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October 15th: 2 Kings 6 & 1 John 3:11—4:6

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Elisha, the king of Israel, and the Syrians. Assurance and discernment by the Spirit.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

2 Kings 6. Now the sons of the prophets said to Elisha, See, the place where we dwell under your charge is too small for us. Let us go to the Jordan, and each of us get there a log, and let us make a place for us to dwell there. And he answered, Go.

Then one of them said, Be pleased to go with your servants. And he answered, I will go. So he went with them.

And when they came to the Jordan they cut down trees. But as one was felling a log, his axe head fell into the water. And he cried out, Alas, my master, it was borrowed.

Then the man of God said, Where did it fall? When he showed him the place, he cut off a stick, and threw it in there, and made the iron float. And he said, Take it up. So he reached out his hand and took it.

Once when the king of Syria was warring against Israel, he took counsel with his servants, saying, At such and such a place shall be my camp. But the man of God sent word to the king of Israel, Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Syrians are going down there. And the king of Israel sent to the place about which the man of God told him.

Thus he used to warn him, so that he saved himself there more than once or twice. And the mind of the king of Syria was greatly troubled because of this thing. And he called his servants and said to them, Will you not show me who of us is for the king of Israel? And one of his servants said, None, my lord, O king.

But Elisha the prophet who is in Israel tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom. And he said, Go and see where he is, that I may send and seize him. It was told him, Behold, he is in Dothan.

So he sent there horses and chariots and a great army, and they came by night and surrounded the city. When the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. And the servant said, Alas, my master, what shall we do? He said, Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.

Then Elisha prayed and said, O lord, please open his eyes that he may see. So the lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. And when the Syrians came down against him, Elisha prayed to the lord and said, Please strike this people with blindness.

So he struck them with blindness in accord with the prayer of Elisha. And Elisha said to them, This is not the way, and this is not the city. Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek.

And he led them to Samaria. As soon as they entered Samaria, Elisha said, O lord, open the eyes of these men that they may see. So the lord opened their eyes, and they saw, and behold, they were in the midst of Samaria.

As soon as the king of Israel saw them, he said to Elisha, My father, shall I strike them down? Shall I strike them down? He answered, You shall not strike them down. Would you strike down those whom you have taken captive with your sword and with your bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master. So he prepared for them a great feast.

And when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. And the Syrians did not come again on raids into the land of Israel. Afterward, Ben-Hadad, king of Syria, mustered his entire army and went up and besieged Samaria.

And there was a great famine in Samaria as they besieged it, until the donkey's head

was sold for eighty shekels of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five shekels of silver. Now as the king of Israel was passing by on the wall, a woman cried out to him, saying, Help my lord, O king! And he said, If the lord will not help you, how shall I help you, from the threshing floor or from the winepress? And the king asked her, What is your trouble? She answered, This woman said to me, Give your son, that we may eat him to-day, and we will eat my son to-morrow. So we boiled my son and ate him.

And on the next day I said to her, Give your son, that we may eat him. But she has hidden her son. When the king heard the words of the woman, he tore his clothes.

Now he was passing by on the wall, and the people looked, and behold, he had sackcloth beneath on his body. And he said, May God do so to me, and more also, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat remains on his shoulders to-day. Elisha was sitting in his house, and the elders were sitting with him.

Now the king had dispatched a man from his presence, but before the messenger arrived, Elisha said to the elders, Do you see how this murderer has sent to take off my head? Look, when the messenger comes, shut the door and hold the door fast against him. Is not the sound of his master's feet behind him? And while he was still speaking with them, the messenger came down to him and said, This trouble is from the Lord. Why should I wait for the Lord any longer? Once again in 2 Kings chapter 6, Israel is having trouble with the Syrians.

There are two connected stories in this chapter. In the previous chapter, Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army, had been healed. And now once again we will see the reputation of Elisha and the work of the Lord through him spreading to the court of the king of Syria.

The chapter starts, however, with the miracle of the axe-head raised from the water. Peter Lighthouse and James Jordan suggest a chiasmic, or there-and-back-again structure in chapters 3-7. War with Moab in chapter 3 corresponds with war with Syria in chapters 6 and 7. The provision for the indebted widow at the beginning of chapter 4 parallels with the recovered axe-head at the beginning of chapter 6. The raising of the Shunammite's son in the middle of chapter 4 parallels with the healing of Naaman in chapter 5. And then at the centre is the healing of the stew and the feeding of the hundred men.

