I know I am a sinner." We all know that forgiveness and reconciliation do not happen when the words of an apology are glib and insincere.

If we say to one of our children, "Tell your brother you're sorry," and he says begrudgingly, "I'm sorry," it does not achieve reconciliation. The confession must be sincere. It must come from the heart. It must be more than mere words. There has to be a disposition corresponding to the offense committed. Real regret. Real contrition. Then forgiveness and reconciliation can happen.

Romans 10:9-10

9 because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

The mouth is thus confessing what the heart already possesses, a saving faith that Jesus is indeed the Christ who came to take away the sins of those who confess him.

So when John says in 4:2 that the evidence of divine spiritual reality is the "confession" that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, he probably does not mean that the mere words or thoughts are sufficient evidence. Just because people can say that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is no sure sign that they are of God. That is far too superficial.

Instead John probably means that the sincere, genuine confession of Christ is evidence of the Spirit's work. If there is a disposition of heart corresponding to the tremendous truth that

the Son of God has come in the flesh, then the confession is evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit. In other words mere doctrinal words, no matter how true, don't prove anything about the spirit or person behind them, unless the words come with reverence and heartfelt conviction and submission to Christ.

The final result of this heart test is that with this confession of Jesus as the son of God, who came in the flesh, is a corresponding lifestyle of loving reverence and submission to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The reason this can be accomplished is because of the Spirit of God. It is God's seed (3:9) which has caused us to come to this place of confession.

This seed of God, which is His Holy Spirit, not only produces a confession that Christ has come in the flesh but it is the same Spirit which has given the ability to love others beyond self.

1 John 3:17 (ESV)

17 But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

The two are inseparable. A heartfelt act of love and a heartfelt confession of truth are both owing to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Therefore the genuineness of our love and the genuineness of our belief about Christ are the evidence of God's work in our lives. They are the Holy Spirit's testimony that we are the children of God.

Why is it so important to confess that Jesus has come in the flesh? That was the heresy which John has been fighting since the opening lines of his letter.

1 John 1:1-4 (ESV)

1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— 2 the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— 3 that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. 4 And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

Let's move on to the second test in our text.

It is found in verse six. It is the hearing test.

It is not just an audio test to see what sound frequencies the ear can hear but rather what the heart is willing to listen to and appropriate in the life of that believer. You see, both the mouth and the ears are connected to your heart. If your heart is stubborn, though you hear your father or mother disciplining you, you may still spurn their effort to teach you. Oh, you may say all the right things to get your parents or teacher off your back but you have not accepted the truth of the words that have been spoken to you. The true child of God, who has through confession of Jesus Christ been made anew and right with God, is also the one who listens to everything God has to say pertaining to life. In other words to listen is to obey.

1 John 4:6 (ESV)

6 We are from God. Whoever **knows God listens** to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Jesus said "my sheep hear my voice and they follow me" (Jn 10:27). The implication is that to follow is to obey and obedience is always connected to hearing.

If we go back to the Matthew 7 passage it is clear that Jesus is talking about obedience.

Matthew 7:15-20 (ESV)

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 You will **recognize them by their fruits**. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17 So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. 18 A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

How is your hearing? Is it selective? My grandfather Scarce was an avid Yankees fan. He was one of the first in the neighborhood to own a television just so he could watch the Yankees play baseball. He could sit there and ignore everything being said around him and concentrate on the game. However, if something was said, from the other room, about him or something

was said that reflected on him in any way, he always heard it. He heard what he really wanted to hear.

Some of us are like that in our relationship with Jesus Christ. We have selective hearing. We hear what we want to hear or what is convenient and disregard the rest. But according to the hearing test in verse six, if you have selective hearing you just failed the test. And the test is to determine if indeed the Spirit of God is living within you. If the Spirit of God is not in you, then you are not a child of His. It really is that simple.

On an occasion Jesus said to the disciples in Mark 8:17-18 (ESV)

¹⁷ ...Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? ¹⁸ Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear?

The heart and ears are connected. You cannot separate the two. The eyes and the heart are connected just as well. That is why Jesus said "If you look upon a woman with lust you are guilty of adultery".

So What?

How are we doing so far this morning? It has been my prayer for you earlier this morning that as you have participated in this time of worship in the Word that you have administered this test to yourself before thinking of how it applies to others.

Something which lies in the center of this text is what I believe God wants us to hear this morning. It is found in verse four.

1 John 4:4 (ESV)

4 Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for **he who is in you is greater** than he who is in the world.

Key Thought: Possessors are overcomers.

Why is it that we can confess that Jesus has come in the flesh? It is because of the work of the Spirit of God in our lives.

1 John 3:9

9 No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.

We overcome because rather than being mere professors of the truth we are possessors of the truth.

Why is it that we can listen to the word of truth and know it is the truth? It is because God has given us ears to hear.

Elsewhere Jesus said "let them who have ears hear". He was not speaking of the ears on the side of our heads but the ears inside our hearts. And unless God gives us ears to hear we are tone deaf to what the Spirit is speaking to us.

It is the Spirit which gives faith to confess Christ and ears to hear the truth of God, that lives within each one who has placed saving faith in the Christ. And because the Spirit of God is greater than the spirit of this world we can all shout **"we have overcome because greater is he who is in me than he who is in the world"**.

There are lessons which I hope you will take with you this morning. In other words I want you to TAKE IT PERSONAL.

There is a lesson in this for believers and unbelievers.

For possessors

For possessors the lesson is twofold.

1. Do not take credit for your listening ear or your confessing heart or your correct view of Christ. Give credit to the Spirit who is in you, and give God the glory.
2. When you are threatened by any deception of the evil one—any temptation, or discouragement, or anxiety, or cowardice—remind yourself that "he who is in you is greater than he that is in the world." Almighty God abides within you. Trust him. For this is the victory that overcomes the world, your faith (5:4) in the sovereign indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

For everyone else

For unbelievers the lesson is this: Seek the power of the Holy Spirit. Ask the Spirit of God to give you ears to hear what God is saying to you. Admit that without him your ears will stay

shut, your heart will remain hard, and you will not confess Jesus Christ come in the flesh. Pray that the Spirit of God would open your eyes. Plead with him to take away the hardness of your heart. And ask him to put within you the joyful confession that Jesus Christ is the Son of God—your Savior and your Lord. Seek God while he may be found. He is calling out to you. He desires to grant to you eternal life. Do not be deceived by the error of those who purport to have some form of the truth but yet deny the deity of Christ, his coming to earth as a man who died to pay the penalty for your sin and rose again to insure that eternal life would be granted to all who confess.