

So That You May Know

An Expository Study of the Epistle of **1 John**

Chapter 16- The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error

150. Testing the Spirits- Part 1

WAOY Tuesday 02/12/08

Welcome again, my beloved in Jesus Christ. We are continuing our verse by verse ‘journey’ through the Epistle of **1 John**, and today I want to begin a new section of our study by looking at what John taught about “Testing the Spirits”. So, let’s open our Bibles and read **1 John 4:1-6** together:

- 1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.**
- 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God;**
- 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the *spirit* of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.**
- 4 You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.**
- 5 They are from the world; therefore they speak *as* from the world, and the world listens to them.**
- 6 We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.**

Now during the last few years of the Apostle John’s life- the Christian Church was going through tremendous upheaval. False doctrine was being spread around the world and false teachers were infiltrating the Church on every hand. At the time that John wrote this Epistle- around the last few years of the 1st Century- Christianity was under severe attack both from within and without the walls of the Church. And many of the things that John teaches us through these powerful verses are designed to keep us strong during times of *external* persecution and turmoil.

So contrary to what we tend to think- anytime that there is *external* persecution against Christianity; anytime that battles come from *outside* the Church- those hardships actually result in Christians to band together; to become stronger; and to stand firm in the Faith. In fact- according to history- persecution *always* solidifies believers and helps them to actually be stronger than if all is well and they are at peace.

We can see this very clearly throughout **The Book of the Acts of the Apostles** where for anyone to become a Christian guaranteed them vicious persecution and almost always brought about certain death and yet the Church grew by the thousands.

We can also see that unlike our modern laid back Church- the preaching and teaching that was done by the Apostles was of a Gospel that required people to walk on a straight and narrow path and that called them to come to the Cross and die and to love not the world. And yet in spite of teaching what many today would view as being hard, mean spirited, cruel, and even legalistic- History proves that the Church grew exponentially.

So it is not true to think that hardships or a Gospel that makes demands on people- hinders Church Growth- that simply is not true.

But battles from *within* the walls of the Church *do* tend to demoralize us and they do divide us and they do help to make us weaker and to lose sight of what Christianity is about.

Now most of the battles in the first century that originated inside the Church were not about the things that you might think- they were about issues of Truth versus Error and about what Christians should or should not believe and confess.

There is very little concern today about Doctrinal integrity or purity today. Upholding Divine Truth has fallen on hard times. Standing up and crying out against false teachers and false doctrines will cause you to be quickly labeled as being anything except what you really are and that is faithful. Most people today want to like everybody and to be liked by everybody and so there is great effort to try to stay away from controversial issues and issues that seem to divide us- even if those issues are specifically commanded in Scripture. It is just easier to go along to get along.

And in 21st Century America- it is deemed much more important to be on the right side of political issues and judicial appointments and

specific candidates than it is to preach the Gospel rightly, fully, and fearlessly- and to live our lives as though we truly believe.

It is thought much more noble to build relationships than it is to speak the Truth in love. It is said that we are better served if we are friends with the world rather than separated from it and most all of the Church growth gurus teach that by us living and acting more and more like the lost pagan world- we will influence more people- all in direct contradiction to what the Bible teaches and 2,000 years of history teaches.

And this cavalier attitude about things like Truth; Doctrine; and sound Biblical teaching is a radical departure from traditional and historic and orthodox Christianity. The chief concern of the Apostles, however was not who sat on the throne of their Government. The chief concern of the Apostles was not how much or how little injustices were being conducted by the brutal Roman army. The Chief concern of the Apostles was the integrity and quality of Divine Truth and to make sure that what Christ actually taught was what we actually believed.

During the last years of John's life as he dictated this Epistle to his disciple as a very old man- new, young, brilliant, very charismatic, and very articulate teachers began to rise up in the Church who began to preach and teach things that Jesus did not authorize and that God the Holy Spirit did not inspire- and these new teachings began to take the Church by storm.