Both the stories of the widow whose sons are at risk of being sold into slavery to repay her debt and the man who loses the borrowed axe-head are stories of the redemption of debtors. An iron axe-head would have been a costly item at the time and as he had lost it, the man would be liable to pay the full cost of the property, according to the law of Exodus 22, verses 14-15. If a man borrows anything of his neighbour, and it is injured or dies, the owner not being with it, he shall make full restitution.

If the owner was with it, he shall not make restitution. If it was hired, it came for its hiring fee. The loss of the axe-head is occasioned by a building project for the growing band of the sons of the prophets that surround Elisha.

These are maybe like the disciples that follow Jesus. The prophets are going to get a new dwelling place and they go to the Jordan to get the materials. While cutting down trees, the axe-head falls off.

This is the fourth miracle to occur at the Jordan, in 2 Kings to this point. There are the two crossings of the river in chapter 2 and Naaman goes down into the Jordan and comes up healed of his leprosy in chapter 5. The fact that it is the Jordan might recall the significance of the Jordan as the border of the promised land. The manner of the miracle might recall the events of Exodus chapter 14 and 15, where Israel was taken up out of the waters of the Red Sea, and then the events of Marah that followed in chapter 15 verses 23-25.

When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter, therefore it was named Marah. And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? And he cried to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a log, and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. Elisha's healing of the waters of Jericho in chapter 2 were reminiscent of this event.

But the throwing of wood into water occurring again here is likely noteworthy. Earlier in 1 Kings chapter 8 verse 51, Solomon had described the people as follows, They are your people and your heritage, which you brought out of Egypt from the midst of the iron furnace. The identification of Egypt as the iron furnace is also found in Deuteronomy chapter 4 verse 20 and Jeremiah chapter 11 verse 4. Perhaps this miracle is, among other things, a symbol recalling the Exodus.

Israel was forged as a nation in the iron furnace of Egypt and then taken up out of the waters through the instrumentality of wood, particularly Moses' rod. Lost outside of the land, if the people seek the Lord, the iron axe-head of Israel that has sunk in the waters of the Gentiles in exile can be recovered. This is also the third time that Elisha has performed a miracle by throwing something into liquid.

He healed the waters by throwing salt into the spring. He healed the poisoned pot by throwing flour into it. And now he raises the sunken axe-head by throwing the stick into the waters.

In the second episode in the chapter, the Syrians come on the scene again. The chronology of the events isn't entirely clear. We might be dealing with events quite a number of years later.

Neither the names of the king of Israel or of Syria are given to us. Syria has been raiding

Israel and engaging in small skirmishes. However, the Lord reveals to Elisha what the Syrians have planned and he is able to warn the king of Israel so that he is delivered from the hands of the Syrians on a number of occasions.

The reputation of Elisha has clearly spread widely as one of the servants of the king of Syria knows that Elisha tells the king of Israel the plans of the king of Syria. He sends an army to Dothan, the same place from which Joseph was taken as a slave into Egypt, where he had heard that Elisha is. The servant of Elisha is very afraid when he sees the city surrounded by the Syrian army, but Elisha prays that the Lord will open his eyes.

When they are opened, he sees the mountain filled with the horses and fiery chariots of the Lord, much as Elisha had seen the chariots of fire that had taken Elijah into heaven in chapter 2. While Elijah had considered himself to be the only one left, Elisha has a recognition of the vast forces arrayed on his side of the spiritual conflict. Elisha is the spearhead of the Lord's operations in the land. Elijah and Elisha are like angelic messengers to Israel, and much as the violent Sodomites who sought to take Lartan as his guest in Genesis chapter 19, the Syrians are blinded by the Lord.

This sets up an immediate contrast with the servant of Elisha, who has his eyes opened to perceive what his master sees, and the Syrians who are further blinded so that they lack even physical sight. Their loss of sight is most likely not a complete loss of vision, but rather a bedazzling, so that even though they are still seeing things, they lack perception. In a comic development, Elisha leads the men into the city of Samaria, where their eyes are opened to recognise their predicament.

However, Elisha forbids the king from striking them down, instructing the king to provide a meal for them instead, treating them as subdued captives rather than as active enemies. Elisha leads the king to treat the Syrians with mercy and kindness, in a way that might remind us of the Apostle Paul's teaching in Romans chapter 12, verses 19-21. This is not the first time that Elisha has shown kindness to the Syrians, of course.

