

Father God, we are very, very appreciative to be here this morning in your presence, in the house that you have built in our hearts, in fellowship with one another, bound together as brother and sister by the power of God's Holy Spirit. We are grateful as we turn our eyes upward toward you and seek your wisdom and your power as we sing this morning, worship you this morning in song and in prayer, as we go into your word this morning and discern who you are and how that is reflected in who we are. Lord, we pray that you would take your rightful place as the teacher and the pastor of this church. As you do for your church universal, may your name be praised this and every day. And it's in your name, dear Jesus, that we pray. Amen. We are moving through the first letter of John, as we call it, beginning in chapter 4 today, talking about some things that are very necessary to talk about in today's world. If you know, and we just a refresher here regarding John, he understands, and I do believe that God's Holy Spirit included the works of John, if you will, in our canon, because he brings that spiritual perspective, if you will. His focus is on the spiritual power of God. His focus is on the fact that we are, at our core, spiritual reflections of God. Right? When he talks about God, he speaks of God's attributes and then they stem from the fact that he is love, that he is truth, that he is the way. All of those things are not tangible things. He's speaking of God's attributes as God presents the power, his power and who he is spiritually to us. And then by his power, we are able to discern right from wrong, truth from falsity, good from evil, all of those things. He really wants the church, the church. That's why it's in our canon, the church, to understand, as I said, the building is awesome. And I do believe in church buildings. You know that. But you know, I don't need a building. I am the church and people are the church. Yeah, it's true. But those people who are the church need a place to gather. Then we're called to gather so that we can share the gospel with one another, have those conversations, share the fruits of our labor, talk with one another, pray with one another, all of those things. And we call it kirta, a building, a church. So we're all about church. But he wants us to understand that the cornerstone of any church, whether it's meeting in an elementary school or in a 191 year old facility, I guess the facility is not 191 years old. The church is, though. We started down the road, boys. Discerning truth from error. I don't want to teach you something that's not right. You can smile. That was... You've got to give me a few moments to get warmed up here. I'm still envisioning St. Mark's and all my visits. So I'm not here, I'm present. No, but and so that's what we've been talking about with John. And he pounced that home time and time and time and time again, that the cornerstone of any human being is the power of God's Holy Spirit through your salvation that comes through your repentance. And the cornerstone of any gathering of the brethren is, you guessed it, God's Holy Spirit that comes through the repentance and comes to the salvation of those who are gathered. And as that collective power of the Holy Spirit, if you will, gets together, we can discern truth from error. We can go into God's word, pray over and find out how, as I mentioned before, he is reflecting himself to us. Thus, we can learn more about ourselves. And who we are as his children, who we are as men and women, who we are as couples, who we are as parents, who we are as children of the blind. John wants us to understand this. So I'm going to read this passage, verses one through six, because it is especially relevant today as under the dome of Christendom, you have an Orthodox church, which is very much in the minority. And underneath the dome of those who believe in God, Orthodox Christendom is now becoming in the minority, and within that Orthodox Christianity is but a sliver of the main religions, if you will, in the world today. John speaks to this. "Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the Spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world. This is how we know if they have the Spirit of God. If a person claiming to be a prophet acknowledges that Jesus Christ came in a real body, that person has the Spirit of God. But if someone claims to be a prophet and does not acknowledge the truth about Jesus, that person is not from God. Such a person has the Spirit of the Antichrist, which you heard is coming into the world and indeed is already here. But you belong to God, my dear children. You have already won a victory over those people because the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the Spirit who lives in the world." Those people belong to this world, so they speak from the world's viewpoint, and

