

May 21, 2006
Easter 6

"Protecting Ourselves Against Many False Teachers"

1 JOHN 4:1-11

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. ⁴ You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. ⁵ They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶ We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood. ⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 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.

"There is nothing new under the sun." How true this is about false teaching that pops up about Jesus. Take for example the popular book and movie, *The Da Vinci Code*. What this book says about Jesus is similar to the false Gnostic teachings that came into the church at the time of John. He warned his dear beloved children in Christ that they should "Test the spirits, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."

Should we take *The Da Vinci Code* seriously or just brush it off as another evidence of the times in which we are living? Over 40 million copies have been sold. Millions more are seeing the movie this weekend. Howard, Hanks, and Hollywood and you have a potential blockbuster. Chuck Colson warns that this book is "effectively affirming the unbelief of nonbelievers, turning off honest seekers, and even confusing and disillusioning many Christians." Audaciously the author Dan Brown states in his introduction that the facts in this book are true. Some facts are true only because they represent the false Gnostic teaching that existed in the church at the time of John. Other so-called facts are just poor fabrications and revisions of history. People caught up with the interesting nail biting read of *The Da Vinci Code* are swept into its false statements just as the people at the time of John were fascinated by tall tales and stories about the life of Jesus written willfully to discredit him as Lord and God who had come to this earth in human flesh.

While there is nothing new under the sun when it comes to false teaching, we should expect to see something new under the sun as we contemplate ways to protect ourselves and our children against false teaching. That is what these words of John will help us do this morning.

Testing the spirits

John encourages us to test the spirits to see if they come from God. "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." John said many false prophets have gone out into the world. Jesus said of the last times, "At that time many will turn from away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people." A false prophet never comes to your door dressed in a red devil suit with horns, a spear and evil looking eye such as Jack Nicholson might portray in one of his films. He comes to you as the nice neighbor next door who waters your lawn when you are on vacation and brings you tomatoes from his garden. Jesus said they come in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

Test the spirits John tells. The Greek word for "test" was a term used to test people who were preparing to be medical doctors. A good doctor can spot problems in your lungs, a weak heart, or lack of pulse in your veins just by using a simple instrument such as stethoscope. In some cases he might take one look at you and know immediately what is wrong.

There is a way that you can look at a false teacher and immediately spot them as false teacher. John says, "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." We have no problem seeing the parts of *The Da Vinci Code* that are totally incorrect and wrong because this book does not acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and God who has come in the flesh. The Gospel of John begins with the words, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. Then it acknowledges Jesus has come into the flesh: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." The *Da Vinci Code* says Jesus married Mary Magdalene and started a line of people that was carefully hidden by the church. It claims Jesus was not really God from eternity, but declared to be God in 325 AD at the Council of Nicea. Immediately we see this conflicts with the words of John that we have come to accept and believe are true. The Gnostics who believe all matter is evil loathe and despise and disdain any teaching that the Son of God took on human flesh.

If I meet a Christian friend from the Baptist church, or the Presbyterian Church, or the Pentecostal Church, and I confess my faith to them in the words of John 1 "In the beginning was the Word..." Of if I state the words of the Apostle Creed or Nicene Creed as a summary of my faith, these brothers and sisters in Christ will say a loud "Amen, brother" to what I have just stated as my belief about Jesus Christ. Jesus as Lord and God in human flesh is a touchstone of the Christian faith. It will smoke out the counterfeits and show them for what they truly are. If a Jehovah Witness stops at my door, and I tell them I believe Jesus Christ is Lord and God, they will immediately become defensive and angry. If I were to publicly confess this next to a mosque in Iran, I would probably be beaten, or put into prison, or even killed. And if I have a chance to talk to someone who has questions about the Christian faith after seeing the movie, *The Da Vinci Code*, I have a golden opportunity to confess Jesus as Lord and God. If you have a chance to discuss this with someone consider bearing witness to your faith by telling the account of Jesus appearing to the disciples the night of his resurrection with the words "Peace be to you." Tell them how he showed them his hands and side. Tell them how Thomas confessed, "My Lord and my

God.”

There is so much power in the name of Jesus to ferret out the false spirits and help them see the truth. I ran across this interesting quote about the power in the name of Jesus. “Jesus. It’s a little name. It is a small word. Say this little name in public, however, in a way other than an obscenity, and stand back and watch the fireworks. This little name is like a tiny detonator that triggers a nuclear warhead. You can say “God,” and you won’t get a squeak. You can say “Our Father in Heaven,” and few will flinch. You can say “Great Spirit,” and people will nod in approval. You can say “Allah” and you will be deemed tolerant. But say “Jesus” and just wait for the sonic boom.” Dear Christians we love the name of Jesus. The world does not understand how we can sing, “How sweet the name of Jesus sounds In a believer’s ear! It soothes our sorrows, heals our wounds, And drives away all fear.”

Remembering we are different from the world

We can also protect ourselves from false teachers by reminding ourselves that we are different from the world around us. John says, “You dear children are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in world.” We have overcome the world, because we have Jesus. In John 16 Jesus said, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” “We are more than conquerors through him that loved us.” Nothing in this world can separate us from the love we have in Jesus.

The world thinks differently than we think. As John tells us, “They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them.” To illustrate how this world thinks differently from how we think let me share with you something I saw in my backyard this past week. Baby starlings had left the nest and were sitting on our fence. The parents were trying to feed the squawking birds by snatching up snails, breaking open the shells and filling their hungry mouths. No one has to tell a mother starling how to build a nest, lay eggs, or take care of its young. It is ingrained into its system. So it is with the world into which we were born. No one has to teach people how to trust in themselves to be saved. Everyone is born thinking they have the power within themselves to make things right with God. Ephesians 2 says we once walked in the ways of the world. “You were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air.”

Now things are different. We don’t have this worldview. We overcome them. “We are from God and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.” If it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it must be duck. If Dan Brown and the ideas he promotes in *Da Vinci Code* look like the worldview of this world, and speak like the world, then it must be part of the world and its way of thinking. That should not surprise.

John tells us, “We are from God and whoever knows God listens to us.” Something amazing has happened in your life and mine. God has spoken to us in his Word and we have come to accept the things of God as being true. 1 Corinthians 2 says, “No one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.” Then it goes on to say, “We have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God.” God opens his mind to us and reveals to us

that all of our best efforts to please him only false short continually. God also reveals how he does it all for us through Jesus and the love that he has for us. The false teachers cry out, "Do this! Do this! And you will be saved." The Spirit of God points to Jesus and we hear Jesus cry from the cross, "It is finished." That is a whole different view that dominates our lives even if the whole world is against us. Martin Luther once said, "If I am the only person in the world to believe this, then I am the true church."

Encouraging each other in God's love

If we are going to overcome the many false prophets in the last times we need to huddle together and encourage each other in the love that God has shown to us. John says, "Let us love one another, for love comes from God." The starlings who take care of their little ones show a love and concern based on a love that God put into these lowly creatures. God is the source of all love. Even parents who are not Christian have a certain amount of love for the kids that comes as a blessing from God.

You, dear Christian, have come to know God's love in its highest form. As John says, "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. This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." The best answer to the false teachers of every age and the best answer to anyone asking you about *The Da Vinci Code* is the simple truth that you can share from John 3:16 "God so loved the world.... There is no religion in the world that teaches anything remotely like this. No example of animal love or human love can compare to this love of God that forms the basis of the love that we have for each other. This love is new to us every morning. It is the best defense against false teachers we have. Amen.