He was involved in the healing of Naaman, a commander of their army, in the preceding chapter. Now, on his instruction, a Syrian army is shown great mercy. They had intended to capture him, but he took them captive and brought them to the king of Israel, only to set them free again.

As a result, they do not raid the land again for some time. The story of Elisha's mercy to the Syrian army has a sequel, though. Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria, musters his entire army and besieges Samaria, and there is also a great famine.

It is so serious that unclean donkey's heads are being sold for a great price for food, and people are even buying dove's dung in a desperate search for it. As the king, likely Jehoram at this time, is walking on the wall, a woman calls out to him for help. The king declares his own powerlessness in response, but asks the woman concerning her trouble.

She wants him to judge between her and another woman, with whom she has made a pact to eat their two sons. However, after the woman asking for help had given her son to be eaten with the other woman, the other woman hid her own son so that he could not be eaten. This is a twisted version of the case judged by Solomon in 1 Kings 3, verses 16-28, where Solomon judged between the two prostitutes, the one with the dead and the other with a living child.

It might also recall the petition of the Shunammite woman to Elisha concerning her dead son. In contrast to Elisha, however, the king of Israel lacks any power to help. Perhaps we are also to see here some premonition of what will befall Israel and Judah.

The Amorites of Israel have two great murderous women, Jezebel the Sidonian wife of Ahab and Athaliah the granddaughter of Amasai. Athaliah is the murderous mother of Israel, who tries to consume the sons of David, killing all of the royal family of Judah, save for Joash who is hidden away by Jehoshabab his aunt in chapter 11. Like the cannibal mother of this chapter, in the marriage of Athaliah to Jehoram of Judah, the two kingdoms as two women had joined together in a child-consuming pact.

In 1 Kings chapter 3, the two nations that would arise from the divided kingdom could be seen in the symbol of the two prostitutes, one who did not care for the seed and the other who protected the seed. Once again we see two women struggling over the seed. The woman who repents of her cannibalism of the seed and protects her own child from the cannibal mother might be seen as Judah after the restoration of its kingdom under Joash.

We might further note that this is a fulfillment of one of the curses of the covenant from Deuteronomy chapter 28 verses 52-57. They shall besiege you in all your towns until your high and fortified walls in which you trusted come down throughout all your land. And they shall besiege you in all your towns throughout all your land, which the Lord your God has given you.

And you shall eat the fruit of your womb, the flesh of your sons and daughters, whom the Lord your God has given you, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemies shall distress you. The man who is the most tender and refined among you will begrudge food to his brother, to the wife he embraces, and to the last of the children whom he has left, so that he will not give to any of them any of the flesh of his children whom he is eating, because he has nothing left in the siege and in the distress with which your enemy shall distress you in all your towns. The most tender and refined woman among you, who would not venture to set the sole of her foot on the ground because she is so delicate and tender, will begrudge to the husband she embraces, to her son and to her daughter, her afterbirth that comes from between her feet, and her children whom she bears, because lacking everything she will eat them secretly, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemy shall distress you in your towns.

This is pretty far down the list of curses that have already come upon the Northern Kingdom. It is swiftly running out of opportunities and will eventually face the ruin of exile for its sins. The king vents his anger at Elisha.

Elisha had spared the Syrian army earlier in the chapter, and now the army has come back to destroy them. Like the king of Syria had done earlier in the chapter, the king of Israel sends men to take Elisha. However, knowing the intent of the king, Elisha gets the men with him to bar the door against the messenger of the king.

There were resemblances to the protection of the angels from the men of Sodom in Genesis chapter 19 earlier in the chapter, where the Syrians were bedazzled, like the men of Sodom. And now we might see further resemblances, as a door has to be guarded against people trying to take a messenger of the Lord from inside. At this point the king arrives on the scene.

He expresses his anger and his despair at the situation. The Lord had brought this disaster upon the people. While the righteous waited upon the Lord in their distress, trusting him to deliver them, the king sees no point in doing so any longer.

The Lord is their enemy, and he will wait for the Lord no longer. The chapter ends on a cliffhanger. A question to consider.

How should the king of Israel have responded to this situation? 1 John chapter 3 verse 11 to chapter 4 verse 6 Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, that he lay down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth.

By this we shall know that we are of the truth, and reassure our heart before him. For whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God, and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.