the world listens to them. But we belong to God, and those who know God listen to us. If they do not belong to God, they do not listen to us. That is how we know if someone has the Spirit of truth or the Spirit of deception. We may get stuck on that scripture, that opening six verses this morning, and because there's a lot there to be said that is misunderstood by the church. We think, "Oh, okay, you believe in Jesus, great!" I just want you to know Satan believes in Jesus. And so we'll take it from there. It's a great message. Let me go down a little rabbit trail here because you all know the news and you see all the politics and you see all the nastiness and all the everything, right? That everybody's supposed to be, "I'm supposed to hate you and you're supposed to hate me and this group over here and that group over there and these people and that people." And we're all supposed to be all pitted against each other and we're all going to work it out. "I got the power, I want the power, I got money, you got money." God is marching on and Satan is laughing all the way as he drags souls to hell who are so concerned about worldly things. We're going to talk about that. Again, not that we do not exercise discernment, educate ourselves, and perform our civic duties. But God's, He's in all of history at all times. His plan will be fulfilled. Have you read the Old Testament? It's messed up people in a messed up world. And God's plan marched all the way through it to Calvary. And from Calvary we march all the way on to the fulfillment of the prophecy. So that's a great message for today. Not to mention the idea of the spiritual warfare. Because ultimately that's what it is. Get involved with something other than a relationship with God. Anything. Please, Satan says, I don't care if you miss your salvation by a millimeter or by five miles, I don't care. As long as you miss it. Make politics your religion, make money your religion, make your business your religion. Make collecting men or women along the way your religion. Do whatever. Miss your salvation, he says. That's why I'm talking about the core of the gospel, which John gets to immediately, every time he writes. Get your eyes where they belong, on Jesus. Open your heart to the very power, spiritual power of God. And we throw that around all the time. As Christians, we talk about that and perhaps we talk about it too lightly or too glibly where we don't truly grasp the idea that all battles, all actions, all is spiritual in nature. We are created as God's special creation to partner with him in this management of this earth, to walk with him. And those who persevere to the end will be saved in the ancient economy. So yeah, that really struck me, what you saw, and I've heard it some hundred times, I don't know if it does. But it's important and this goes right back to what he's saying. I want to go back to the opening scriptures that we get, Brian. "Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the Spirit they have comes from God." This is a powerful statement because by the implication of this statement is the fact that there are other spiritual forces at work. In the world and very much would like to work within you. Now the power of God is the power of his Holy Spirit dwelling within you. We have that, him, the Spirit of truth, the fruit of the Spirit, all of the things necessary to discern if what somebody else is saying is of the Spirit of God. We have God's word. Here's a point to consider. God will never contradict himself. We have his reflection right here. Who is God? Read your Bible. It's all about him and he will not contradict himself. So when you hear some internet preachers say, "I was taken by the Spirit last night and held in the arms of Jesus and what he wanted to tell me was he asked me for my forgiveness." For what? You hear crazy things all the time from people who are claiming to be speaking of the Spirit of God and they're obviously not because what they're saying contradicts the word of God. This is the core element of a Christian that we can completely depend upon. Is it of God? Let's check. Or are you following or listening to or are you a person claiming to speak for God as a prophet, saying things that only exclusively were said to you by God, trying to get people to believe you and this amazing special power that you have. These are the points of discernment when we're listening to teachers and we're listening to people preaching and teaching the word of God that we should listen for. The equation generally works this way. Sometimes this is what you hear in deceitful teaching. Again, I received the word for you from God this morning and I want to share this with you. I was taken by the Spirit last evening before the service this morning and God shared with me this and he wants me to share with you. That's a very modern approach and you see that all of the time but the equation usually should work this way. You're thinking about something and it is

affirmed by others who are in the Spirit as well. So that can go for preaching. If my preaching comes supposedly from the word of God, but I say I understand what John said, but God told me this, you should run from me. But if my preaching comes from the word of God and you're in the Spirit of God, you feel that spirit of affirmation in your soul. A little conviction. Where does that come from? You understand that there is a spiritual power when you're speaking truth about God. As opposed to being entertained by somebody who's claiming to say this, that, or the other thing or have these powers, etc. So we talk about do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the Spirit they have comes from God. First test is what they are speaking congruent with the word of God. Is it consistent with the word of God or does it go against the word of God and the character of God and the attributes of God and who God is? The second aspect is authentic fruit of the Spirit. One of which will not be wanting to lie to you. Or make something up to make me feel or make me appear to have some sort of special connection with God that you as a follower of Christ don't because it doesn't work that way. So I will say you follow me, listen to my teaching because I have a special anointing and I am speaking these words directly from God for you. Get out from under that teaching. So then one of the genuine fruits of the Spirit is not going to be a spirit of deceitfulness to try to manipulate you. It's going to be the spirit of truth because we know that Jesus Christ is truth. So you can discern truth from false, falsity. You can discern shall we say that spirit of deceitfulness from God's spirit of truth. There are many false prophets in the world this is how we know if they have the Spirit of God. If a person claiming to be a prophet which is a person who is speaking the word of God so it's not the office of prophet. This prophet the term here is being used generally speaking. You're speaking the word of God you are prophesying the word of God. When you talk about prophesying in church it's not necessarily telling the future. It is speaking the word of God. So there are two different levels of that word at work in scripture. Claiming to be a prophet acknowledges that Jesus Christ came in a real body that person that person has the Spirit of God. This is a super powerful statement and that's why I got stuck on the opening scripture this morning. Because I began to think through the study of this the biggest heresy as John was writing this is that Jesus Christ was not fully human. And that is a derivation if you will from the old testament teaching when God when we have an epiphany of God right he comes we hear about the word of God resting on a person. We hear about the Spirit of God coming into a person. We see God appearing as a man Abraham Jacob etc. But he has not been incarnate. He made himself to appear such and so that is like well Jesus is just another one of those right. It's called an eschatological inbreeding of God. He comes down to earth. No Jesus is different. He's fully human born of a woman fully divine with a holy divine nature. So the biggest heresy in his day was that Jesus was not fully human and that it seems to be a natural teaching coming from the old testament and the way that God would present when he chose to be with his people right smoke and fire and hear all the different ways that he chose to be with his people but he never became incarnate as a human. Today what's interesting is the greatest heresies are that Jesus Christ is not God. So the heresy from John is like yeah he's God he's God he's God appearing to us. Today the heresy is that he's not God. He's just a man or a man appointed by God and anointed by God. If you're a Jehovah's Witness you don't believe that Jesus Christ is God. If you're a Mormon you believe that he is a God just like you. If you're a Muslim you believe that he's just a man a prophet anointed by God with great prophetic words but it's certainly not God. I just found that interesting that we always say the more things change the more they stay the same and this has flipped over now to meet our modern world. I want to throw the name of Jesus Christ around and get people under this dome of Christendom using the name of Jesus Christ because there is power in the name of Jesus Christ but I am not going to teach you what John says the truth about Jesus Christ and who he is. I'm going to make something else up so that I can be the one who says I know you think you know about Jesus but let me tell you this. Or really I know we have this word of God but and we go off and we find golden tablets or we find etchings in caves or we supposedly do this or supposedly do that and then we begin this heretical teaching of who Jesus is. That's why I said under the dome of Christendom you will find the great heretical religions that claim to be followers of Jesus but do not know Jesus nor

