

## Test All Things

Call to Worship: Psalm 119:137-144

1st Scripture: 1 John 4:1-6

2nd Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22

Hymn Insert- *Every Promise of Your Word*

Hymn Insert- *O Church Arise*

Hymn #706- *Take Time to be Holy*

### **Introduction:**

We've been working through a list of various, additional exhortations, which Paul has strapped on to his letter to the Thessalonians. And the last two that we have considered, along with the final one, which we will be now considering, have come at us in somewhat of a shotgun style, bearing a certain connection, while being broader than that connection at the same time.

"Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies." And now, "Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil." While quenching the Spirit is a broad offense, one can certainly quench the Spirit by despising prophecies. And while despising prophecies is a certain evil, one must be careful to examine all that is taught, to ensure that it is indeed God's Word and not the conjured up notions of man. A system of checks and balances is here put in place to ensure that what is preached and taught, lines up with God's mouthpiece, which is His Word. And so, not despising prophecies does not eliminate the responsibility of every individual believer, from carefully examining the truthfulness of what is brought into the ears through the teaching and preaching of God's Holy Word, and then to respond accordingly.

This morning then, we examine Paul's final exhortation in this section, which charges us with the responsibility of testing all things, so as to ensure that the things that we are taught to embrace, are truly of God. What you choose to believe, will always affect how you live. Guarding what is placed within the vault of our hearts, therefore, is a necessary and critical responsibility, which belongs to all of us.

### **I. The Apostle John's Dilemma**

In our first Scripture reading, we found the Apostle John contending with a significant heresy that had sprung up in the life of the early church, which had threatened to destroy her from within. There, we find one specific example of this exhortation being called into motion.

We read earlier, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error" (1 John 4:1-6).

Here, John charges his readers to "test the spirits," to see whether or not they are from God. And what he means by this is, "Examine those who call themselves prophets," to see whether or not they are from God. And why is such testing necessary? Because, sadly, John assures them that there are false prophets who have gone out into the world. Even as God had His true Apostle's and prophets serving His purposes in the proclamation of Gospel truths, as we might expect, Satan, in seeking to contend with God, sends out his servants as well, with a distortion of the truth, so as to infiltrate the churches with damnable heresies. This being the case, warrants the need to test those who would seek to say any given word on behalf of God. Are they really speaking by the Holy Spirit or are they under the influence of a demonic spirit? Well, the burden is put on the people of God to test the spirits of such men, discerning whether or not they are truly from God.

But, how were the people of God to test the spirits? What means did they have, to discern whether it was Satan or God, who was communicating information to them? Well, John tells us in the text: "They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God. *He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us.* By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error." What is John saying here? Namely, that those who contradicted the teachings of the Apostle's were of the world, and their teachings reflected the impure motives of the world. But those who are of the Lord, are those who "hear us." In other words, they speak in agreement with all that the Apostle's themselves (being the foundation of the church) have taught. And so, the alleged prophets who came to them, were to

be held to the specific standard brought about by the teaching of the Apostle's. And if the alleged prophets contradicted the teachings of the holy Apostles, then they ought to be rejected as false prophets; intruders, governed by demonic beings, with worldly motives.

In this specific context, John is dealing with the damnable heresy of Gnosticism, which ultimately denies the incarnation of Christ, because Gnostics viewed everything material/physical as inherently evil. And so, to presume that God, who is Spirit, would actually take on flesh (which is evil), would be a preposterous notion to the Gnostics. Needless to say, this is not only a gross attack on the gospel (and the sacrificial value of the atonement), but it is also an all out assault on the Person of Christ Himself, distorting both His deity and humanity. And so, John addresses this heresy in the strongest of terms. But again, the preliminary charge that comes out of this is, "Test the spirits! Don't just embrace everything that people say, no matter how eloquent and educated they sound. Make sure it lines up with the teachings, which have been passed down to you through the Apostles."

In a broader and more general sense, brethren, this is what Paul is expressing in his exhortation to the Thessalonians. While they were not to despise prophecies, they were not simply to accept everything that came to them in the name of prophecy. They needed to test the spirits, to see if what they were hearing, was lining up with the revealed will of God, given through the Apostles. God's Word, embedded in the foundation, was what needed to set the pattern for the entire infrastructure of the church, for all generations.

## **II. Test All Things**

Getting back to our main text then, we now have a three dimensional understanding that can help us properly grasp the full meaning of the text: "Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil." In keeping with what we've gone over, we might restate this exhortation then, in the following way: "There are many so-called teachers and alleged prophets out there. Don't just embrace everything that you hear. But rather, test all things and be sure that what you hear is in keeping with the Word of God, and all that you have been taught by us. What you find to be true, hold fast to it. Cling to what is good and in keeping with the revealed will of God. But also, abstain from every form of evil. Whatever contradicts the Word of God;

whatever teachings, doctrines or practices are presented to you, which do not line up with the Scriptures, whole heartedly reject. Abstain from every form of evil. Flee from every wicked way, which is contrary to the revealed will of God."

