

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

152. Testing the Spirits- Part 3

WAOY Thursday 02/13/08

Welcome again, my brothers and sisters in Christ. We are continuing to go over our verse by verse study of the Epistle of **1 John**, and today I want to continue to examine what John taught about testing the Spirits by looking at **1John 4: 1-6**- so let's read those verses 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 on the last broadcast- we were going over verse 1- so let's read that verse again:

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.

Now when John uses the word, "spirit" in this verse- he is not only talking about *literal* spirits- but he is also talking about those people in whom in whom the spirit dwells. Many times in the Middle East during

the first century- especially in literature- the term, “spirit” was referring to a person- not to a literal spiritual entity. So this exhortation to try the spirits or test the spirits is a test that we can not only apply to demons or fallen angels- but also to those men in whom demons dwell- who teach damnable heresies that are designed to deceive.

So first of all- John tells us here to not believe every spirit. In other words- John is telling us here not to believe everything that people teach- simply because those people stand in a place of power or authority or because they are popular. Now it must be said here and we have to be careful that in doing this testing- we do not fall into becoming jaded or cynical. Suspiciousness or being cynical is a natural reaction to being hurt or led astray and it shows a damaged heart and an untrusting soul. Being cynical or doubting everything that everyone says is *not* following John’s command here- it is doing nothing but robbing you of many human relationships that could help you.

We have to remember, beloved, that everyone is wrong about something. No human being has arrived at full maturity in Jesus Christ. We all have individual beliefs that are not true and we all hold to doctrines that while they sound good to us- they are not Scriptural. So when you distrust everyone except yourself- you keep yourself isolated from everyone except yourself. The problem with that is that you have no more reason to trust yourself than you do anyone else- because even though you may trust yourself- you are just as likely to be off base and deceived as anyone else is. So I beg you not to become cynical or suspicious- and distrust everybody thinking that you are only testing the spirits.

Yet at the same time that we are to trust those who have proven to be trustworthy- we are to test the spirits to see if they are of God. So John teaches here that there is a test; there is a definitive way; there is a method by which we can determine that what is being taught is true- and in the course of this study- we will get into that way- but before we get into just what that test is- we need to settle in our minds why all of this is necessary. The reason that we need to be able to know if what we are being taught is of God is because John says that there are many false prophets gone out into the world.

Now some people may be tempted to think that false prophets were only in the Old Testament- but that is not true. So in order to see just

who John was talking about- we need to understand what this term, “prophet” actually means.

Old Testament prophets were special people. They were people who were specially chosen to do a special and unique thing. They weren't just your average Jew. These are the people who gave the chosen people of God the Word of God. The prophets prefaced everything that they said or wrote with a phrase like this, **“Thus says the Lord”** or **“The Word of the Lord came to me saying”**. And what came out of their mouth or from their pen was the inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of the living God. Prophets of God were never wrong about anything that they ever said in God's Name. They were 100% accurate 100% of the time for everything that. That is why what these men said and wrote has been preserved for us and is contained in several Books of the Old Testament.

Many people today have an idea about the prophets that is simply not true. Many today look at these men as being anarchists or renegades- social outcasts who did the very opposite of what everybody else was doing. They are caricatured as being misfits and people who went about tearing up the culture of Israel. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Many of the prophets were also priests or sons of priests who were well known and well respected in the land of Israel. Some prophets had access to great wealth while others lived in abject poverty. What was controversial about these men was not their clothes or their style or their mannerisms- it was what they said.

The words that came out of their mouth- the pronouncements of **“Thus says the Lord”** that God had put in them was what made these men to be hated and driven out and cast away and scorned and ridiculed and persecuted and killed.

These men called the children of God to repentance; they issued divine indictments against the rulers of Israel; they sanctioned and rejected Governments; and they revealed a God of infinite Majesty and infinite Righteousness and infinite Holiness and a God who demanded obedience and adherence.

Much of what God has revealed to Man about His Own Character and Nature- He did through the words of the Old Testament prophets. In fact without reading and understanding the Old Testament prophets- you will not fully and accurately know the God of the Bible.

