



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 John 4:1-6

"The Test of the Spirits"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] For those of you who are here for the first time, we are studying John's first epistle and we have reached chapter 4. And the Scripture reading for today as you can tell from your bulletin is chapter 4 verse 1 through verse 6. The apostle writes,

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:"

We do not use this type of language anymore. I'm reading from the Authorized Version and we would probably want to translate the expression that the apostle uses as "has come in flesh and is of God." But these particular rendering such as "is come" are perfect tenses in the original text, and so we should keep that in mind as we are thinking through this passage. The apostle continues, "And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God." The original text has simply, "Every spirit that confesseth not Jesus." Those other words added in a few of the manuscripts and translated in the King James Version are in perfect harmony with what is said but specifically not found in the text that John probably wrote.

"And this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them."

If you've often wondered why it is that the world finds it difficult to respond to the things of the word of God but finds it easy to respond to the fads, and to the practices, and the inspirations of the present day, the apostle gives us a sure and certain answer to the question. "They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them," he says. "We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error." Just one point, the apostle, when he says in verse 4, "ye are of God," uses emphasis and the emphasis is upon the "ye." And then in verse 6 when and he says, "we are of God," again he uses the emphatic pronoun.

But most likely means by the "we" of "we are of God" not every believer but the apostles themselves. In the light of the way he begins his epistle, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life." And the remainder of that section through verse 4 indicates that he really is making claims for himself and others as apostles. "We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error," and the apostles have the spirit of truth and others who are of the world have the spirit of error.

May the Lord bless this reading of his word, and let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father we give Thee thanks for the possession of the word of God. We thank Thee for the words of the apostles and we praise Thee for the appointment of them by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And we thank Thee for the place that they have played in the history

of the Christian church and the place that the Scriptures that they have written have in the Christian life that has characterized the church of God from its beginning.

We thank Thee and praise Thee as we reflect upon the battles that have transpired down through the years. We have just sung of them in the hymn that we have sung. And Luther was surely right when he spoke of the world as truly filled with devils, servants of their master, and that the Lord Jesus Christ is the King who has overcome. And while the storm center of the ages, nevertheless, we have confidence in the victory that he has won and in the completion of his triumph in his Second Advent, and kingdom, and in the eternal days that lie ahead of us. We praise Thee and thank Thee for the hopes that we have as bound up in the triune God and its great ministry.

We thank Thee Lord for the day in which we live. And we pray Thy blessing not simply upon this body of believers, and friends, and visitors, but upon the whole church of Jesus Christ. Strengthen us, build us up in the faith, keep us from evil, and deliver us from the stratagems of the devil and his devils, enable us to glorify they name in the day in which we live.

We pray especially for the sick. We ask, Lord, they blessing upon them. Give healing if it should please Thee. Bless those that minister to them, the physicians, and their family, and friends, and others who are concerned. We pray for those who've requested our prayers especially, Lord, meet their needs and bless them richly. We thank Thee for answers to prayer and we look forward to the answers of the future.

We pray for our country. We ask Lord Thy blessing upon President Reagan and President-elect Bush. May the decisions that are made be decisions that are pleasing to Thee. We pray that Thy would guide and direct this great nation by the providence of our supreme God. And may there come over this nation the conviction that there is someone who is mightier than we, and under whose banner and word we must live if we are to prosper.

We thank Thee for this opportunity to gather on this day, and worship Thee, and sing praises to Thee. We pray Thy blessing upon the hymns that we sing, upon the word that is read and preached. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] As you can tell from the bulletin, the topic for today is "The Test of the Spirits". The early church was both similar and different from the church today. It was different in that, as someone has said, the exuberance had not been organized out of it, that is the gifts were exercised in the meetings of the church.