And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as he has commanded us. Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him, and by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us. Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

By this you know the Spirit of God. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you heard was coming, and now is in the world already.

Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are from the world, therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God.

Whoever knows God listens to us, whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error. To this point in 1 John chapter 3, John has been characterising the righteous, setting them over against those given to sin, rebelliousness, and those who belong to the devil.

Now he continues, expressing the opposition between the righteous and the wicked in terms of the contrast between Cain and Abel. Verse 11 connects with what has gone beforehand, with its reference to lack of love for one's brother as a sign of being a child of the devil. Once again, as he has done at several points already in the Epistle, he recalls the teaching of Christ concerning love for the brethren.

In John chapter 13 verses 34-35, A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

And John 15 verse 12, This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. In the contrast between Cain and Abel that he proceeds to draw, John is continuing to draw upon the teaching of Jesus recorded in his Gospel. John chapter 8 verse 44, You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires.

He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar, and the father of lies. The devil was a murderer from the beginning, and Cain was of him.

The motivation for Cain's murder of Abel was the fundamental hostility between the righteous and the wicked. Cain's deeds were evil, and Abel's were righteous. Abel's sacrifice was accepted, while Cain's was rejected.

Cain was angry to be rejected, seemingly regarding his sacrifice as a means of getting his way with God, rather than as a genuine offering. The wicked hate the righteous because the deeds of the righteous reveal the true character of their deeds and their character. The wicked don't merely kill the righteous because they are spurred by their own wickedness, but because they are implacably hostile to those who do good.

By contrasting love for each other with murdering our brothers, we might perhaps think that John is grossly exaggerating for rhetorical impact. However, we should here recall Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5, verses 21-24. You have heard that it was said to those of old, You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.

But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment,

whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council, and whoever says, You fool, will be liable to the hell of fire. So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Just as Jesus does in the Sermon on the Mount, John traces murder back to its roots in the heart, showing that it springs up from hatred towards one's brother. God does the same thing in Genesis chapter 4 when he challenges Cain before his anger, envy and hatred towards Abel has borne the fruit of his act of murder. In verses 6 and 7 of that chapter, the Lord said to Cain, Why are you angry? and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door, its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.

Recognizing the deep hostility that the wicked feel towards the righteous, John's hearers should not be at all surprised that they are experiencing the hatred of the world. The example of Cain and Abel serve to suggest that the enmity of the wicked towards the righteous has been there from the very beginning. This is not a new thing, and Christians should not be surprised to face it.

When they experience it, they should know that they stand in the long history of enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. None of us start off in the realm of life. We must pass out of death into life.

An assurance that this has occurred is experienced as we live and act in love towards the brothers. This love is the fruit of the transition, and it is also in this practice that we are assured that the transition has taken place. The assurance is not necessarily known as we stand back and look at our works, but rather as we live in love towards God and our brothers.

We can often think of assurance as if it were strong knowledge of an objective truth, rather than as knowledge of a relational reality, which is not caught in the objective-subjective opposition that many approaches to assurance are. You do not know that you have a loving relationship with someone generally by standing back and scrutinising your heart, nor by abstracting yourself from the relationship and examining its objective character in a detached manner. Rather, you best know that you have a loving and healthy relationship with them as you live in loving communion with them.

The same is true of our relationship with God. Assurance is a knowledge that is largely gained indirectly as we live in love towards God and our neighbour. The person who does not love has not made the transition from life to death.

Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer. He may not yet have killed his brother, but the sin of murder, the seed of his father the devil, has taken deep root in his heart. The true pattern of love is provided by Christ himself.

As Jesus teaches his disciples in John 15 verse 12, this is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. Paul spoke of Christ's love as the fullest expression of love back in Romans 5 verses 6-8.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly, for one will scarcely die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die. But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. We must follow this pattern of love in the way that we treat our brothers.

The contrast here is a pronounced one. On the one hand, there is the taking of the life of our brother, whether in the ultimate act of murder, or in all the little, multiple lesser ways that we assault them, undermining their relationships, their property, their reputations, or the way in which we live in envy towards them. On the other hand, there is laying down our life for our brother, whether in the ultimate sacrifice, or in the many ways in which, in love, we privilege their concerns over our own.

True love is necessarily evidenced in deeds. For instance, if we see our brother in need, and we have what he requires for his assistance, but we still do nothing, we lack any evidence for the love of God dwelling in us. Like James, John wants his heroes to be in no doubt that love is not merely a matter of fine words, it must be embodied in deeds of love.

