

## THE WORLD AGAINST CHRIST AND THE CHRISTIAN

(The Substance of an Address on John xii. 23-33 ; xv. 18-24 ;  
I John ii. 15-17 ; iv. 1-6)

IT would be impossible in the time available to speak in detail upon the passages we have read together. It may be possible, however, to draw your attention particularly to what the word of God in them says regarding the world and its relations to Christ and the children of God.

The subject of the world constitutes a real practical difficulty to most believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, because a great variety of solemn utterances about the world are found in the scriptures. They can hardly fail to realise their importance, but they become confused with regard to their exact meaning and application. For instance, reading the injunction, "Love not the world," they are puzzled in deciding what the world is, where it begins, and where it ends.

Instead of pursuing the scripture teaching of the subject, they set it aside as something beyond them and of very little importance for daily living. But this neglect is a great mistake. They are damaging their own souls. The difficulty they discover really lies with themselves. They approach the subject of the world in a wrong manner.

There is, without doubt, great difficulty in defining or describing in so many words the scriptural meaning of this term, but without a definition it is an easy matter for even the babe in Christ to decide for himself what the world is, if he regards it from the scriptural point of view. The scripture brings into prominence the world's essential feature, which is an attitude of hostility to God and His Son. And this spirit of hostility was shown very bitterly towards the Lord Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God. For the child of God, therefore, the world is made up of whatever is opposed to God and Christ.

This character of enmity to divine Persons by the world is very evident in the Gospel and Epistles of John, where it appears side by side with the wonderful revelations of the Father by the Son, and with those made by the Holy Spirit

of the adorable Person of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. The true nature of the world is taught there by contrast, like the blackness of darkness made known by the brilliance of light.

This vivid contrast between God and the world is of immense practical value to the believer. The world's boundaries are easily determined. If I am walking with the Lord, imbibing His thoughts and His teaching, I know that what is not of Him is of the world. All that I have as a child of God is not of the world. The blessings of grace that are mine as a vessel of the Holy Spirit are in sharp contrast with the things of the world, as things of darkness are opposed to things of light. Is it not easy for those who are of the day to distinguish between light and darkness?

### **The "World" is Moral not Material**

John at the beginning of his Gospel makes the distinction between the world in a material sense and in a moral sense. He opens with the Lord Jesus as the Word made flesh, the Maker of all things that were made. He came into the world that He Himself had made, but the world that man had made knew Him not. In the material world, He found a moral world, a world of spiritual darkness.

The Light shone in this darkness, but contrary to the law of the material world, the darkness in the moral world did not comprehend the Light, and was not dispersed (i. 5). The presence of Him Who is the Light of the world revealed without removing the density of the world's darkness and blindness. And throughout this Gospel, it is emphasised in a variety of ways that the Son of God was in the world, but the world knew Him not.

Thus, the evangelist John uses the term, "world," to describe the moral condition of that vast organisation, which man built up for himself after he was driven out of the Garden of Eden. By his skill and his learning, man gradually formed a great system for managing all the affairs of this life without the help or the recognition of God. Sinful indulgence and selfish ease became the primary elements of man's world, and when the Son of God came into it, He was despised, hated, and crucified.

There is an analogy between John i. and Genesis i. In Genesis, we read of a state of chaos in the world of creation. The earth was without form and void. Darkness was upon

the face of the deep. After its original creation, it had fallen into this condition of disorder and confusion, and then it was that the Spirit of God brooded upon the face of the waters.

In John, we are shown a moral waste, a moral confusion. Darkness covers the face of the world. And we also see the most astonishing fact of all ; when the light shines upon this darkness, the darkness resists its approach. Such a thing was unknown before. When the sun rises daily in the heavens, the darkness flees away, but when the Lord Jesus came into the world as its Light, the darkness of the world remained, and even deepened. The utter obduracy of man's heart in the individual and in the community was made manifest once for all. And the inveterate enmity of the world-system to God and His Son was finally established at the cross of Calvary.

