

INTRODUCTION

Children are blessings from God. Parenting is an exciting journey that is full of challenges. A sister once advised me to cherish every moment with my kids. Before long I may have to beg them to visit home over holidays. I am sure as parents look back by the time their children leave home, they feel that every moment the family spent together is well worth it. Most of us Chinese parents may find a tension between our traditional versus Western parenting style. Some parents always look at their sons and daughters as kids no matter how old they are. A Chinese pastor commented that we Chinese raise a child, but Americans raise a person. Once the pastor was invited to preach at the home church where his mom attends. After the service, some coworkers treated him and his mom for lunch. When the food was served, the mother reminded her son in front of everyone: “Don’t eat the chicken skin. It is too greasy.” She needs to try some genuine southern fried chicken! Then as they walked out of the restaurant the mom told her son: “Watch out for cars when you cross the street.” The pastor thanked her, then he added: “Ma, you don’t need to tell me that again. I’m a grandpa myself already!” That may be how your parents raised you, or even how you treat your children. In comparison, how does our Heavenly Father deal with us? He did not just drop the Bible from the sky, then said us: “Okay, now you are saved. From now on you are on your own.” Neither does God put us in a greenhouse and shields us from harm or puts us on a leash to make sure that we will not wander too far. God gives us the Holy Spirit to help us understand the truth and to guide us in the right path. We live in a fallen world that overflows with temptations and sins. Satan tries every trick to lead us astray. Only by relying on the Holy Spirit can we withstand the deception of falsehood.

In this passage John told us that there are two kinds of spirit at work in our world – the spirit of the antichrist and the Spirit of God. It will be helpful for us to compare the characteristics of the two spirits. I put the information in a table on the screen.

Features	Spirit of the Antichrist	Spirit of God
Origin	From Satan	From God
Test	Does not acknowledge that Jesus came in the flesh	Acknowledges that Jesus came in the flesh
Power	Limited	Mighty
Concern	Things of the world	Things of God
Reaction	Rejects the truth	Upholds the truth
Content	Falsehood	Truth

As children of God, we need to watch out for the false teaching from the spirit of the antichrist. How can we distinguish right from wrong? John told us that there are two tests to verify a teacher. If you compare verses 2 and 6, John used almost identical wordings to summarize the intended results of the two tests: “This is how you can (we) recognize the Spirit of God (truth).” First, does the teacher believe that Jesus Christ was born into flesh? Second, does he abide by the Biblical truth?

EXPLANATION

1. Admit Jesus' Incarnation 承認耶穌成了肉身

The first test to validate if any lesson you hear is based on the truth is this: does the teacher admit Jesus' incarnation? The word "incarnation" refers to the process through which God became a man. A person believes in the doctrine of incarnation professes that Jesus was born into the world through the womb of Mary to become a 100% man. Why is this doctrine so critical? Do you still remember the belief system of Gnosticism we mentioned when we began the study of 1 John? This school of thoughts teaches that Jesus did not come as a human. Believers of Gnosticism were affected by Greek philosophy. They thought that the soul is pure but the body is evil. Therefore, it was unthinkable to them that God would take up a human body and become a person. However, in this letter John testified from his personal experience that Jesus was a real person whom he had heard, seen, looked at and touched (1:1). If Jesus had not come as a man, He could not have died on the cross. If there was no physical death, there was no resurrection. If Jesus had not resurrected then there was no solution for sin. We only live with an empty dream that Jesus can wash away our sins and we can have eternal life when we put our trust in Him. Can you see the chain of logics here? Therefore, it is important that Jesus came in the flesh. Christians believe that the Christ took on a human body and He was born into our world as Jesus in the history. **Hebrews 2:14** says: Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death - that is, the devil. Since God is all powerful, He could have uttered a word and granted forgiveness to everyone. But the Heavenly Father sent His Son Jesus to become a man to substitute us for the penalty of sin. John told us if a teacher does not admit the incarnation of Jesus, then his/her teaching comes from the spirit of the antichrists. When used in its plural form, the antichrists are false teachers who deviate from the truth. Back in chapter 2, John told us the antichrists proclaim that Jesus is not the Christ, meaning that Jesus is not God. Here, John said that it is the spirit of the antichrists leads people to reject that Jesus was a man. We mentioned before that the Mormon Church and the Jehovah's Witnesses deny that Jesus is God. They both claim that Jesus was a created being. Then there is a cult called the Church of Christian Science that does not believe in Jesus' incarnation. There is a local chapter of the church here in town. Its believers deny that God has become a person and died on the cross. They believe that the material world is an illusion. There is no sin, no heaven or hell. Even disease and death are illusions. The church advocates prayer for healing. It is not to treat the ailment, but to correct one's mind that leads to the illusion of sickness. Its believers uphold the authority of the Bible, but they completely twisted the meanings in it. The result is a sophisticated sci-fi-like philosophical thinking system. Sadly, there are many followers of crazy schemes like this. A person can only be under the control of the spirit of the antichrist or the Spirit of God. A teacher does not make up an inspirational speech out of nothing. He/she is influenced by one or the other spirit. The spirit of the antichrist is also at work in the hearts of non-believers to hinder them from knowing the truth. Paul said in **2 Corinthians 4:4** that - The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. Your classmate, colleague and relative like to argue about the Christian faith because the spirit of the antichrist sets up a fog screen in their mind. Similarly, a person shows no interest in spiritual matters because the spirit of the antichrist clogs up his/her heart for the truth. Our face may turn red when we engage in a heated-debate with seekers. We wonder why

