

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

170. Testing the Spirits- Part 21

WAOY Wednesday 03/19/08

Welcome again, my beloved in Jesus Christ. We're continuing our verse by verse "journey" through the Epistle of **1John**, and today I want to continue to examine what John taught about "Testing the Spirits". So let's open our Bibles and read **1John 4: 1-6-** again 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 looking at verse 5- so on today's broadcast- I want to see verse 5 in light of verse 6- so let's read those two verses again together:

- 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 what John meant

when he said here that the antichrists of his day speak of the world and the world hears them by looking at the pillow prophets of Ezekiel's day.

Now we saw last time that these false prophets were called "pillow prophets" because Ezekiel said that they sewed pillows to put under the elbows of God's people as they relaxed and felt secure- even though sin was rampant in their lives. The pillows of these heretics was representative of the soft, easy gospel that they preached- which brought no conviction of sin and lulled the people to sleep with promises of prosperity and peace.

Nearly all of Israel was taken in by the false prophets of Ezekiel's day because their message was so nice; it sounded so soothing to their ears and it required nothing from them. Pillow prophets then as well as now never speak about sin or repentance or dying to self or crucifying the flesh. No, their gospel is much different. The gospel of the people that John called heretics and antichrists speaks about easy things like health, wealth, and prosperity without getting in to the serious and uneasy topics like turning from sin and picking up your cross daily and denying yourself and following Jesus.

Now last time we saw that true men of God have a vision of Jesus that consumes them and causes them to be willing to follow Jesus no matter what it costs them. Their eye is single; their heart is fixed; their step is sure ; and their voice echoes God's Word- not what the world speaks. But God warned Israel, "**The false prophets are like foxes...**" In other words, the pillow prophets have no single eye focused on Christ alone- but they have eyes filled with covetousness. They spoil the vine, taking the best for themselves. They go their own way, feeding their own egos! These self-seeking prophets claimed to have heard from God. Theirs, they claimed, was a prophetic word directly from heaven. **Ezekiel 13:6** says **They see falsehood and lying divination who are saying, 'The Lord declares,' when the Lord has not sent them; yet they hope for the fulfillment of *their* word.**

The multitudes of God's people who run about to hear only soothing messages need to take a second honest look at what they are hearing and believing. **Ezekiel 13:7** says **"Did you not see a false vision and speak a lying divination when you said, 'The Lord declares,' but it is not I who have spoken?"** And verse 10 says **"they have misled My people by saying, 'Peace!'"**

when there is no peace. And when anyone builds a wall, behold, they plaster it over with whitewash;

The message of these “pillow prophets” in Ezekiel’s day was the very same message of the antichrists of John’s day and it is the very same message of the false teachers of our day- **"God told me all is well. No trouble ahead. Good times! No trials or tribulation. God's desire for me is that all will be happy, prosperous and at ease. This is my best life now!"**

Beloved, the Bible calls a message like that deception! I don't think ministers are taking seriously enough the tragedy of preaching the wrong message. How dare we preach peace and endless good times to a nation and a people on the brink of God’s Judgment! How much more sin does America have to engage in before we who stand in the pulpits will have the courage to cry out- **“Repent!”**

Israel's sin was about to explode in unbelievable fires of Divine wrath. And Ezekiel was very reluctant to preach such a disturbing message- especially to a people who had heaped to themselves pillow prophets who went about telling God's people that all was well. Listen to what God was trying to say to His people in **Ezekiel 15:6-8-** **"Therefore, thus says the Lord God, 'As the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so have I given up the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I set My face against them. *Though* they have come out of the fire, yet the fire will consume them. Then you will know that I am the Lord, when I set My face against them. 'Thus I will make the land desolate, because they have acted unfaithfully,'" declares the Lord God.**

Now after a true prophet of God thundered that kind of Divine warning- what do you think was Israel’s response? What would be our response today if we heard that kind of warning? The people of Ezekiel’s day completely rejected the true Word of God. The masses ran off after their favorite teachers to hear the deceptive message -- "God is not that kind of God. He desires only the best for us all. Great peace and good times lay ahead. Don't listen to the prophets of doom. Don't worry about repentance and holy living- God told me, right from His throne room that the best is yet to come."

And according to Scripture- the people of John’s day didn’t do any better than the people of Ezekiel’s day and they ignored John’s warning also and by the time that John wrote **The Book of the Revelation-** Jesus

had to personally call five of the seven churches to repentance and to return to their first love- because they were overrun with heresy.