### **The Son's Testimony to the Father**

The Son's presentation of Himself to the world as the Revealer of the Father is set out with divine fullness in the Gospel of John. Therein the Spirit of God selects a few of the heavenly marvels of His mercy and kindness, isolating each one and attaching to it the conversational discourse of our Lord. The teacher in Israel and the Samaritan at the well, a sinful woman, a cripple and a blind man, all are made occasions for the Son to pour out upon this weary, thirsty earth, the fountains of grace in God the Father.

But the Gospel shows this display of heavenly light shining upon the dark background of human sin. Chapter after chapter witnesses that men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. The world knew not its Creator ; the world did not recognise the Son Who is in the bosom of the Father, when He came into the world. Always and everywhere the Son testified of the Father, but the world did not receive His testimony. On leaving the world, the Son confessed to the Father, "The world hath not known Thee." His perfect testimony had only aroused the world's deep-seated anger against the Father and the Son, as the Lord Himself said, "They have both seen and hated both Me and My Father."

### **The Father's Testimony to the Son**

Because the Son was doing the will of Him that sent Him, His service was accompanied by the Father's testimony to

the Son. Without considering this testimony throughout the Gospel at length, we think of the beautiful and striking instance in chapters xi and xii of the Gospel. Death had come into the family where the Son had revealed the love of the Father, and where it was enjoyed. The bereaved sisters were stricken with sorrow, but the dead Lazarus was soon called forth from the tomb at the bidding of the Son. By that act of resurrection, the name of the Son was glorified, but the Holy Spirit shows in the chapters that the Father's hand was throughout directing the movements of the Son with this end in view.

When the Lord received the urgent message from the sisters of their brother's sickness, He tarried where He was beyond Jordan. He knew what was before Him to do, and what was before Lazarus and Martha and Mary to suffer, and that all was planned for the glory of God. At the appointed moment, He proceeded with the dignity inseparable from the obedient Son of God to the house of mourning in Bethany.

The Lord knew that He was about to be declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection of dead Lazarus, nevertheless, His sympathies were in fullest exercise towards the sorrowing sisters. They did not understand His slowness in responding to their appeal. They were dull in believing that the delay was part of the Father's plan to glorify His Son, not at the bedside of Lazarus, but at the graveside.

But the knowledge of the Father's purpose to raise Lazarus in no wise diminished the exquisite sympathy of our Lord for the mourners. His tears flowed spontaneously, if I may with reverence say so. He wept, not mechanically as part of a plan, but because His loving heart was moved with compassion for the sorrows of bereavement.

His tears told the Jews how Jesus loved Lazarus, and they, like the sisters, could not understand why He had not prevented him from dying. In a human fashion and in a worldly way, they reasoned that the love that showed such sympathy might have shown its power at the first by healing the sick man. But unerring wisdom and unfathomable love had ordered the circumstances. The Father was directing, the Son was obeying, and all was working together for good, that is, for the glory of God.

At the graveside, the Son bore testimony to the Father's guidance and His own dependence. "Father," He said, "I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me, and . . . hearest

Me always." This He said that the people might know He was the Sent One of the Father. He had come to the tomb at the very moment the Father would have Him there. Obediently to the Father's will, He raised Lazarus, and delivered him to his sisters. And by the act of resurrection, the Father glorified the Son in Bethany, having heard His prayer.

In chapter xii, we again find witness that the Father in heaven heard the Son on earth. When the Son said, "Father, save Me from this hour . . . Father glorify Thy name," there was an audible voice from heaven, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." This august communion was another testimony by the Father to the eternal Sonship of the Son of man, as blessedly significant then as when previously the Father spoke to Him by the waters of Jordan and upon the Mount of Transfiguration.

