

WHAT ARE WE TO BELIEVE?

1 JOHN 4:1 • TV255B

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by
HENRY T. MAHAN

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1 John 4:1

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.”

I’ve been thinking for a long time about bringing the message that I plan to bring to you today. I have been looking at this Scripture and considering a message on this subject. I want you to listen very carefully and very prayerfully as you consider these things.

The title of my message is: **“WHAT ARE WE TO BELIEVE?”**

There is so much religion in this day, so many voices, so many preachers, so many denominations and so many churches. Just what is a man to believe? John the apostle writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in **1 John 4:1**, makes this statement, he says; *“Beloved, believe not every Spirit.”*

Anyone can tell you this, (anyone who knows anything about the Scriptures) that the word *“spirit”* signifies men, preachers and teachers. These are those who claim to be endowed with the gift of the Holy Spirit or claim to be endowed by the Spirit of God in order to perform the office of prophet, preacher or teacher.

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God does speak through men; He speaks to us by men. The Scripture says, *“There was a man sent from God whose name was John.”* God does speak through men. Paul said, *“We have this Gospel in earthen vessels. God hath entrusted us with the Gospel. How shall they hear without a preacher?”*

So, God does give His Spirit to men. He does endue them with power to preach and to teach. My friend; what John is saying is, every person who claims to be sent of God is not sent of God. Everyone who claims to be God’s preacher is not God’s preacher.

He is saying here, *“Beloved, believe not every spirit (every preacher; believe not every teacher); believe not everyone that comes to you saying, I am sent of God.”* The apostle John is saying here, *“Try the spirits.”*

What does it mean to try something? To try something is to test it or examine it. John is saying to us, *“Try these preachers, and examine these preachers and teachers. Try them and see if they are of God.”* Christ said, *“Many, (note that word “many”) false prophets (and false preachers) are gone out into the world.”* Peter tells us that; he says, *“There were false preachers in Israel, even back in the days of Moses, Isaiah and Jeremiah.”*

There were false preachers in the days of the apostles. The apostle Paul was always complaining about the false teachers that had crept in or risen up in the church at Corinth and in the church at Galatia and other places.

Even as there were false preachers in Israel and false preachers in the days of the apostles, there are many false preachers today. He is telling us here, brethren, beloved, believe not every preacher, but try the preachers, try the teachers, whether they be of God.

We must not be dazzled. We must not be impressed by everyone who claims to be holy. We must not be dazzled by everyone who claims to work wonders or do miracles. Our Lord said, *“at the judgment many are going to say unto Me; ‘Lord, we preached in your name and cast out devils in your name and did many wonderful works in Your Name.’”*

We are not to be impressed by everyone who claims to speak for God. We are not to be impressed by everyone who uses the name God or carries a Bible in his hand and preaches from a pulpit through a microphone. John says, *“We must try the spirits.”* We must test and examine these men whether they be of God.

Let me tell you something; a false preacher is usually greedy and covetous. An opportunist will not tell you that he is a false preacher. Our Lord said, *“Beware of false prophets; they come to you in sheep’s clothing. They come to you disguised as sheep; but on the inside they are ravening wolves.”*

Paul calls these false prophets the *“apostles of Satan.”* He also calls them *“The ministers of Satan.”* Paul says, *“They will come to you as ministers of righteousness, even Satan himself is changed into an angel of light.”*

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My friends, sometimes it takes a discerning eye, a discerning ear and a discerning spirit to discern the counterfeit from the genuine. It takes spiritual understanding of the Word of God to expose false preachers and false teachers.

But, I will get to that in a moment; there are many obvious signs that anyone should be able to detect. There are many obvious signs of false preachers and teachers. It is so obvious that even a person who does not know anything about the Word of God but has some concept of the holiness of God, the majesty of God and the glory of God, can detect a false preacher.

I will give you a few obvious signs:

First of all: God's prophets in the Old and New Testament have never lived lavishly and luxuriously in the world. Write that down, you can go through the whole Bible and God's prophets and God's preachers have never lived lavishly and luxuriously in the world; they have always been plain men with simple tastes. I am telling you the truth!