Now, we had the gift of making announcements exercised this morning when we had an announcement from the audience of a change in the Bible class meeting. And Ross, we were glad you did that. But some of the exuberance, particularly in the church today, has been organized out and the ministry of the gifts, the gifts of exhortation, the gifts of teaching, the gifts of in other forms in which the early church exercised them we do not ordinarily see. We see one man stand behind the pulpit and that in essence centers the exposition of the word of God in one person. I'm grateful that in Believers Chapel we do have a meeting in which there is opportunity for those with spiritual gifts to exercise them, as well as those who hold the office of priest to exercise their priesthood. In that sense there is difference. In the sense of similarity, one sees similarity in the prevalence today of the same types of claims that characterized the early church, that is claims of individuals to possess supernatural power in the performance of miracles and also in the use of prophetic language and of prophecies themselves.

Of course, we always had the necessity within the Christian church of testing and the Apostle Paul reminded us in his Epistles that we were to prove all things and hold fast that which is good. It was permitted men to utter their prophecies in the meetings of the church but it was also the responsibility of the believers who heard to prove those prophecies. Some of them were true and some false. And those that were false demonstrated, of course, that the individuals were not prophets at all.

As far as the Bible itself is concerned, we have had the manifestation of supernatural power and the claims of supernatural experience from the beginning. When Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt there was a great conflict that went on between Moses, and the Egyptians, and the Egyptian magicians. And it is remarkable, as you read the book of Exodus, how many of the

miracles of Moses, the man of God, were duplicated by the magicians who were the false prophets of their day. And in the case of the experience of Saul and the witch of Endor there were other questionable things that were done.

In the New Testament, we have men like Elymas the sorcerer, who evidently was able to pull the wool over the eyes of a number of people. Simon Magus, who set himself forth as a great one and managed also to convince some at least that he was just that. Luke, when he writes his history of the early days of the Christian church, speaking of Simon and his ministry if one may call it that, said there was a certain man called Simon who before time in the same city used sorcery and bewitched the people of Samaria giving out that himself was some great one, to whom they all gave heed from the least to the greatest saying this man is the great power of God.

Now, if we have any questions about whether it is possible for men to prophesy remarkable prophecies and yet nevertheless not be of God, we have this finally illustrated completely in the ministry of the beast whose ministry is described in Revelation chapter 13. He not only made prophecies but also performed miracles as well. And in the Book of Revelation he is described as a person who performed miracles, but they were not of God. In other words, what I'm saying is to define the supernatural with the divine necessarily is a perilous mistake. We may have the supernatural but not necessarily that which is divine. In the wheat there are tares and in the world there is hardly any truth without its counterfeit.

This past week I traveled to Chicago for the meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society and also for a meeting of a number of men who have been associated with what we are calling the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. And we had our initial meetings, we met the press, we gave out the statement of what we were standing for, answered some questions, and sought to also introduce the council to the Christian evangelical scholars who were there at the meeting. In the course of the time together, we heard a number of addresses.

One was given by Dr. Norman Geisler, who was formerly on the faculty of the seminary here. And Dr. Geisler spoke on power evangelism and cross-cultural communication, but it was

primarily and exposition of John Wimber's claims with regard to the gifts of prophecy, and miracles, and the preaching of the word of God. And in it Dr. Geisler pointed out very very aptly to my mind that that same point, I don't think that he specifically said this but this was his point, to identify the supernatural with the divine necessarily is a perilous mistake. Of course, things might be divine and not supernatural at all, things might be supernatural and not divine at all, and of course, things might be supernatural and divine. It's helpful to remember that because in the word of God we do have false claims as well as genuine claims to supernatural experiences. And when we examine movements it's well for us to remember to prove all things and to holdfast that which is good, and the fact that something appears to be supernatural does not mean that it is of God at all.

Dr. Geisler's address proved the fact that a good Arminian can give a good address and it was a very good one, one of the best I heard. But he also gave the best story of the days. He said that he asked us if we had the story of the Professor of Communications who was giving his students an assignment. He assigned them that they were to invent or devise the most eye-catching newspaper headline that they could think of and they were to do it in three words. So the students left with their assignment and sought to come together with three words that might really catch attention. So the meeting of the class the professor asked them for the results of their work, and one of the students said that his headline would be, "The Queen Abdicates". And another one came up with the headline, "Fidel Castro Assassinated". And the third one won the classes accolade coming up with, "The Pope Elopes". [Laughter] I see you think that's better, too. We all thought that was the best of the three by far.