### **The Character of the World Elicited**

At this juncture, the Lord's solemn utterance is introduced: "Now is the judgment of this world." Its hostility to the Son was implacable. The world would not receive the witness of the Father. "This voice came not because of Me," the Lord said, "but for your sakes." No weightier evidence to the Son's claims could be given them. Earlier the Lord had said, "The Father Himself, Who hath sent Me, hath borne witness of Me. Ye have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His shape" (John v. 37).

The Gospel records the Father's testimony, and also the Son's. The Son of God Himself is shown, speaking words that are spirit and life, doing works that no other had done. These the world had heard and seen, and could not deny their truth. But the world refused to accept the Son or to receive His ministry. With the Father's voice from heaven, the Son's presentation to the world was completed. And with this refusal of the Father's witness, the omniscient Son declared, "Now is the judgment of this world."

Historically, the Lord was speaking immediately before His apprehension by the officers of the Jews in the garden. So that the world's testing-time had now expired, and the world had displayed its true character. It was not merely passively blind to the beauty of Christ, but actively hostile to Him and His claims, hating Him and thirsting for His blood. The plans for His arrest and crucifixion had been

made, and accordingly, the Lord said, "Now is the judgment of this world."

He had not come to judge the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. Nevertheless it had been judged, not by the Son of man sitting upon a throne, but by the Son of God walking through the world in grace and truth. Thereby, its moral and spiritual condition was revealed, and its hatred is recorded in the scripture for the guidance of the children of God, who are to walk through it even as He walked.

Having passed sentence on the world for its rejection of Himself and His Father, the Lord said further, "Now shall the prince of this world be judged." The world that knew not God was under the dominion of a rival ruler. And with the judgment of the world, there was the virtual expulsion of Satan, its prince, who had sinned from the beginning. Every doer of sin in the world is of the devil, and the Son of God was manifested to destroy the works of the devil (1 John iii. 8).

Now, speaking from the divine standpoint, the Son sees the ruler of the world cast out of it. Historically, Satan was not then expelled. But as the death of Christ was the hour of the world's judgment, so that death nullified the power of Satan and ended his dominion in the world (Heb. ii. 14). The basis for delivering the world from the presence and power of the devil for a thousand years was laid at the cross when the Son of man was "lifted up."

In the Apocalypse, we have a further testimony to the ejection of the prince of this world. First, John sees him as the great red dragon cast down from heaven to earth by Michael and his angels (Rev. xii). The devil is filled with great wrath, knowing his time is short.

Next, the prophet, beholding the coming of the Son of man as the Warrior King, sees the ruler of this world cast out of the earth into the bottomless pit (Rev. xx). An angel binds him with a great chain, and he is imprisoned for a thousand years. The world-kingdom of our Lord and His Christ is established. The Son of man reigns in glory over the world, which is freed from the power and subtlety of the old serpent, the devil, whose end John sees also, for he is eventually cast into the lake of fire, prepared for him and his angels.

This hour of triumph the Son of God saw in the hour of His rejection by the world, and announced it before He departed out of this world, as a warning to His foes and a

comfort to His own. We need not fear the power of the great adversary, nor the world in which he rules. The Lord assures our hearts by these words. He tells us that the world which will hate and persecute us is judged, and that the great prince who governs and guides its affairs is deposed. His power is already broken and neutralised, and he himself doomed to everlasting punishment.

### **The Son's Lifting Up**

We come now to the Lord's third solemn statement. He spoke concerning the death He should die. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." Three times in this Gospel, reference is made to His "lifting up." As Son of man He was to be lifted up, even as the serpent was lifted up in wilderness. Thus He would become the object of faith to men everywhere (iii. 14, 15).

Again, the Lord, speaking to the disbelieving Jews, said, "When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am He" (viii. 28). After they had crucified Him, they would know, not immediately, but eventually, the glory of His Person, and that He had come to them as the Spokesman of the Father.