And dear friends- we need to know what the modern pillow prophets will do when God begins to judge the sins of this nation and cut off its bread and its fullness? Think of the unprepared multitudes of sincere Christians who should be repenting of lukewarmness; who should be weeping because of compromise and covetousness; who should be forsaking all rather than accumulating more.

Thank God the Holy Spirit is raising up a holy people who are sick of all the self-centered ministries, and their cry is, "**We would see Jesus.**"

I tell you that the man-centered gospel cannot last much longer. A time of purging is ahead. We are heading into God's refining fires. While the covetous lounge on their beds of ease and comfort themselves with luxuries- a remnant of sold out slaves of Jesus Christ will break away and go out seeking the Bridegroom. Christ is going to reveal Himself to the humble; the poor in spirit- not to the arrogant and self-centered and the true Word of the Lord will flow forth with unction and power. Union with Christ will become the pearl of great price.

2. The true man of God preaches and practices the beauty of a life of self-denial.

Compare the message of self-denial that true men of God preach with that of the pillow prophets. In **Ezekiel 13:19**- God said of them, "**For handfuls of barley and fragments of bread, you have profaned Me to My people to put to death some who should not die and to keep others alive who should not live, by your lying to My people who listen to lies.**"

A modern translation is, "These "pillow prophets" have money and material possessions on their minds and it has made liars of them." Here is the full picture of a pillow prophet. He lets his imagination run wild. He operates on the idea that prosperity will last forever. He builds on dreams and schemes. To do it, he needs money -- lots of it. His need for money becomes the overwhelming focus of his ministry. He ends up telling lies to God's people in order to get more of it. He begins to promise people spiritual anointings and financial blessings and even eternal life if they will just give him more money. And then he pollutes it all by saying, "**God told me**"

But the true genuine message of Jesus Christ is painfully blunt -- deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Jesus.

In an age of humanistic false teaching about building up self-esteem and covetousness and accumulating more of this world's good- for anyone to boldly proclaim the beauty of a life of self-denial is to commit pastoral suicide. That is because the Biblical Truth about self-denial is a foreign sounding concept in a day of self-pampering and ease. The pillow prophets have rejected the concept of self-denial flat out. Self-denial is the giving up and forsaking of all and everything that hinders the constant presence of Christ in our lives. It flows out of a heart which has seen Jesus and has fully surrendered to be a slave of Christ – living only to do His Will.

Now let me be clear about this- there is no merit in self-denial. Living a life of self-denial does not purchase Salvation. No, we are saved and secured by Grace alone through Faith alone in the finished work of Christ alone. So, self-denial should never be entered into in order to earn benefits from God. But self-denial removes the hindrances to a constant communion with Christ. In **1Corinthians 9:27-** Paul said, "**but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.**

But many today who have heard the easy gospel preached by the modern pillow prophets are not bringing their bodies under subjection- and the result is that our passions and appetites are not under subjection. Sensuous television programs now whet the appetites among Christians for pornography. Lust is nearly out of control in our culture- even in the ministry and there is an epidemic of sexual immorality in the Church like never before. Multitudes of God's people, including preachers of the gospel, waste precious hours lounging before the TV idol. And just like Lot- their minds are getting vexed by the things we see and hear.

But the deepest truth about self-denial goes way beyond giving up material things. You can sell your TV; shun all erotic sights and sounds; and bring all appetites under control- and still not have denied self. What Christ is calling for is a kind of devotion to Himself that expels everything in the heart that hinders. It is a commitment to becoming absolutely nothing before God and man. It is being able to say with Paul, "**I no longer live-- it is Christ living in me.**" And Paul taught the simple beauty of this life when he said in **Galatians 5:16-** "**But I say, walk**

by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

Dear friends- The world must lose its charm to us. We must die to all self-ambition -- to all attachments to earthly things, until we can honestly say, "I am dead to this world and all it represents. I no longer live. Physically alive, yes! But I must die to all that hinders my vision and love for Christ. Whatever it is -- it must go. Lust? Self-made plans? Bitterness, grudges? Recognition, self-esteem? Unforgiveness- I must die to it all. I must bring it all to the cross and execute self-judgment."

This is why when genuine Christians are about to die- they become so detached from the world and material and physical things. To these faithful saints- eternity is close at hand and everything in this life pales in comparison to the joy that lies just ahead. So why can't we live like that all the time? Why not keep our minds fixed on Christ at all times and experience the fullness of joy that can only be found in a life of self-denial?

Ezekiel and John cried out against the antichrist and pillow prophets of their day and I say that we need to be faithful to cry out against the very same thing in our day so that we may see Jesus high and lifted up and so that our joy may be full.

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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