For example: In the Old Testament, the Levites were God's men, God's prophets and God's priests. They never owned any land. All the other tribes had land; they owned land and had homes. The Levites did not; they never owned any land. They ministered about the temple of God and never owned any estate or property. They lived by the things of the temple. You know that is so and I do too.

Even so; the apostle Paul said; "*They that preach the Gospel are to live by the Gospel.*" God meets their daily need in a plain and simple fashion, but he meets it abundantly. God's preachers do not wear diamonds, live in mansions, own properties and businesses.

They do not require body-guards. God's preachers are simple, plain, men with simple tastes who walk before their God who supplies their daily need. Now, that is an obvious characteristic of God's preacher, a prophet of God.

The apostle Paul made tents to take care of his livelihood and those with him. When you see these personalities living in their lavish style and luxury, you can mark it down; they are not plain men with simple tastes whom God sent. Stay with me now, these are obvious traits. Men will say, "God sent me. I have a message from God and I am going to deliver it to you."

Secondly: God's preachers, (not preachers in general), never promote themselves. They never exalt themselves, read the Scriptures. They never put their names on buildings, monuments and memorials, not God's preachers. No sir, they are concerned only for the glory of their Lord. They want their names forgotten and His name remembered.

They came to John the Baptist and said; "*Who are you; are you the Christ?*" He said, "*Oh no!*" They asked him if he was Elijah; he said, "*Oh no!*" They were wondering who he was. He could have said that he was supernaturally born of Zacharias and Elizabeth when they were old people. It was a miracle of God.

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Everyone is always talking about the miracles that got them where they are. He might have said, "I was filled with the Holy Ghost from my mother's womb." He might have said, "The Lord said that I was the greatest man born of woman."

He didn't say any of those things. He did not put out a brochure glorifying himself or bragging on himself by telling others about his accomplishments. John the Baptist said, *'I am a voice crying in the wilderness; make straight a path for our God.'* He also said, *"I must decrease; (I must go down) and He must increase."*

The apostle Paul said, *"I am nothing."* That's right; he also said; *"Apollos is nothing, Peter is nothing, I am nothing; I am not one wit behind the chief apostle though I be nothing."* Paul also said, *"I am the less than the least of all the saints; I am not worthy to be a preacher; I am the chief of sinners."*

That is Paul; he never took a title. He never referred to himself as "Reverend Paul," "Doctor Paul," "Bishop Paul," "Cardinal Paul" or "Pope Paul;" he just said, *"Paul, a bond slave of Jesus Christ."*

Do you want to know who God's preachers are? I will tell you this; they are plain men with simple tastes. They are men who never exalt themselves, project themselves or promote themselves. These are men who never seek to lead memorials to themselves. They never brag on themselves, they are concerned for the glory of God.

These are obvious traits and obvious characteristics. There are mighty few preachers in this day that are sent of God to declare God's gospel.

I will tell you something else about God's preacher; God's preachers always have wives who are in subjection to their husbands. They are in submission, they are in submission, subjection, and they keep silence in the church.

God has never from **Genesis to Revelation**, ever called a woman to preach the Gospel, to lead a church, or usurp authority in any way over the men of the church, the ways of the church or the program of the church.

That is the Word of God. This same Bible is the one that says, *"You must be born again."* This is the same Gospel that declares that God is God and Christ is the only Saviour. The Scripture says, *"Let your women keep silence in the churches and let them learn in silence with all subjection."*

God says, *"I suffer not a woman to teach nor usurp authority over a man. Let your women keep silence in the church; it is not permitted for them to speak (or preach)."* This is written in **1 Corinthians 14:34** and in **1 Timothy 2:11 and 12**.

The bishops or the pastors are to be a man of sobriety, a man of simplicity, a man of sincerity and a man of honesty, a man grave and sober and a man in the Word."

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In **1 Timothy 2:9**, the Scripture says; “*But also, in like manner; the women, (his wife, and other women in the church), let them adorn themselves in modest apparel.*” Not with elaborate hairstyles, neither gold nor silver nor expensive clothing.

Watch the preachers of this day; their wives have more to say than they do. They are generally, more elaborately decked out and are showing the worldliness of their whole existence and their whole taste. They usually take over. It says in the Word that God’s prophet has his home, his wife and his children in subjection unto him.