Well, the Apostle John has said in verse 24 of chapter 3 in the last sentence, "And hereby we know that he abideth in us by the spirit which he hath given us." So now in chapter 4 and verse 1 in the very first verse he appeals to them to prove or test the spirits. "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." What follows is really an amplification of that last statement, "Herby, we know that he abideth in us by the spirit that they hath given to us." In a sense he returns to a subject that he has

already discussed in chapter 2, the rise of false prophecy, the rise of the antichrists who are present in his day, and the spread of the delusions that affect the Christians.

You may remember that the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 speaks of the spiritual gift of the discerning of spirits and it's very evident from what John says here that that was a very necessary gift in that day. And as I mentioned already, the Apostle Paul wrote to the Thessalonians and told them to "quench not the spirit, despise not prophesying, prove all things, hold fast that which is good." So the question that faced the early Christians is the same question that faces us when we hear of the supernatural or the spirits. He says, "Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God."

Two questions one must ask oneself in the presence of the claims to the supernatural. First of all, "Are these real experiences or real events of which we are speaking?" And secondly, "Are they of God?" Incidentally, when the apostle says, "Believe not every spirit," one may reason from this that just as belief is an aspect of spiritual maturity so is unbelief a mark of spiritual maturity. In other words, to believe not certain things is just as significant as to believe other things. We tend to now a day to as it is said, "Accent the positive." But the negative is of the greatest importance. This has no reference to the political campaign that just transpired although there is some relation to it naturally.

But when he says, "Believe not every spirit but try the spirits whether they are of God," he also indicates something else. The very fact that the apostle calls upon the believers to examine and try the spirits, testing the reality and genuineness of the evidence, he indicates to us the right of private judgment. If it were really true that God intended for us to appeal to some one person, whether of a total church or whether of all Christendom as we are exhorted to do by some, or whether to one body of believers as we are exhorted to do by others, or whether to one man in one church as we are often exhorted to do in particular communions, then we are really asked to appeal to an official. And if it is true that we should get all infallible judgments from an official the apostle could never say, "Beloved," addressing the whole body of believers whom he is addressing, "you believe not every spirit." The very fact that he incidentally uses the plural here, the very fact that he

puts it as he does indicates that he stands behind the idea of the right of private judgment, and that is extremely important.

Furthermore, the very fact that he says, "Do not believe every spirit but prove the spirits," that is test them with a view to approving them, that's the force of the term that is used here. He indicates that our signs and claims for the supernatural are to be judged by the doctrines of the word of God. It's not in the reverse order, that is, we don't judge doctrine by our experiences as, for example, Mr. Wimber has claimed that by experience we may actually prove doctrine. It's the reverse always. In other words, if there is an experience that we have as a Christian which is not wedded to the teaching of the word of God then that experience is not to be believed. Everything that is found in the word of God and set forth as a genuineness experience has to do with the teaching of the apostle and others and has the stamp of genuineness upon it. Our experiences always must be justified by the words of the word of God. So when he says, "Believe not every spirit but try the spirits whether they are of God," he wants to impress upon us the fact that we have the responsibility of private judgment and we have the responsibility to test the miraculous or the claims for the miraculous by the word of God.

As a matter of fact, the Apostle Paul, writing to the Galatians put it in a very very strong way when he says to them in the first chapter of his epistle and in the eighth verse, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." In other words, Paul to speak of the extreme says if an angel from heaven should appear and preach unto us a Gospel different from this Gospel it should not only not be believed, but he in effect says let him go to hell. That's what is meant by "let him be accursed."