When we have assurance, we will be able to approach God with confidence in prayer. There will, however, be times when we feel our hearts condemn us, and John wants us to know how to respond well when this occurs. Particularly for those who suffer with scrupulosity, with an obsessive conscience that constantly accuses them of various infractions, it is very important to find some way to set their hearts and their minds at rest.

We have limited knowledge of our own hearts, and we should be wary of placing too much weight on their judgements. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 4, verses 3-5, But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself, for I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted.

It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness, and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

We should not allow the accusations of our weak consciences to prevent us from approaching God. Rather, we should seek the forgiveness that He has promised and commit ourselves to the way of love, finding assurance as we are taken out of ourselves

and into relationship with the God who is so much greater than our accusing hearts, a God to whom we can confidently entrust ourselves. Where we do have confidence before God, we will find that our prayers will be much more effective.

As we are conformed to the character of Christ, our prayers will also be conformed to God's will, and we will receive surprising answers. If we constantly hesitate in approaching God with the accusations of conscience, we will be stunted in our growth, and John wants us to avoid this. But if we press our accusing consciences notwithstanding into ever more committed appeal to God our Father, the more we do this, the more our hearts will be set at rest, and the more that our prayers will be effective.

In his farewell discourse in John's Gospel, Jesus had taught his disciples about love for each other as his commandment to them. This commandment is the one new commandment, personally embodied in Christ himself, which sums up all of the other commandments. Keeping this one command not only sums up but also includes all of the other commandments.

In keeping this commandment, we will keep all of the others. In verse 24 he moves from the singular commandment to the plural commandments, perhaps to underline this relationship between plurality and singularity. This is how we are to abide in Christ.

Once again this is reminiscent of John 15 9-14 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

You are my friends, if you do what I command you. How do we know that God abides in us? By the spirit that he has given us, the spirit that Jesus promised to his disciples in the farewell discourse. Once again, we should not presume this to mean that we know that he abides in us by being able to point directly to the spirit in our lives and say, there, God dwells in me.

No, the spirit blows where he wishes, although we see his effects. The assurance comes through the spirit's work within us. The spirit will lead us to call out to God as Father.

The spirit will lead us to love our brothers. The spirit will produce in us a spirit of prayer. The spirit will lead us to long for God's promised future.

We almost certainly won't be able to point to the spirit doing this in our lives, but the effect in our lives will be such that we will be assured of our fellowship with God. As he works in us, this confidence will be a result. Love, assurance and discernment have all

been important themes in John's epistle to this point, and the theme of discernment, previously discussed in chapter 2 verses 18-27, reappears in chapter 4 verses 1-6.

The spirit grants us love, but the spirit also grants us discernment, in chapter 2 verses 20-21. But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. I write to you not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth.

And in verses 26 and 27 of that chapter, I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. But the anointing that you receive from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him.

Love and discernment belong together. Looking back at John's teaching about love, it should be clear that it is also teaching about discernment, about recognising what belongs to the truth and to God through the criterion of love, as that in which all the commandments in their particularity are consummated. Jesus had warned his disciples about false prophets back in the Olivet Discourse, in Matthew 24 verses 9-13.

Then they will deliver you up to tribulation, and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another, and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise, and lead many astray.

And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold, but the one who endures to the end will be saved. Just as there had been false prophets in the last days of Judah, so there would be false prophets in the days before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The faithful needed to be prepared, and to be able to discern between what was true and what was false.

Lying spirits had gone forth. People were sent strong delusion, and were believing lies because they hated the truth. A key test would be found in the knowledge that the true Spirit of God bore witness to Christ, as Jesus had taught in John 15 verse 26.

But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. The truth of Christ, as the Incarnate Son and Messiah, was a powerful touchstone for testing and identifying spirits and recognizing the true Spirit of God. False spirits do not bear witness to Christ, but to some other thing that will usurp his place.

If we want to be able to discern the true Spirit of God, testimony to Christ is the watermark. In contrast to the true Spirit's testimony, the testimony of false prophets was inspired by the world, and heard by the world. The true people of God, however, would be known in the fact that they hear their Lord's word as he had taught in John 10 verses 2-5.

But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out.

When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers. A question to consider, what are some of the ways in which the fact that the Spirit bears witness to Christ enables us to discern what is truly of the Spirit of God, and what is counterfeit?