His wife is to be a homemaker, “*keepers at home,*” who is to be an example to other women who are believers. Write that down, there are no co-pastors, man and his wife. There are no such animal in the Word of God.

God said, “*I will that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands to God.*” They are to be the preachers, the leaders and the women are to be the followers. This is what the Scripture says. We are going to go by the Word of God. God’s prophet always goes by the Word of God and if his wife knows God she will go by the Word of God.

We’ve got these evangelists and pastors paired now. The women are doing more leading, preaching, testifying and teaching. They are causing more turmoil than anyone else. Please stay with me; there are so many obvious signs that some of these preachers are false preachers.

Here is another one: God’s preacher is not a clown. He is not a joker or an entertainer; he is a preacher of the Word of the Lord. Most of the church programs today are about 80% music, fun, hallelujahs, clapping hands and dancing around. There is very little preaching of the Word going on.

Yet; “*God hath chosen by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*” God’s preacher is not called and sent to be a clown. He is not called and sent to please men, to make men laugh and clap their hands at his antics, jokes, and entertainment. God’s preacher is not a singer, he is a preacher. He is a preacher and teacher of the Word of God. He comes declaring “*Thus saith the Lord.*”

Can you imagine Elijah behaving like some of these fellows today who claim to be preachers of God? Can you imagine the apostle Paul putting on a show, decked out in the fancy duds and diamonds of today’s preachers? Can you imagine him jumping up and down the aisle, slapping people on the head, talking like these fellows talk?

I can’t imagine that with the longest stretch of my imagination. I can’t put Paul in this character. He was a sober and a sincere man of God who came teaching the Word that man might have something to hold to, build upon, rest in, and to have somewhere to find some kind of hope.

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Paul said; *“If I please men, I am not the servant of Christ,”* if I am in the men-pleasing business I am not sent of God. God’s preachers are not ashamed of the Gospel; he is not ashamed of the testimony of God. He is not ashamed of the cross of Christ.

His chief concern is not to be successful but to be truthful. He has no ambition to be successful. When God saved him and made him His child; that is as high as he can go. There is nothing that the world can add to him with all of its glitter, glamour, and fashion that fades away. You can’t add anything to God’s blessings. When we have Christ we have everything; *“We are complete in Him.”*

God’s preachers are not concerned about numbers. He doesn’t count people. One of the severest trials that God ever put David through was because he numbered Israel. He went out there and counted Israel.

We are in the counting business now. If we didn’t have numbers to report and numbers to brag about and numbers to impress people, we couldn’t get anybody’s ear. God’s preacher does not care whether there are two or two thousand; he wants men to know Christ.

God’s preacher will preach the truth; he will preach the Word of God. He is not ashamed of the absolute Sovereignty of God. He tells who God is. He knows who God is. He talks about the glory of the Lord and the sovereignty and power of the Lord as revealed in the Word of God.

His prayers are a lot like the prayers of Elijah on Mount Carmel; he said, *“ Lord God of Abraham; Isaac and Israel; let it be known this day that Thou art God and I’m Thy servant, that I’ve done these things at Thy word.”*

God’s preacher will preach the fall and the sinfulness of the human race. He is not ashamed to declare the truth about men. He is not trying to impress anyone. He is not trying to win their influence and their favor. He is not trying to get a raise, God supports him. He is not trying to keep a lot of unsaved people together in a religious organization; he wants God’s people to be manifest and the tares to be manifested.

When that preacher preaches the truth about God and the truth about men; (that Scripture accomplishes His purpose); he does not apologize for the power of God or make excuses for the sinfulness of men.

He knows that *“There is none good, no not one,”* including himself. He knows that there is *“None righteous, no not one.”* He knows that there is *“None that seeketh after God.”* He knows that *“There is none that understandeth.”* He knows that *“They are all together become unprofitable.”*

He knows that man fell in the garden and the consequences of that fall have reached to every human being. He knows that we are shut up to the mercies of God.

