

Module 15: 1 John 4:1-6 (Part 2)

Group Exercise 1

The name Jesus is found 12 times in 1 John (1:3, 7; 2:1, 22; 3:23; 4:2, 3, 15; 5:1, 5, 6, 20). What do you observe about the other words used with it in these verses? Are the usages in 4:2-3 unique in any way? If so, how and why?

Group Exercise 2

Using some of the 5 W, 1 H question words (Who, Where, What, When, Why, and How), give a brief outline of 1 John 4:1-3.

1) Observations and Observational Questions that guide Interpretation

- a) Read 1 John 3:19-4:6 for context.
- b) What words do you see as important, either because they are repeated often or they are part of a key teaching in verses 4:1-6? Spirit, world, God, confess, 'by this', listen.
- c) What title do you suggest for the paragraph starting in verse 4:1? A possible title is "Test Every Spirit".
- d) Transition – links to previous verses
 - i) Spirit (3:24; 4:1)
 - ii) "What" and "why" in verse 1. "How" in verses 2-3 and 4-6.
 - (1) "By this you know the Spirit of God" (2) – by testing the teachers by the content of their teaching.
 - (2) "By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error" (6b) – by testing the audience by the nature of their response to the teachers.
- e) "By this you know"
 - i) "By this you know" – (4:2)
 - ii) "By this we know" – (2:3, 5; 3:24; 4:13; 5:2)
 - iii) "By this we have known" – (3:16)
 - iv) "By this we shall know" – (3:19)
 - v) "From this we know" – (4:6)
 - vi) "By this" – (3:10; 4:9, 17)
- f) "Confess"
 - i) *Homologeō* – to say the same thing as another (i.e. to agree with); to concede; to declare; to profess.
 - ii) 26x in the NT; 5x in 1 John (1:9; 2:23; 4:2, 3, 15)
 - iii) Confession is more than recognition of identity, but a profession of faith in Him 'openly and boldly' as the incarnate Lord. (Westcott)
 - iv) Even evil/unclean spirits recognized Jesus's deity, but they did not acknowledge Him. (Mark 1:24; 3:11; 5:7-8; cf Acts 19:15)
- g) "Has come"
 - i) Perfect tense – past event with on-going effects
 - ii) Seems to emphasize that the flesh assumed in the incarnation has become His permanent possession.
 - iii) Cf. present tense in 2 John 7

- h) What is meant by “Jesus Christ in flesh having come”, the literal wording? (The following are allowed grammatically. Which best fits the context?)
- i) ‘Jesus Christ come in the flesh’ – that is, Jesus Christ, the one who has come in the flesh (Comprehensive construction, as per Brooke)
 - ii) ‘Jesus Christ’ as ‘come in the flesh’ (Hiebert? and Kistemaker?)
 - (1) The combination ‘Jesus Christ’ is used together 8x in John’s epistles, six of these times in 1 John (1:3; 2:1; 3:23; 4:2; 5:6, 20; 2 John 3, 7). Clearly separated twice (2:22; 5:1) as ‘Jesus is the Christ’. Abiding union of the divine and human in the combination name.
 - (2) According to Findlay, probably not, because He is not called Jesus until after the incarnation.)
 - iii) ‘Jesus’ as ‘Christ come in the flesh’ (that is, ‘the Christ incarnate’, as supported by Moffatt and Stott)
 - (1) Consistent with ‘Jesus’ alone (i.e. without ‘Christ’) in verse 3, which is the immediate context.
 - (2) ‘Jesus’ used with ‘Son’ (and without ‘Christ’) 3x in John’s epistles (1:7; 4:15; 5:5).
 - iv) I support this last interpretation. (In all cases above the critical teaching is that the man Jesus is also the divine Christ. According to Hiebert, this is a rejection of the Jewish claim that the human Jesus was not the promised Messiah.)
- i) “In”
- i) Precise wording to repudiate the contemporary view of Cerinthian Gnosticism that the Christ spirit descended upon the man Jesus at his baptism and withdrew from him before his death. Christ did not come ‘into’ the flesh of Jesus, but Jesus was the Christ come ‘in’ the flesh. The two are to be identified. (Stott)
 - ii) Similarly, this thwarts Docetic Gnosticism, which maintained that Jesus Christ only had the phantom appearance of a man. (Hiebert)
- j) “Every . . . and every”
- i) Two categories only
 - (1) Every spirit that confesses that Jesus....
 - (2) Every spirit that does not confess Jesus
 - ii) This test is comprehensive. It accounts for all spirits in each category. There is no spirit which is left out.
 - iii) Failure to confess is essential for a complete picture. It’s not okay just to sound fine – one must confess Jesus.
 - iv) This is not a contrast between belief and unbelief. Instead it is a contrast between belief in Jesus and heretical beliefs.
- k) “Christ is come in the flesh” (3)
- i) These words are in verse 2.
 - ii) The better manuscripts omit these words in verse 3. There are no less than five variant manuscripts for verse 3. This negative full restatement is a scribal expansion.
- l) “Spirit of the antichrist”
- i) “Spirit” is not actually expressed in the Greek.