So standing foremost always is the testimony of the word of God. In the Old Testament, in Deuteronomy chapter 13, Moses specifies the same kind of testing of the prophets, "If the things they say do not come to pass, they are false prophets."

Now, he justifies his appeal by saying, "Because many false prophets are gone out into the world." In other words, the danger is not imaginary. It exists in John's day, "Many false prophets

(not shall go out but) have gone out into the world." Not surprising, our Lord had warned of that. Paul had warned of it. Peter had warned that that would happen, and Jude, too. And now, the Apostle John gives us a similar warning. He's already said in chapter 2 and verse 18, "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time." Their doctrine, incidentally, has put forth as a revelation. The reason we know it's put forth as a revelation is because he says, "many false prophets." That's what a prophet does. A prophet does not give us good advice. He doesn't really give us teaching. He does not simply give us exhortation. When we think of a prophet we think of an individual who utters words that have to do with the future and words that have to do with the present, that is he may offer predictions but he also may offer appeals and exhortations. But the characteristic thing of a prophet is that utters revelation, that is it is new truth that comes from God.

The prophet Isaiah, for example, offered us some magnificent messianic prophecies that have to do with future, predictive material. But he also gave out inspired exhortations and inspired comfort to the people of his day. That was prophecy too for the simple reason that those were new words from God. When a [man] makes the claim today of being a prophet he's making the claim of revelation. He may not know it, but he's making the claim of revelation, that is something new that comes from God through them.

And as John says, "We are to prove the spirits whether they are from God because there are many false prophets that have gone forth into the world." We look back and think of Muhammad and the claims that he has made, Joseph Smith and the claims that he has made, Swedenborg, and the claims that he has made, the Irvingites and the claims that they have made, and Jim Bakker, and Oral Roberts, and Kenneth Hagen, and Kenneth Copeland, and many many others of the same kind who make claims of prophecy.

Now, that means specifically that their utterances come from God as new truth. So it's a very serious thing to claim to be a prophet. It's not like claiming to give good exhortation based on the word of God. It's entirely different. It's new revelation. And no wonder the apostle is disturbed,

"many false prophets are gone out into the world." We have had individuals in the contemporary scene over a lengthy period of time who've made claims for prophecy. Where are their prophecies? What is the value of them? Do you know or have a book of contemporary prophecies? No, the Christian conscious knows that they are worthless prophecies as a general rule. So, my friends, when you hear a person claim to have the gift of prophecy remember what prophecy is, "test the spirits whether they be of God."

Now, having said that, the apostle moves onto this test and the doctrine of the incarnation. He states, "Hereby," and he refers to what follows in this instance, sometimes he refers to what has preceded by that term, "Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ as having come in the flesh is of God." What he means simply is that it's the Lord Jesus as the promised Messiah incarnate, that's the confession, that is the confession that identifies the spirit of God. Every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ as having come in flesh is of God. No one can make that confession in reality. Of course, you can make it on your lips, but in reality no one can make that confession without the enabling power of the Lord God. "Listen, no man calls Jesus Lord," Paul said, "except by the Holy Spirit."

No one can say that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Messiah who has come in flesh apart from the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. Say it and mean it. Anyone can say it, but to say it and mean it. And I want you [to] notice this statement because it seems so simple. You might think, "Well you mean that is all there is to a true confession, to confess that Jesus Christ has come in spirit?" But think about it for moment, what he's really saying. He doesn't say he has come into the flesh. You see a Cerinthian Gnostic might say that. "For he thought of Jesus as just an ordinary man who at a point in time, his baptism, there had come upon him power from God, under which power and by which power he ministered until before his work on the cross when the power departed from him and he died just as a man."

So John says it's not that we confess Jesus Christ as having come into the flesh but in flesh, a true incarnation. Furthermore, he doesn't say that we confess Jesus Christ as one who came in the

flesh, as if our Lord came in flesh and that was an event that happened a long time ago and it has not particular significance for us today. No, no, he says that the true confession is the confession of Jesus Christ as having come in the flesh and still being in the flesh. That's the point of the particular expression that he uses. It's a permanent thing. It's not a when our Lord appears in his incarnate days, that's not an exhausting of the fact of the incarnation.