God’s preacher will preach God’s Covenant of Grace in Christ. He is not afraid to use Bible language. He will talk about God’s predestination. He will talk about God’s elective grace. He

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will talk about God's Covenant and is not ashamed of those words. He does not try to slip up on people and surprise them. He does not try to coat the truth with some kind of intellectual words that no one understands. He knows that "*Salvation is of the Lord.*"

He says, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies, according as He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His own will.*"

He is not a coward. He says, "*I thank God for you beloved because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.*"

You will never find one of God's preachers compromising with anyone. They can even kill him; he will still preach the truth. They can fire him but he will still preach the truth. He will go out singing:

**"All hail the power of Jesus' name,
Let angels prostrate fall**

**Bring forth the Royal Diadem,
And crown Him Lord of all."**

He can lose every friend in the world but "*God is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.*" That is God's preacher. He is no compromiser; he will preach the Lordship of Christ in no uncertain terms. He will preach the walk of faith and holiness in no uncertain terms. He will preach the obedience and commands of Christ by the power of God's Spirit.

He will preach the effectual call of God's Spirit and he will preach the perseverance of the saints. He will also preach the return of Christ.

He will not copy, mimic and imitate the preachers of this world. He got his message from God. These people do not influence him. He doesn't preach anything because Luther preached it, Calvin or Spurgeon preached it. He is preaching it because God says it.

He is not convinced by the logic and reasoning of human wisdom; his message comes from the Word of God. It is obvious that God's preacher will preach the Gospel and he will leave conviction in the hands of the Holy Spirit. He will leave conversion in the hands of the Holy Spirit. He will leave salvation in the hands of the Holy Spirit.

He won't drag false professors down an aisle in order to report a lot of converts; he is not in that kind of business. He will not drag people down an aisle and drag professions of faith out of sinners in order to brag about the success of his ministry.

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He will just preach the Gospel and leave that Gospel to be made effectual by the work of God's Spirit. It is just like Paul in **Acts 20**; he said to those people, "*I commend you to God; I commend you to the word of His grace which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance.*"

To me, these are obvious characteristics of those who are sent of God to be His prophets. Pastors and teachers are sent of God and it is obvious who many of them are. The chief evidence given here in **1 John 4**, as to how we can determine who is a prophet of God, the chief evidence is what they preach about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Look back at my text; I know that this is serious business but we are going to have to face our day. I am preaching today, in 1985. We have issues to be dealt with in this day. We have people in this day to be dealt with and God's Word to be dealt with.

He says, "*Beloved; believe not or spirit (every preacher), but try the preachers whether they be of God for many false prophets have gone out into the world. Hereby, know we, the Spirit of God (truth or error). Hereby, know we the Spirit of God, every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God.*"

My friend; Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. Jesus is the Old Testament name Joshua; (God is my Saviour). The name was given to this person born of Mary at His birth. "*Thou shalt call His name Jesus. The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee; the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee. That Holy Thing born of thee shall be called the Son of God and thou shalt call His name Jesus for He shall save His people from their sins.*"

This is a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah. Isaiah says, "*Call His name Immanuel (God with us).*" Jesus is God with us. Jesus Christ is the Messiah. Every Old Testament promise, prophecy and picture of the Christ, the Messiah, the Redeemer, is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

"*He is the Lord from Heaven.*" He is Jesus the Son of Man and He is the Christ, the Messiah and the Redeemer. All of the Old Testament is fulfilled in Him. "*He died according to the Scriptures.*"

"*He has come into this world.*" What does that mean? He is Jesus, God, Emmanuel, the Messiah, and the Christ. He is the fulfillment of all Scripture. He has actually come into this world. He wasn't born only but He who is, He who was, and He who always will be, has come into this world.

God has visited this world in human flesh. He came into the world; "*He was in the world and the world was made by Him and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own and His own received Him not but as many as received Him to them gave He the privilege to become Sons of God which were born not of blood, not of the will of the flesh, not of the will of man, but born of God.*"

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“Jesus Christ is come into this world to save sinners of whom I am chief.” The Father ordained Him, anointed Him, commissioned Him and sent Him. He came down here and through His perfect life and through His sacrificial death He saved His people. Christ came and through His great resurrection, ascension, and Mediatoral work to redeem a people that the Father gave Him in a Covenant of Grace.

God’s preacher will tell the truth about Jesus Christ. He will tell the truth uncompromisingly, boldly, and truthfully. He will tell the truth in simplicity so that men as they are taught by the Holy Spirit will turn their face, not to the preacher but to that Son of God *“who must increase while we decrease!”*