In passing, I may mention that Isaiah twice uses this expression of Christ in the sense of exaltation in glory. He saw the Lord on a throne, "high and lifted up," His train filled the temple, and the whole earth was full of His glory (Isa. vi). It was a vision of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the same chapter Isaiah foretold the gross darkness and blindness that should come upon the people through their unbelief in the Messiah. Reference to this prophecy occurs in the chapter before us (John xii. 39-41).

Isaiah also uses the term when speaking of Christ as the Servant of Jehovah (lii. 13). Speaking of the glory God will give Him, the prophet said, "He shall be exalted and extolled," that is, "exalted and lifted up." This was fulfilled when God raised up the crucified Jesus, and made Him Lord and Christ at His right hand. As such, the Jews will believe on Him, and acknowledge Him as the great "I-am." Seeing Him lifted up in glory, they will confess their sin in lifting Him up on the tree, and will mourn in the touching language of the next chapter (Isa. liii).

The Lord here speaks for the third time of His being lifted up to die, and says that this will be the centre of attraction

for all men. As the crucified Son of man, He will draw to Himself, not merely the Jews, not only the Greeks, like those who had just desired to see Him, but all men in the widest and fullest sense. Now the gospel is preached in all the world, and whosoever believes is saved, but the Lord's words look to the future time when the whole world will bow beneath the sway of His sceptre.

### **The World and Christ's Own**

Let us pass to the second part of our subject—the world and believers. We have seen that when our Lord came into the world, He was received with unmitigated hatred and with a resolute determination to end His unwelcome testimony by His death. Now we are to consider what is the attitude of the world towards His disciples. Would the world be content with the death of the Master, and adopt a policy of liberty and toleration towards His followers?

The Lord Himself before His departure made it perfectly clear to His own what would be the future relation of the world. During His own presence in the world, His disciples had been immune from the attacks of the Jews. But He was going to the Father, and the little company of believers in Him would remain in the world. What would be their experience? As we read in the verses from John xv., the Lord showed them that the world would in His absence oppose them as it had opposed Him.

The radical moral principles of the world-system do not change. The antipathy of evil to good is seen from the beginning. Cain's malicious hatred of righteous Abel appears in the deadly enmity of the Jews against Christ. The same spirit of animosity would remain in the world against those that bore the name of Christ. As the world hated God and His Son and His Holy Spirit, so the world would hate that which belonged to Christ.

It is important to observe that in these verses, the Lord attributes the world's hatred of His disciples to the fact that they belonged to Him. They were His servants, and the servant is not greater than his Lord. "If they have persecuted Me," He said, "they will also persecute you." The world would not hate them because they were law-breakers, or because of objectionable features in their moral character, but because the Lord had chosen them out of the world to be His own.



The resemblance of their demeanour to Christ's would rouse the world's ire. The Lord had spoken to them of this resemblance to Himself in the allegory of the Vine, found earlier in this chapter. He was the True Vine, bearing fruit for the Father. "Ye are the branches," He said, and the branches of the Vine were to be fruitful even as He was. Their fruit would show they belonged to the Vine. Grapes could not be borne by the thorn or the thistle, or even by the fig tree or the olive tree.

A special feature of the fruit of the Vine was that it was appreciated and valued by the Husbandman. The life of our Lord was a continual source of enjoyment to the Father. All that He desired was in the Vine. Even during the hours of darkness upon the cross, the Father found what was in His own heart fully expressed and reciprocated in the heart of the Son.

Now the disciples, as branches of the Vine, were admitted into close communion with the Son. The fruit He bore for the Father they must bear for the Father also. As the living branches abode in the Vine and were inseparable from it, so the fruit of the branches would be indistinguishable from the fruit of the Vine. They were to keep His commandments and abide in His love, as He kept His Father's commandments and abode in His love.

Moreover, as His disciples they were to bear much fruit, and His joy would abide in them, and that joy would be full, giving the fruit an attractive appearance and beauty for the eye of the Father. And just as such fruit in them would awaken the good pleasure of the Husbandman, so it would awaken the bitter enmity of the world against them.