they are so stubborn. We may feel frustrated, but we should not be surprised. We were just like them before we knew Christ. If it is not because of the mercy of God, no one can be saved. It is God who works inside people's hearts through our effort. We are just messengers of the gospel. Therefore, even before we share the gospel with people, we have to pray for them. We ask the Holy Spirit to open their hearts, eyes and ears to the True Light. We rely on the Holy Spirit for wisdom to articulate the truth. We ask Him for help to point us to the proper Bible verses in our explanation. Whether believers of another religion or atheists, they are bound by the spirit of the antichrist. We cannot accept what they believe, but we can still make friends with them. In fact, there are many things we need to learn from them. People who do not believe in Jesus can often be more compassionate of others' need. We can work together for a food drive or fund drive, as long as the effort will bring benefit to the community, rather than supporting their beliefs. There are some people advocating for merging of different religions, thinking that we ultimately worship the same God. We do not! Based on the Bible no one can be saved if people do not put their trust in Jesus Christ. We can learn from their examples of love, but we should not compromise our faith.

2. Submit to Jesus' Instructions 遵從耶穌所傳教導

Only by relying on the Holy Spirit can we withstand the deception of falsehood. John alerted us to check the source of teaching we come across. We have to know if the teacher admits Jesus' incarnation. Then there is a second test. We have to verify if the teacher submits to Jesus' instructions. John said that the teachers of the fallen world educate about the things of the world. They attract listeners who love to hear about those matters. Whereas, teachers of the truth instruct Jesus' teaching, and they draw students to God's truth. Of course, there are many useful information like health, finance or home improvement. But those knowledges may not foster our spiritual growth. False teaching is not a 21st century thing, it happened in the Bible times too. Listen to Paul's command to his successor in **2 Timothy 4:2-4** – 2 Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction. 3 For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. 4 They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. There are people who only care about the things in this world, and there will be false teachers to meet their appetite. If a person stands in front of a TV camera and proclaims that he is Jesus II then most Christians will know that it is only a monkey show. But Satan is so crafty that he will make up something to distract people's attention away from the things of God. There are people who go to churches to learn flower arrangement or aerobic dance, but they have no interest in Bible study class. I once drove by a church that put up a sign promoting an upcoming "blessing of the animals" event. I was like: "What on earth is that?" I do hope that we do not just talk about things of this world in our church. I pray that God is the center of your life. All that we do should be for the ultimate purpose of glorifying God. Two Fridays ago, after the fellowship meeting, I saw a few brothers chatting in the hallway. They were discussing the teaching of Joel Osteen. He is the pastor of Lakewood Church in Houston, the biggest church in U.S. in terms of worship attendance. I shared my input by referring to an interview Osteen did on Larry King Live aired on June 20, 2005. Let us watch a one-and-a-half-minute video clip of the show. Allow me restate Osteen's answer to the question whether he believes Jesus is the only way to salvation. He said: "... I can't judge somebody's heart. You know? Only God can look at somebody's heart, and so

- I don't know. To me, it's not my business to say, you know, this one is or this one isn't (going to heaven). I just say, here's what the bible teaches and I'm going to put my faith in Christ. And I just I think it's wrong when you go around saying, you're saying you're not going, you're not going, you're not going, because it's not exactly my way." I have no intention to attack the person. But I wonder what he truly believes. Osteen may try to be a nice guy, but at the expense of diluting God's truth. He may encourage a lot of people with his inspirational messages. But if he does not submit to Jesus' instructions and preach the truth without reservation, then he only teaches things of this world. In [Matthew 7:21-23](#) Jesus issued a stern warning about false teachers – 21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" False teachers may do a lot of good things. The key issue is whether they do and say things based on God's truth. Once there was a Jehovah's Witness knocked on my door. As usual, I quoted the Scripture to have a discussion with him. Before he left, I told him: "You are very zealous about what you believe. But I do hope that you will check the Bible clearly. I don't want you to find out that you believe in the wrong thing all your life when it is too late." When seeker friends hear the gospel, they may not like the message. Our purpose is not to offend them or scare them. Our goal is to tell them the truth, and hope that they will make wise decisions. When I go see a doctor, I do not want to hear good news, I expect him to tell me the facts. I have to obey his instructions to get well. There are many people in every church who only like to hear good news. They want to be assured that God loves them no matter what. Contrary to most people think, heaven is not for good people. Eternal life is for people who truly understand that they deserve to go down and they trust that only Jesus can save them. They have to accept God's diagnosis, then seek His treatment to get well.

CONCLUSION

Only by relying on the Holy Spirit can we withstand the deception of falsehood. It is a fallen world out there. When we adhere to God's truth not only can we survive the danger from Satan, we will grow strong in the grace of our Lord. Last week two young sisters were rescued after they survived 44 hours in the wilderness. Eight-year-old Leia and her younger sister Caroline had a little adventure in the 80-acre property their family owns. The problem was they wandered too far off and they could not find the way home. Night fell and they were in the middle of nowhere without food, water and shelter. Soon enough, rain and temperature dropped. Leia knew what to do. The two sisters hid under a bush to keep dry, and they huddled at night to stay warm. They drank from rain water. Leia recalled what she learned from their parents in previous camping trips, and the survival skills she acquired in 4-H programs. 4-H organizes activities for youth development and community support. Leia also remembered her dad told her that he will come find them if the two sisters stay together in one place. They did all the right thing they were taught. Finally, after mobilizing 200 agents and two helicopters, rescuers were able to find the girls by tracing their footprints. Everyone was glad that the ordeal came to a happy ending. As Christians, sometimes we may feel lost in this fallen world. We face temptations every day. There are tensions that entice us to compromise our faith. We can stand firm because the Holy Spirit is inside us to protect us. We can overcome any danger when we recall what our Heavenly Daddy teaches us in His unchanging Word. He will guide us to the way home.