In other words, the Lord Jesus is in flesh at the present time, glorified flesh now as a result of the resurrection, but in flesh. Listen to the Apostle Paul, "There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." He's still a man in glorified flesh at the right hand of the Father in heaven. The incarnation has not been completed, as a matter of fact it's permanent. It's like a wedding and when you are married you marry and the arrangement is considered to be permanent. So our Lord has come, wedded himself to human flesh forever. Think of the conversation of that. The second person of the trinity has become man. The word became flesh forever for our benefit. So the confession is of Jesus Christ as having come in the flesh, but there is more to this than that.

He uses an expression which, if you reflect on it for a few moments I think you'll understand it. He says, "Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh." Why didn't he say, "has been born in flesh"? Well as a matter of fact, others of us are begotten in flesh. Have you ever notice how the Lord Jesus describes his coming? I've mentioned this before. Some of you, however, were not there. When the Lord Jesus describes his entrance into human society he only one time says that he born. Isn't that strange? You would think that that being such a significant event that he would have said it many times that he was born. Only one time did he ever say that he was born, and he said that to an unbelieving man, Pontius Pilot. No doubt the reason why he said it Pilot could never have understood at this point, if he ever did, precisely what our Lord was claiming. Pilot said, "Art Thou a king then?" Jesus replied, "Thou sayest that I'm a king, to this end was I born." Unless you get the impression, unless Pilot get the impression or anyone who heard him say, "to this end was I born," that he was just born as only other men are born. He adds, "Even this one time and for this cause came I into the world."

Now, if you will go back and reflect on the gospel you remember the Lord Jesus uses two expressions to describe his coming. He says he was sent. Sent. And then he says, "I came." In fact, in John chapter 16 and verse 28 he goes into a bit of detail on the point. In John sixteen and verse 28 our Lord in the Upper Room Discourse says to the apostles, "I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and I go to the Father." So he came, he was sent. What does that suggest to us? Why, it suggests at a minimum his preexistence. And since we say preexistence I think it's fair to speak of his eternal existence. Other men are begotten of the flesh. You and I are begotten of the flesh. Our Lord came in flesh, begotten of the Holy Spirit through the womb of the Virgin Mary, conceived of the Holy Ghost. So when we read this statement then, "Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ as having come in the flesh is of God," much more is involved in it than you might think.

Augustine said that he had in all of his reading of philosophy, and he had read philosophy in his day, he said practically everything in the Christian faith may be found in the philosophers. Parallels can be found for almost everything except "the word became flesh". You cannot find that. The theological implications of this are magnificent. The genuine humanity of our Lord is involved in that expression. The full deity of our Lord is implied within it. The priesthood and mediatorship of the Lord Jesus, the real union between humanity and deity is suggested by that fact, the ground of an atoning sacrifice. In fact, most of the interpreters who are orthodox would affirm that that statement itself implies the penal substitutionary sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, the saviorhood of our Lord, the resurrection of the body, and in fact the Second Advent of the God-man all found implicitly in, "Every spirit that confesseth Jesus Christ as having come in flesh is of God."

The spirit of God himself is the supreme confessor of the Lord Jesus Christ. No one ever confesses faith in him apart from the Holy Spirit. He is the one who make the confession. Even when you make the confession it is he who confesses within your heart because it is his ministry to glorify the Son and to testify of him, and he does it through us when we come to confess him. As I said earlier, the Lord Jesus Christ is the storm center of the entire warfare waged between heaven and

hell. And the question that faces everyone of us is the question implied in the statement of the apostle, "What think ye of Christ?" I ask you that question, "What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he?"