They themselves were to love one another. The world would hate them and persecute them for seeking to please the Father and for loving Christ, following Him, and bearing fruit in His name as branches of the True Vine. Such conduct proved they were not of the world. "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own," the Lord told them. Apart from the Vine, the world has its associations, societies, and brotherhoods, for which it cares. Those that stand aloof from its social activities are misjudged, despised, and persecuted.

The disciples of the Lord, immediately after His departure, experienced this persecution. The forces of the world arrayed themselves against them for their extermination, as they had done against the Lord Himself. He had warned them of what

was before them. Was not the world's persecution part of the Father's purging that the branches of the Vine might bring forth more fruit?

But the Lord would not have His own fear the power of the world. They had His example of submission before them. He would not ask them to endure more than He had endured. Do not be alarmed, He says, as it were; what they did to Me, they will do to you. "If they have persecuted Me, they will persecute you also." "All these things will they do unto you for My name's sake because they know not Him that sent Me."

Could we count it a hardship to-day, if we had to pass through persecution? By the mercy of God, Christians in this country have been immune from persecution for two or three centuries. But the world has not lost its persecuting spirit. And violent persecution by "the powers that be," may spring up again. We may have to face it because we belong to Christ, and endure its hatred because we bear a likeness to our departed Lord. Should such fiery trial arise, may we be found faithful.

### **The World Not to be Loved**

But the relation between the world and believers has another aspect, which appears in the verses read from 1 John ii. There we find the converse of what we have been considering. As in the Gospel we saw the attitude of the world to the followers of Christ, so in the Epistle we see the attitude of God's children to the world. They are not to love the world nor its things.

This exhortation is there addressed particularly to those in the family of God whom the apostle calls the "young men." Of this class, he says, "ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one." The last of these three clauses is repeated from the previous verse, showing that overcoming the wicked one, the ruler of this world, is the outstanding feature of the young men.

This class had grown up from the state of spiritual infancy. They had acquired spiritual strength and spiritual intelligence. Moreover, they had withstood the persecuting power of the wicked prince of this world, and they were overcomers. They had resisted the terrifying agencies of Satan, and were victorious in the onslaught.

Had these young men, who had resisted the devil, and from

whom he had fled, nothing further to fear? In seeking to overthrow the faith of those that are Christ's, has Satan no other tactics to employ than those of persecution? We ought not to be ignorant of his devices. If, as the roaring lion, he fails to devour the saints, he will, as the deceitful serpent, seek to lure them to destruction. If his terrors are met in the strength of the Lord and the power of His might, he will endeavour to mislead and deceive and ensnare.

The young men are to beware of the seductive influences of the world. Satan will bring before them its many pleasant and attractive things. By such means, the old serpent beguiled Eve in the garden. He pointed out the attractive qualities of the forbidden fruit. His persuasive speeches deceived the woman, and she took of the fruit herself, and also gave of it to her husband. They both were overcome by the wicked one, not by force, but by fraud.

Hence, those who had overcome the power of the wicked one are warned against his earliest artifice. The enemy would set before the young men worldly objects cunningly designed to excite the affections of the heart and the desires of the mind. Therefore John's exhortation is, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." The love of the world is the service of Satan, its prince.

The apostle's prohibition is most comprehensive in its terms. The entire world-system and its various component parts must be excluded from the range of the believer's affections. The love of money, for example, is the root of every evil. The love of gain is a canker to the soul. The advantages of the well-watered plains of Jordan led Lot to the gate of Sodom. The young men were not to love the world in this respect, nor in any of its things.

Is this admonition as weighty with us as it should be? Have we heard it so often that it has lost much of its force? It may be that we take care not to allow our hearts to run after the world as a human organisation, and that we avoid those things in it that do not directly appeal to our particular tastes. But, forgetting that the injunction covers *all* that is in the world, we permit ourselves a little indulgence in what we consider a minor matter. Reversing the practice of the scribes, we get rid of the camel, but swallow the gnat. For instance, we read in private what we would not listen to in public. We love that little indulgence, for it seems to us but a little thing. Yet our relish for it proves our love of the worldly thing.