do they teach the truth about Jesus but they want the name of Jesus and we need to be very careful about that. We learned this that person claims to be a prophet verse three and does not acknowledge the truth about Jesus. What is the truth about Jesus? Read over these words. You know the truth about Jesus. That he was conceived in Mary's womb and born of a woman. That he is was fully human fully divine as he walked the face of this planet and now he is in this his glorified state. The first of all who will rise in the name of Jesus. The truth is that he lived the perfect life died as an atonement for your sin and was bodily resurrected. You cannot be bodily resurrected if you don't have a body. If you're not fully human. We know the truth about Jesus and what I'm saying is that Orthodox Christianity is getting slimmer and slimmer and slimmer and slimmer because that story just doesn't seem to be the modern narrative that everybody wants. We want deliverance, healing, signs and wonders, miracles. We want anything other to distract us from simple faith that Christ lived, Christ died, Christ rose again. Is your faith enough that Christ lived, Christ died, Christ rose again? Or do you need me to stand here and profess to you that I am some miracle worker, miracle healer, whatever the case may be? Do you need clouds of glory to fill the sanctuary? Do you need or do you have, you just want what you have, Jesus Christ and God's Holy Spirit within you? John is powerfully talking, so he's speaking into the lives of followers of Jesus and he's saying those who know the truth of Jesus are of God. Those who have the Spirit of God are of God and those of God are able to tell those who are not of God. Why? Because you have the Spirit of truth within you. I hope that that makes sense. You come to repentance through the word of God, you are saved by the power of God, you are indwelt by the power of God's Holy Spirit. This opens a world to you, expands your world into seeing truth and error and in believing truth over error and asking the question for all of these false prophets of which John is speaking 2,000 years ago and of which I am speaking today, is your faith in Jesus enough? Do you have to have more? And he says people who, verse four, "but you belong to God my dear children, you've already won a victory over those people because the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the Spirit who lives in the world. You will always be able to tell the difference because of God, because of the Spirit of truth." Those people belong to this world so they speak from the world's viewpoint and the world listens to them. You want to fill up a stadium in the name of Jesus Christ? Say something, right? It's Brian's Christian revival and then go and tell people anything that they want to hear. Tell them anything but the truth about Jesus. Tell them all of the worldly things that they can have, all of the worldly things that they can do. Tell them all of the things that are that you are powerful and you thought you were awesome before you got here today but with God you can be even more awesome. Now go get them champs and everybody whoo! And yell, "Yes! I got this amazing pep talk from this amazing speaker today. I don't know Jesus and I'm going to hell." The more things change the more they stay the same. There's not even any fruit of the Spirit in that person who's filling the stadium because that person's only desire is to deceive people. That's not a fruit of fear. They belong to this world. They speak from the world's viewpoint and the world listens to them, man. Now you throw in the name of Jesus, you got yourself a church. It's that easy. We belong to God and those who know God listen to us. That's where we gather and share the Gospel one way or the other every week. We talk with God in conversations, from the text messages, the emails, the conversations, the visits, all those things. If they do not belong to God, they do not listen to us. That is how we know if someone has the Spirit of truth or the Spirit of deception. If you want to find out if this is real, this is where guilty has charged, it's easy to take your spirituality, your Christianity, your discipleship of Jesus and put it under the basket right that scripture speaks of because you have all experienced what it's like when you break that light out and you shine it in the world. What happens? People go, "Yes, I want that. It's awesome. Fantastic. Tell me more." No, they go, "Shut up, shut down, you bigot, you homophobe, you pedophile, you whatever." Shut up again. We don't want to hear from you Bible-thumping, fundamentalist freaks. You go do your thing. This is what is shared. This is what is known about even orthodox Christianity. So go be the light. We're still called to go be the light, but it's also prophesied that we are going to be persecuted for it. If it were that easy, the human will is not that easy. So we're going to stay there. We're going to let that sit. And I hope that you understand the power of this opening

passage of John 4. Truth from error. Have we known truth? We've got the Word of God. You've got your living with somebody who you know, you're in relationship, you've got your children, your spouse, whatever. You have friends at school, you have friends. Are they of God? You may judge them by the words that they say and the things that they do. Is it authentic fruit of the Spirit or are they manipulating you? And as a person with the power of God within you, you have the ability to discern that through prayer, through conversation, by comparing it to the Word of God.