Well, having said that the apostle goes on to state it negatively in the third verse, "And every spirit that confesseth not Jesus, is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is in the world." The test that faced the Christian then are twofold, human conduct, chapter 3 verse 10, "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother," a practical confession of human moral conduct, but then here of spiritual belief. Spiritual wickedness in the high places is now here and it is the time for the confession. They already, incidentally, suggests there's more to come and we know the New Testament tells us more will come when ultimately the beast come, and false prophet, and the necessity of a confession of the truth becomes even more significant.

And finally, in verse 4 though verse 6 the test and apostolic teaching are compared. He states in the fourth verse abruptly passing from the false teachers to the true children of God, "Ye," emphatic in the original text, "Ye are of God, little children," not like the spirit of antichrist, not like the false prophets, the false christs, "You are of God little children and have overcome them because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world." The victory of the children, they have withstood the seducers but they have not withstood the seducers in their own might. They have withstood the seducers in the might of God.

You know when you read the Bible you read a very strange thing in a sense. I'm sure it's puzzling to anyone who reads the Bible. You would think an expression like, "the god of this age," must be a reference to the Lord God in heaven but it's not. It's a reference to Satan. Satan is a great person. There are two great persons in this world, God and Satan. He's the god of this age. Our Lord is the God of the ages and, of course, supreme. That's why he says, "Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world." He's not an insignificant person. He's great. And furthermore, he has

all of the wisdom to know how to overthrow, if it were possible, the elect children of God. He has always ready for that which will disturb, deflect you from the purpose and plan of God if possible.

And furthermore, my Christian friend, what John is talking about is not the world out there. He's talking about the world in here, that is among the people who know of spiritual things. He's talking about individuals who have been in the family of God at least outwardly. In chapter 2 verse 19 he spoke about, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us." In other words, in the religious world, in the spiritual world, there are two classes of people. There are the believing children of God and there are the unbelieving children of the devil. And there is a great god of this age who is the god of them. And there is the triune God in heaven, the God of us. And you can see the machinations of evil one constantly, always attempting to disturb the flock God. So when the flock of God gets a little dissatisfied with things of the spirit when they become old to him and he's no longer interested in them and he finds it boring to hear the ministry of the word of God, so Satan out of his wisdom and skills will supply that for him which he has wishing. If he wants the fads, if he wants the interesting things, if he likes the materialism of the world and the excitement of the fleshly world about him, Satan will supply it to him.

We see that constantly in the activities of the Christian church. One of the reasons why churches ultimately, it seems, go off into heresy and departure from the truth of God, they become cold, disinterested, they become dull, apathetic, they are looking for excitement and they go where the excitement is because Satan is wise enough to give them what their heart is beginning to desire. These, incidentally, are tests that the triune God gives us testing the spirits, that by succeeding, by overcoming we may grow and mature in the Christian faith.

"So you are of God, little children, you have overcome them because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world." The world is the source of the inspiration, the words, the life of the world about us. I read a book a number of years ago by Mary Wood and it was called, "*Living Above the Average*". And since I was wondering whether I was living above the average I read the

book. It's a little book, rather interesting little book but it was very short. And I remember an illustration that she gave.

She said that one day she and her friends were on a train that threaded its way through the Canadian Rockies in Selkirks, a magnificent area. All of that area to the west of about, I guess about Saskatchewan and at least of where Calgary and Edmonton are to the coast would have probably been part of the United States were it not for the fact that ultimately engineers were able to find a way through those Rockies. For a long time they thought there was no way through. If you go up in that area and you get on that transcontinental highway you can stop and see the pictures of how that was done, both devising the way and then accomplishing it. But they were riding on the train. It's a magnificent ride, and they were looking at all of the glorious things, the snow peaks.