So God used these prophets to articulate and define Divine Truth about many, many things and without that Divinely revealed Truth- our knowledge of God and the things of God is at best incomplete and may even be wrong.

The specific detailed divine Revelation that the prophets brought forth is part of what makes up the whole of Scripture or the Word of God. Therefore- it is fair to say that the prophets helped to formulate and define all that we know and believe that is true about God.

These men were not rebels- they were reformers. God did not empower them to destroy the nation- he empowered them to expose their sins and call them to repentance and a right relationship with God. These men were not 60's style hippies who rebelled against the establishment and lived in a counterculture. That portrayal of the prophets is just flat out wrong. These men lived the life- they were holy men; they were honorable men; they were chosen by God- not self-appointed; they were all reluctant to speak what God gave them because they knew that, for the most part, no one would hear. They were also highly accountable – not only to God – but also to that portion of God's Word that had already been revealed to Man through Moses.

For example- Samuel was not feared by the people of the city because he had short hair- he was feared because when he came into the city- he brought God's inspired and infallible Word to them and with those Words came either judgment or blessing.

Jeremiah was not hung up by his thumbs because he was dark complected or because he dressed funny. He was persecuted because he thundered God's command for the people of God to repent and return to God's already existing Truth. Elijah was hunted down because he rebuked the King for his immorality- not because Elijah was against government.

John the Baptist was not beheaded because he was dressed in camel's hair and ate locust and wild honey. He was beheaded because he told the king that he was sinning by his adulterous relationship.

So it was not their own personality that made them different- it was what these men said; what they spoke; what they thundered in God's Name that caused them so much trouble.

So any deviation from what these men taught was as serious an error as was deviation from what Moses taught. It wasn't just what the Law said- it was what the Law and the prophets said because those words

that came from the prophets was as equally inspired and as equally infallible and as equally authoritative as what Moses penned down.

So along with what Moses and David wrote- what the prophets wrote down became part of all that God had revealed to Man through the Old Covenant. And then when God called the Apostles and gave them the final, full, and completed revelation of God – the entirety of all that pertains to life and godliness was finished and it was written down and supernaturally preserved for us and was later gathered together and brought into one document that we call today the Holy Bible.

So the sixty six Books of the Bible is all that God has chosen to give to man that pertains to both life and godliness. We cannot and we should not and we must not add anything to what God has said and we must be careful that we do not leave anything out.

Any attempt by anyone for any reason to add to the words of the Scriptures is condemned by God and any attempt by anyone for any reason to take anything away from the already existing Scriptures is equally condemned by God.

For example, there is nothing that we could possibly add to how God converts the human soul; or how a sinful man is justified before a holy God; or how to operate the Church that is not already clearly spelled out for us in Scripture and to take anything away from any of these things would be to dramatically and radically alter them to the point where they wouldn't be the same.

The point here is that what the prophets spoke and wrote was inspired. It was God breathed. God literally exhaled the Words that the prophets spoke. That makes those Words- along with the other Words of Scripture special and different and unique from all the other Words spoken and written by all the other authors in the entire history of the world.

You see, beloved, nothing is like Scripture- nothing. No other Book was exhaled by God. Not one. No other Revelation came from God- none. All other books all other pronouncements; all other words written by all the other writers is either the result of well-meaning but deceived people or it is the product of demons.

There is no other God- but the God of the Bible. All the other gods of all the other nations are false and fictitious or they are in fact fallen angels. And there is no other Revelation from this one single God

except that Revelation that is contained visibly in Creation and in the pages of the 66 Books of the Holy Bible.

So when John was saying here in verse 1 that there are many false prophets who have gone out into the world- he was saying that there were many people in his day who were teaching things contrary to what God had revealed to Man through the Scriptures. They were hearing other voices- but not God; they were following different angels- but not from Heaven; they were seeing different dreams- but not divinely inspired; they were getting different visions- but they were false; they were being led by another spirit- but God was not in them and God was not directing them and God was not empowering them and God was not sanctioning them or what they said.

And so John says to test these spirits and hold them accountable to Scripture so that we will remain faithful to Jesus Christ and not be deceived.

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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