Like today- the deciding factor as to whether or not a Church or a believer would accept a teaching was not how faithful that teaching was to Scripture- but was for no other reason than it was popular. So great orators and powerful and influential people- men of great financial status began to teach things contrary to sound Doctrine and began to lead the Church astray.

But a funny thing happens when the Church of Jesus begins to go astray. Jesus Himself said in **Matthew 16** that He would build His Church and the gates of Hades would not prevail against it- and so because He owns the Church- Jesus is faithful to raise up men to cry out against the heresy and the apostasy and the false teaching that **Jude** said would creep into the Church and as they call the Church to repent and to return to her First Love- God sends genuine heaven sent revival.

And that revival begins with a passionate return to the altar as men begin again to call on the Name of the Lord and then God Sovereignly draws men back to the Scriptures and intense line upon line and precept upon precept studies of the only Book that God gave to man begin again with a new found eagerness. And as the Word of God is read and studied and learn and believed- our hypocrisy and our shallowness; and our lukewarmness and pragmatism; and our worldliness is exposed and it is made crystal clear and identified and once again the people of God humble themselves and pray and seek His face and turn from their wicked ways and once again God hears from heaven and forgives their sin and heals their land.

And this is exactly what was happening late in the first century as John- now in his late nineties- and the last living Apostle- looked over the horizon of the visible Church of that day and saw a great need to pen these words down and to make sure that he left the Church in good hands.

Paul was gone. The greatest of all Evangelists and Apostles had already been beheaded over twenty years earlier. Peter had been crucified upside down and had taken four days to die. James, Matthew, Mark, Luke, Bartholomew, Thaddeus, Barnabas- all gone; all martyred; all now in heaven with Jesus crying under the mercy seat,

The Revelation 6:10b

... How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

So John was the last living man who has actually touched the Lord; the last living man who had laid his head on Jesus' Breast; who had walked and talked with the Incarnate God.

So John felt a tremendous duty and a responsibility to tell this young, fledgling Church to cleave to that which is good and to be faithful to the Doctrine of the Apostles lest the Lord of the Church come and remove their candlestick.

So here in Chapter 4 of this great letter to the Church at Ephesus written by the disciple whom Jesus loved- John warns the Church with tears not to sleep and not to slumber to be awakened and to watch and pray and to be diligent because the enemy was at the door. So, he writes these words:

1John 4:1

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Don't believe everything that people teach simply because they teach it in Jesus' Name, John cries. Don't be silly about eternity. Don't be naïve as it pertains to the fact that there are *many*- not a few- but *many* false prophets gone out into the world.

John says don't accept something simply because it is popular; simply because it brings you personal gain; simply because it makes you happy or because it builds you up- but try the spirits and makes precise determinations as to whether their teachings are of God or not; put every spirit to a test; analyze what is being said and being taught; hold everything accountable to Scripture; develop spiritual discernment; exercise self-restraint and resist the temptation to simply repeat what other people say.

In writing this verse- John joins with other writers who also wrote inspired, infallible, and inerrant Truth about this very same subject. Under the very same anointing and for the very same reasons- Peter said this in **2Peter 2:1-3**:

1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.

2 Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned;

3 and in *their* greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

And the half- brother of Jesus Christ wrote this in **Jude 3&4**:

3 Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.

4 For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the

grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

And beloved brother Paul said this in **2Timothy 4:3&4:**

3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires,

4 and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

And when asked about it- the Lord Jesus Christ Himself began His discussion of the last days and his second coming with this warning in **Matthew 24:4b:**

... See to it that no one misleads you.

So John the beloved joins in with these as he begins to teach in Chapter 4 what I pray will encourage and enlighten and strengthen you as we study this great Chapter together.

Well, I have to stop right here, but please join me on the next broadcast as we continue our journey through the Epistle of **1John**. May God help us all.

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