She said, "All day long we feasted our eyes upon the beauty of the mountains, the canyons, the forests, the rivers, the marvel of the creator's handiwork, and the marvel of the engineer's work that enabled them to make that possible really consumed them." And finally, near the end of the day, reluctantly, they left the observation coach tired with looking at so much sheer loveliness. She said, "As we walked back through the coach we saw a girl seated in a corner of the coach with her eyes riveted on," this was some years ago, "a film magazine." "The wonder of the mountains, the rivers, the rocks, the forests, meant nothing to her," she said, "glamour had blinded her eyes to true beauty. God's handiwork had left her unmoved. All she cared for was the fantasy of the artificial, the bewitchment of the screen, she was earthbound."

As a Christian, let me say this, if you become interested in the glamour of the artificial, the fantasy, the bewitchment of the life about you, there is a great one who will make it possible for you to have all that your desire would consume. Fortunately, there is one who is greater than he. And for the children of God to depend upon him means that we will not be overcome by that, earthbound, worldly occupied with the things of our particular life. How terrible it is in the light of the great truths. Listen to what the apostle goes on to say. He talks about the children of God then he says, "Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world, they are of the world therefore

“speak they of the world and the world heareth them.” The interests, the desires, the occupations are occupations of the world. They are of the world, therefore they speak of the world and the world hears them. The world responds to that kind of things because there is a harmony between their dispositions and natures.

Now, he adds in the sixth verse, “We are of God.” Now, when he says we he's talking about the apostles. “We are of God, he that knoweth God heareth us. He that is not of God heareth not us.” It's by this that we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. We have the spirit of truth, the antichrist, the false prophets have the spirit of error and it's the one who responds to the apostles who is of the truth. It's those who respond to the false prophets and the antichrists who is involved in the spirit of error.

Now, you can note that what the apostle says, how great it is and how great the claims, it's what someone has called the magisterial tone of apostolic authority. “We are of God.” That underlines the whole epistle. Ordinary believers to adopt the language would be presumptuous sectarianism. Suppose were to say, speaking for Believers Chapel, “We are of God and he that tis of God heareth us.” How ridiculous. We hope we are of God, of course, but to limit the apostolic teaching to what we comprehend is true, it is simply presumptuous, arrogant, sectarianism. I hope we are of the truth. But to say that in order to be of the truth you must live within the boundaries as we perceive them. No, no, we cannot do that.

God's people listen to the words of the apostles. There is a correspondence between the message and the hearers. We pay attention to philosophy. We read philosophy. We read psychology. We read sociology, but when it comes down to what we believe, we believe the words of the apostles. They are truth. We judge other things by them. Our Lord Jesus made the claim himself of the truth of God. He said in John chapter 8 and verse 47 these words, John chapter 8 and verse 37, I guess. Well, it's not in Acts is it? John chapter 8 and verse 47, “He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.”

So let me sum it up for our time is up. The truth is that by which men live, error is that by which men die and the truth is found in the apostle's words. George Finley has said, "Our Lord's incarnate Godhead is the test of every creed and system. His word is the stone of foundation on which who so falleth will be broken to pieces and that wall is built standeth fast forever." To whom, my Christian friends, do we respond, the words of the apostles or the spirit of the antichrist? Are we of God? Well someone might say, "Well, I don't really exactly know. But how can I come to know that I am of God?"

Well, John is given us a clue. He said in the second verse. "Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God." It's the spirit who makes the Bible a personal letter and if you wish to know that you belong to the truth and belong to God then by God's grace with the help of the Holy Spirit make the confession, "I do believe that Jesus Christ, Jesus the Messiah has come in flesh and I trust him as the one who saves sinners." May God in his grace enable you to make that confession and come to the assurance of life. Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the apostles and the boldness with which they proclaimed the word. Lord, deliver us from the spirit of antichrist and the spirit of the false prophets. By Thy grace enable us to test the spirits, to find those that are of God. And we thank Thee for the apostolic teaching given through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the teaching that guides us infallibly to the knowledge of Christ as Savior and Lord.

And Father we pray that if there are any in is meeting who have never believed in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ that at this very moment, if it please Thee, they may confess their need of a Savior from their sins and by grace give themselves to him whom to know is life eternal. O Lord through the Holy Spirit work the work of regeneration and faith.