The apostle is emphatic that the love of the world and the love of the Father are incompatible. "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Only here, I think, do we read of the love of the Father, that is, of our love of the Father. We read of the love the Father has bestowed upon us, and also of our love of God and of Christ. But in this passage our love of the Father is set in contrast with our love for the world. They are mutually exclusive.

The love of the Father is the height of Christian privilege. In the Son the Father is seen and known. In Christ the love of the Father's heart for us is revealed, and in Him our love of the Father is consolidated. This revelation of the Father is concealed from the world. "O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee," the Lord said at the close of His ministry. But to His own He had manifested the Father's name, having chosen them out of the world. For any of His own, therefore, to love the world was to quench the love of the Father in them. They would be loving what hated the Beloved of the Father.

Nothing in the world is "of the Father." The things of the world, the desires of the flesh within, the desires of the eyes without, and the pride or vainglory of life are "of the world;" all exclude God and exalt self. The Father's object is the glory of the Son, and the world's object is the gratification of selfish lust. No heart can love and serve both God and mammon. But while the world and its lust is passing away like a vain show, "he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

### **The World's Recent Encroachments**

The discernment of the world by believers is a simple process, and presents no difficulty to us as long as we use the criterion given us in scripture. What is not of the Father is of the world. For our undoing, Satan seeks to mystify us about the nature of this distinction. Many argue the vague question how far a believer may go in the direction of the world without endangering his soul. Some have been induced to take up worldly associations and occupations, and settle the question by actual experiment.

There is, alas, no doubt that the world and its things have encroached upon the lives of brethren in the Lord in a marked degree during the last few years. Without attributing this departure from the love of the Father to any particular persons, those who can look back, say, forty years know

perfectly well that the world has gained a decided foothold among us. The world has influenced our words, our actions, our habits ; it has come into our gatherings, our worship, our service, our homes, our occupations. Worldliness is even now eating like a canker into the spiritual life of many who belong to Christ.

The result has been disastrous. Fruit for God has withered. Weakness cripples the gatherings. There is no power to recover some who have drifted openly into the world. Pious families have been broken up by the love of the world and its things. I need not continue this harrowing recital.

Why is this widespread ruination ? Is it not due to love of the world ? Have not the brethren succumbed to the deceitfulness of Satan ? The great world-ruler had his eye upon them as a company of brave witnesses for the truth of Christ. He sought to destroy their testimony—not by violent persecution, at first, but by deceit and flattery, by the pride of life. And by introducing the things of the world, he has caused the love of the Father in many to wax cold.

You know how spiritual weakness prevails, not only in your immediate association, but widely throughout Christendom. You know it best perhaps in your own heart and life. Where is fidelity to the truth ? Where is the spirit of true piety ? Where is the holy life that appeals to those that know not God or Christ ? The Holy Spirit is grieved, and is hindered in His working through the ministry of the word and the preaching of the gospel. Why is this ? is it not because of the defiling and paralysing influences of worldliness among the children of God ?

### **The World's False Teaching**

Let me now say only a little on the verses read from chapter iv. They also are of practical importance to us. Those in chapter ii. related to conduct, these in chapter iv. to teaching or doctrine. The former deal with our love, the latter with our faith.

John writes, " Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God." And he goes on to show how those that are of God may protect themselves from the effects of false doctrine, the teaching of the spirit of anti-christ which is already in the world.

He says that many false prophets have gone out into the world, that is, men who pretended that their words were

uttered with the authority of God, but who were liars and deceivers, and therefore, emissaries of Satan. It is generally thought that because they went out into the world, the reference must be to teachers of evil doctrine who leave the assemblies for the world.