Before we move on to consider various, relevant applications, brethren, let me highlight one further example, given in the Scriptures, where we actually see this kind of "testing all things," being fleshed out before us. We note that, even Paul himself, was tested in this way, on at least one occasion, and he commended his listeners for doing this. Hear again, that well known text, found in Acts 17:10-12:

"Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men."

Paul had entered Berea for the first time with the gospel, and he found something different about the people there, when he presented the gospel to them. These people were astute, focused and engaged, listening carefully to all that Paul was saying. They were diligent and not lazy in their desire to understand spiritual things. And then, daily, they searched the Scriptures to see if everything Paul was teaching was indeed in keeping with the Word of God (the OT, which was all that they had at that time -- note: the gospel is clearly given in the OT). The Thessalonians were not as diligent in this regard. And so, what do we have here? A good illustration of what it means to test the spirits!

### **III. Closing Thoughts and Applications**

Having worked through our main text, brethren, let us move on then, to consider a few, relevant closing thoughts and applications:

1) Consider, brethren, that we all have a responsibility to test what we hear; to test what informs us in this life. And we must do that by bringing all that would influence us, into the stencil of Scripture, to see if the principles that guide us are indeed biblical. Now, that carries over into many areas of our lives, doesn't it?

That brings us from our personal gut feelings, to the traditions upon which we have been raised, to simple friendly advice, to the realm of psychology and counseling, to the realm of politics, and of course, into the realm of the church. You don't have to have been here for that long, to testify to the fact that I have said many times, in accordance with the Scriptures, that what you believe about anything, matters significantly, affecting the way that you live. The fact that "faith" and "belief" are given a priority emphasis all throughout the Scriptures should clearly affirm this. And a key reason for this is because, "What you believe will always affect how you live." We live out of our beliefs. The principles that guide us, are derived from our beliefs about any given thing. If I truly believe in the reality of God, that will affect how I live. And what I believe about that God will also affect how I live. The Muslims, who crashed those planes into the Twin Towers (some 15 years ago now) didn't end their lives without being directed by a foundation of beliefs and convictions, that motivated their decision to lay down their own lives for what they considered to be a worthy cause.

And so, we must concern ourselves, brethren, with what exists in the storage unit of our beliefs. And we must take regular inventory, to ensure that whatever is unbiblical, is thrown out of the closet of the principles that drive us. We need to be a people, who test all things, brethren...and especially in this day and age, where critical thinking of any substantial kind has gone out the window.

Young people, you are growing up in a generation that is lazy and has very little desire to think for itself. And there are people at the top, who don't want you to think. And they will offer to give you all kinds of free things, if you will simply hand your mind over to them. People just love to parrot talking points that have been handed down and passed on from others, like lemmings jumping off a cliff. Our political system is a sad and great testimony to this. People hardly concern themselves with substantial issues anymore. And so, if you simply say all the right things (in the right ways), regardless of your past actions, you can become president nowadays, simply by being a popular candidate of some sort.

You will be made to look like a fool; you will inherit the arrogant and mocking gaze of many people today, if you even infer that God exists. And if you mention Jesus, forget about it. And it will be so much easier to just trust the textbooks and the college professors, who will hand

you a load of cow dung, dressed up in scientific language, to force feed you evolution, which happens to be very equitable in our day.

And so, we have to be a people who think, friends. But, we also have to realize that even our own hearts are deceptive, driven by a desire for material things and all kinds of sinful, idolatrous lusts. But God has given us His objective truth, outside of ourselves, outside of the contamination of fallen humanity, so that we might have a solid rock, upon which we can stand, protecting us from every wicked influence that surrounds us (and even springs up within us). We have a Book from God, which calls us to, "Trust in the Lord with all of our hearts and to lean not on our own understanding," and it is there that we will find true life and protection from every wind of doctrine that blows throughout the world around us. The world is a dark, dark place. But Jesus Christ, the Living Word of God, entered this darkness, to expose it for what it is, and to lead us to the Light that is in Him, which leads lost sinners into His everlasting life!

"Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil." In Romans, Paul charges us to not be conformed to this world, but rather to be transformed by the renewing of our minds..." We have been shaped by the world, but now, in Christ, we seek to siphon out the world's influences, replacing them with the mind of Christ, given us in the Scriptures.

And so, brethren, especially in our "media driven, Facebook and Twitter world," where information is just flying around all over the place, let us be on guard. Let us protect our hearts from all of the ungodly information that looms about. Let us be filled with the Scriptures. Let us examine the principles that currently drive us. Let us examine what is taught from this pulpit each week. Let us be like the Bereans, a fair minded people, who search the Scriptures consistently, to search out what is true. And to embrace and cling to what is good, while abstaining from every form of evil!

The Gospel!

Amen!!!

Benediction: Ephesians 3:14-21