

1 John 4:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:

Analysis

Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God. John provides the christological test for discerning true teaching. "Hereby know ye the Spirit of God" (en toutō ginōskete to pneuma tou theou)—this criterion enables identification of God's Spirit versus false spirits. "Every spirit that confesseth" (pan pneuma ho homologei)—homologeō (όμολογέω) means to confess, acknowledge, or declare publicly. The content matters supremely.

"That Jesus Christ is come in the flesh" (Iēsoun Christon en sarki elēlythota). The perfect participle emphasizes the incarnation's completed reality with continuing significance. "Jesus" (His human name) and "Christ" (Messiah, His divine office) came "in flesh" (en sarki)—genuine human nature. This confession affirms:

1. Jesus's true humanity against docetic denial
2. the incarnation's reality—the eternal Word truly became flesh (John 1:14)
3. Jesus's identity as the Christ, God's anointed Savior.

"Is of God" (ek tou theou estin)—originates from and is consistent with God.

True teaching about Christ's person is foundational. False christology produces false gospel. The incarnation is Christianity's cornerstone—if Christ didn't truly become human, He couldn't truly represent humanity, truly die for sins, or truly redeem us. Denying the incarnation destroys Christianity's foundation. This test

remains relevant—any teaching that diminishes Christ's full deity or full humanity departs from God's truth.

Historical Context

Docetism (from Greek *dokeō*, "to seem") claimed Christ only seemed to have a physical body but wasn't truly human. Gnostics considered matter evil, making God's incarnation in flesh unthinkable. They taught that the divine Christ descended on the human Jesus at baptism and departed before crucifixion, or that Jesus was merely an apparition. John's insistence on Jesus Christ come in flesh directly refuted this heresy.

The early church councils (Nicaea 325, Chalcedon 451) formalized what John taught—Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man, two natures in one person. Every major heresy distorts either Christ's deity (Arianism) or humanity (Docetism, Apollinarianism). John's test—confessing Jesus Christ come in flesh—guards Christianity's central truth against both ancient and modern denials.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does the confession that Jesus Christ came in the flesh guard against both ancient heresies and modern errors about Christ?
2. Why is the incarnation (God truly becoming human) essential to Christianity rather than optional theology?
3. What contemporary teaching diminishes either Christ's true deity or true humanity, failing John's test?

Interlinear Text

ἐν	τούτῳ	γινώσκετε	τὸ	πνεῦμα	τοῦ	Θεοῦ	πᾶν
Hereby	G5129	know ye	G3588	spirit	G3588	God	Every
	G1722	G1097		G4151		G2316	G3956
πνεῦμα	ο	όμολογεῖ	Ἰησοῦν	Χριστὸν	ἐν	σαρκὶ	
spirit	G3739	that confesseth	that Jesus	Christ	Hereby	the flesh	
	G4151	G3670	G2424	G5547	G1722	G4561	
ἐληλυθότα	ἐκ	τοῦ	Θεοῦ	ἐστιν			
is come	of	G3588	God	is			
	G2064	G1537	G2316	G2076			

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 12:3 (Spirit): Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.

John 1:14 (Parallel theme): And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

1 Timothy 3:16 (Spirit): And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

1 John 4:3 (Spirit): 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.

1 John 5:1 (References Jesus): 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.

1 John 2:23 (Parallel theme): Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.

