

Testing the Spirits

1 John 4:1-6

THE WARNING

- Throughout this letter to the believers in Ephesus, John calls his readers back to the three basics of Christian life:
 - True Doctrine
 - Obedient Living
 - Fervent Devotion
- In 1 John 3:24, John reminds his readers that the gift of God's indwelling Spirit enables all believers to know that God lives in them.
- As Christians, we are instructed not to believe every spirit but to test the spirits with discernment
- There are only two sources of spirits; the spirits of God and those of the antichrist. John continues to use stark contrasts to make his point clear and we must wrestle with this truth.
- We are spiritual beings. If we are in Christ, the Holy Spirit abides in us.

THE TEST

- John gives us two tests
 - Every spirit that confesses that Jesus has come in the flesh is from God. Every spirit that does not confess Jesus is of the antichrist
 - Whoever knows God listens to the apostles. Those that don't listen to the apostles are not from God but from the world.

FALSE PROPHETS

- John clearly makes the connection that false prophets are "spirits which are not from God"
- We know that Satan is the deceiver and a liar. The false prophets often have a theology which is a subtle perversion of the Truth. See Genesis 3, Matthew 4
- There are many false prophets in the world today. Many are promoting their wares in Christian circles in the form of books, podcasts, etc.

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FALSE PROPHETS CONTINUED

- Remember the subtlety. On the surface, false prophets often look like the Truth, but, upon further inspection are of the devil
- We have to be careful and discerning. Just because someone doesn't agree with our view of Church doesn't make them a false prophet or heretic. Use the test that John prescribes.

THE TRUE SPIRIT

- Anyone can say true doctrine with their lips and not believe it in their heart. Similarly, people can do really nice things for show, so that others see it and not motivated by love. But only the Holy Spirit can make sinners really listen and really confess the truth of Jesus.

Small Group Questions

1. Why is discernment important today?
2. Who is the deceiver?
3. What are the two criteria by which believers are to test what they hear? How do we obtain apostolic authority today?
4. What is a common viewpoint of the world with respect to the Person and work of Christ?
5. How does the work of false prophets align with the viewpoint for the world?
6. In what ways are Christians tempted to compromise with the viewpoint of the world?
7. What false worldly teachings have tempted you in the past? How did you exercise discernment?

DISCUSSION:

What are gracious but meaningful and effective means to combat false teachings amongst the people in your life?

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