

Two Tests of True Christianity

An Analysis of 1 John

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John's first epistle discusses two tests by which the genuineness of a person's professed commitment to Christ can be evaluated. The first pertains to his beliefs, the second to his actions. These two tests are aptly summarized in the following verse:

3:23 And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.

1. The doctrinal test: "Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God?"

- a. Jesus possessed full humanity. The fact of his humanity was verified by the sensory perception of his disciples. As the eternal Word of God, he was fully God as well.

1:1-3 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; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen [it], and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship [is] with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

- b. The denial of Jesus' identity as the Christ is the supreme lie. There are those who profess to be Christians who will eventually defect because of their denial of Christ.

2:18-19, 22-23 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. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would [no doubt] have continued with us: but [they went out], that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. . . . Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: [(but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also].

- c. A basic test of Christian orthodoxy is an individual's belief concerning Christ's incarnation. To deny that Jesus was God in flesh is to oppose God.

4:1-3 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: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that [spirit] of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

- d. Belief in Jesus as the Son of God is a most basic test of Christian faith.

4:15 Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

- e. Personal regeneration is associated with belief in Jesus' identity as the Christ.

5:1 Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.

- f. The reality of Jesus' humanity was attested to by his physical constitution: His body contained literal blood and water. It is also affirmed by the Holy Spirit. Belief in Jesus' dual character as God and man is the basis for victory over the world.

5:5-6 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? This is he that came by water and blood, [even] Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.

The practical test: "Do you practice love for fellow Christians?"

- a. The genuineness of a person's Christian profession is evidenced by his or her love for others. Hatred is a sign of spiritual darkness. Love, on the other hand, is the fruition of a proper relationship to God and his commandments.

2:4-5, 9-11 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. . . . He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.

- b. Brotherly love is a normal part of the Christian life. Believers should seek to emulate Christ's sacrificial love in their human relationships.

3:10-11, 14-18 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. For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. . . . We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not [his] brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Hereby perceive we the love [of God], because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down [our] lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels [of compassion] from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

- c. Brotherly love is a basic test of genuine Christianity. The Christian should be motivated to love by God's loving atonement for human sin. Though God is invisible, his presence among Christians is made known to the world by their love for one another.

4:7-8, 10-12 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. . . . Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son [to be] the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

- d. Love defines the character of God and that of all who dwell in him.

4:16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

- e. A person's love for the invisible God can only be measured by his or her love for visible men and women.

4:20-21 If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

- f. A believer's love for God is expressed through love for God's children. Loving God, loving fellow men, and obeying God's commandments are an inseparable whole.

5:1-3 Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.