- ii) Literally, “and this is that of antichrist”
- iii) The omission of the word “spirit” “gives greater breadth to the thought, so that the words include the many spirits, the many forces, which reveal the action of antichrist.” (Westcott)
- m) “Of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world”
 - i) “You have heard” – perfect tense, indicates these were part of the regular Christian teaching concerning the future.
 - ii) “it is coming” – frequently used of the historical coming of Jesus Christ; likewise, the coming of the spirit of antichrist, operating through many antichrists, is also a historical reality. (Hiebert)
 - iii) “the world” – estranged from and antagonistic to God and His truth
 - iv) “now” – positioned at the beginning of the statement, underlines the active presence of this evil power as John writes.
 - v) “already” – positioned at the end of the statement for emphasis, suggests that “the prophecy found fulfillment before the Church had looked for it” (Westcott) and “implies that a fuller and more vicious manifestation of this spirit of rebellion against Christ await the coming of the eschatological Antichrist” (Hiebert)
- n) The focus on Christ
 - i) In 1 John, ‘Jesus’ is always with wording to show He is more than mere man. (See above for all 12 occurrences of ‘Jesus’ in 1 John.)
 - ii) “Comparing the two passages, ii. 18-23 and iv. 1-3, it is instructive to observe the difference of emphasis. In chapter [2] John teaches that on our confession or denial of the Son depends whether we possess the Father or not, while in chapter [4] he says that on our confession or denial of the Son depends whether we are inspired by the Spirit or not. The Person of Christ is central. No system can be tolerated, however loud its claims or learned its adherents, if it denies that Jesus is the Christ come in the flesh, that is, if it denies either His eternal deity or His historical humanity. Its teachers are false prophets and its origin is the spirit of antichrist. Those who deny the Son have neither the Father nor the Spirit.” (Stott)
- o) What other observations do you see? (Words, grammar, construction, history, content, etc.)

2) Interpretation

By the following test we add to our knowledge and ability to discern the teachers who are influenced by the Holy Spirit of God: each and every teacher who professes that Jesus is the Christ Which has come in the human flesh, and ever remains in that human flesh, is from God.

And each and every teacher who does not openly and boldly profess this truth about Jesus is not from God. And this the spirit of antichrist, revealed by these teachers and forces which he controls. You have heard in your regular teachings that this passive and active denial of Jesus Christ is going to be a historical reality. Indeed, at the present time this evil is active in the world which is estranged from and antagonistic

to God. Moreover, a fuller manifestation of rebellion against Jesus Christ is still to come.

3) Applications

- a) If evil spirits know who Jesus is, but yet do not confess him (Mark 1:24; 3:11; 5:7-8; cf Acts 19:15), what does that teach us about how we should profess/confess Jesus?
- b) Sometimes it is not what a teacher says, but what the teacher does not say that indicates what spirit is behind him/her. List an example of a spiritual teacher who doesn't say anything blatantly wrong, but does not profess Jesus as Christ either.
- c) Is the influence in this world from evil spirits going to decrease or increase as we approach the end times? What should be our tangible response to that in deed and truth?