No doubt the description includes this class, but it surely applies also to those who do their deadly work in the gathering itself, where the children of God are, and are liable to be misled. "World" in John has, as we have already seen, a moral meaning more often than a local one. Going into the world may not mean moving from one place to another, but the adoption of worldly principles and ways of acting and thinking. The false-prophet is guided by worldly habits of thought, and not by the Spirit of truth.

For example, the teacher of evil doctrine approaches the scriptures from a worldly standpoint, regarding them as merely human documents. The result is that he misreads and misunderstands the revelation of God, and he, consequently, teaches what is false, not true, evil, not good. By such doctrine the children of God are led astray from the truth. Thus, the world can, by religious teaching, not only turn away the affections from the Father to itself, but also turn away the mind from the truth of God to the lie of Satan.

Because of this danger, John warns the children of God, and bids them try or prove the spirits before believing them. Do these men speak according to God or to the world? Because the false prophet has a worldly mind, he has a worldly voice; he therefore speaks against Christ, not for Him. He is not loyal and true to the Son of God. Hence I know he is a deceiver and an anti christ, though I may not be able to confute his arguments. By using this test, even the babes in the family of God will be preserved from error, their hearts being full of love and reverence for Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

False doctrine invariably affects the spiritual life and communion of those who imbibe it. The worship of God is affected. How can I rightly worship God in spirit and in truth, if I hold a doctrine which is false? Evil teaching poisons the mind and heart of the one who believes it. In prayer and worship, the introduction of the elements of the world destroys the sense of dependence upon the Holy Spirit. Prayer is no longer a power with God; it loses its intimacy and fervency, and becomes formal and idle.

## The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error

Plainly, we must avoid error in divine teaching—that error which is one of the things of the world. We are not to confuse the spirits that are not of God with the Spirit of God. And the apostle gives us the mark whereby we may distinguish the one from the other. The teaching of the Spirit of God is marked by the confession of Jesus Christ come in the flesh; while the spirit of anti christ which is in the world lacks this confession. “Hereby know ye,” John says, “the Spirit of God.” We are to test every spirit and all teaching by its fidelity to Jesus Christ, come in flesh.

It is well to mark the exact rendering of this important passage, which should be, “Every spirit which confesses Jesus Christ come in flesh is of God.” The omission of the little word, “is,” gives fresh force and significance to the test. The confession that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh might imply no more than the acknowledgement of the historical advent of Jesus Christ, which an infidel or heretic might do. But the confession of Him come in flesh is another matter; this is owning Jesus Christ, come in flesh in all the majesty of what He is in Himself, the Eternal Son of God.

This distinction is most helpful in understanding the truth involved in the verse. We are not to look merely for the confession of the historical event, as the ordinary translation implies, but for the confession of the Deity of Jesus Christ in His incarnation. The Man Jesus Christ must be acknowledged as God manifest in flesh, the Word made flesh. In Him, come in flesh, was and is the full Godhead. This mark is inseparable from the teaching of the Spirit of God. The absence of this hall-mark in any doctrine proves it to be of the spirit of anti christ, and not of God.

But the apostle would not alarm his little children; they were of God, and had overcome the false prophets, because the Spirit of God was in them, and He is greater than the spirit of anti christ which is in the world. False teachers are of the world and speak of what is worldly in order to please the ear of the world. We have the apostolic teaching which is of God, by which we may discern what is the spirit of truth and what is the spirit of error.

In closing, let me remind you of what our brief reference to these passages has taught us about the world. In the Gospel we saw the world's rejection of the testimony of the Father and the Son, and its bitter hostility to Christ Himself

and those that are His. In the Epistle, there was, first, the warning against the attractive things of the world and making them the object of our affections. Then, we were exhorted to take heed what we hear and to prove all things we hear by the infallible test, that is, the confession of Jesus Christ, come in flesh.

Let us walk with Christ, and not with the world. Let us keep our garments unspotted from the world. Let us love the truth which is in Christ Jesus that we may be preserved from the errors which are in the world. Let us seek to be counted friends of the Lord Jesus, and avoid the friendship of the world which is enmity against God.

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