

SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

TEXT: I JOHN 4:1-6

INTRODUCTION:

1. The first six verses of I John chapter 4 describe the conflict between two spiritual realms, "the spirit of truth and the spirit of error" (4:6).
2. When the books of the Bible were originally written, they did not have chapter and verse divisions like we have now.
3. The chapter and verse divisions were added to the Bible for the sake of convenience, in order to help us find Scriptures more quickly and easily.
4. Stephen Langton was a professor at the University of Paris who later became the Archbishop of Canterbury. He divided the Bible into chapters in 1227 A.D.
5. Later on, a Jewish rabbi named Nathan divided the Hebrew Old Testament into verses in 1448.
6. Robert Stephanus (Stephens), a French printer, divided the verses for his Greek New Testament, and published it in 1551.
7. The first English Bible to have both chapter and verse divisions was the Geneva Bible (1560).
8. I said all that to say this -- I John 4:1 is not introducing a new subject. Chapter 3 ends with, "And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us" (3:24b).
9. Then chapter 4 begins with, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God" (4:1a).
10. The subject here is the spirit world. Note: "Spirit" (3:24), "spirit" and "spirits" (4:1), "Spirit of God" (4:2), "Every spirit" (4:2, 3), "spirit of antichrist" (4:3), "the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error" (4:6).
11. That is nine references to "spirit" in five verses.
12. The word "spirit" is also found in I John 4:13; 5:6, 8.
13. This is an important and fascinating passage of Scripture because it deals with the unseen spirit world. J. Vernon McGee said this about this portion of Scripture. "We are in the devil's territory. As a pastor I found that whenever I would preach about the devil, he always managed to cause some interruption in the church service."
14. I remember hearing Dr. John McCormick speak in chapel when I was in Bible college. He was preaching an excellent message on demons when all of a sudden the lights started going off and on. This continued for a while, and Dr. McCormick said this had happened to him on previous occasions when he preached about demons.

I. WE ARE TO TRY THE SPIRITS (4:1).

1. First John 3:23 says we are commanded to believe on the name of God's Son Jesus Christ. Then I John 4:1 says, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try (test) the spirits whether they are of God..."
2. Faith in itself is no virtue. In fact, some faith is very dangerous (e.g., Islam).
3. Some people mistakenly believe that we are to believe everything and everyone, but that is foolish. I have heard people say, "I give money to the JW's when they come to my door. I saw a Mormon commercial on TV and I called up and they sent me the book of Mormon. I give money to TV preachers, etc."
4. That is unwise. God says, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try (test) the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (4:1).
5. There was a liberal minister who resigned his liberal church for another, bigger liberal church. On his final Sunday, an elderly lady shook his hand and said, "Reverend, before you came here I didn't care at all for man, God or the devil. But after listening to you preach for five years I've learned to love all three."
6. Verse 1 says, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try (test) the spirits whether they are of God..." People say they "believe in Jesus," but which Jesus?
7. Is it the Roman Catholic Jesus who is either a helpless baby in Mary's arms or a dead Jesus nailed to a cross who cannot save anyone without masses and novenas and rosary beads and sacraments?
8. Or is it the Mormon Jesus, who is the brother of Lucifer?
9. Or the Jehovah's Witness Jesus who is Michael the archangel?
10. The Bible says, "Try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (4:1).
11. This is what our Lord said in His Olivet Discourse:
 - "Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many" (Matthew 24:4, 5).
 - "And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many" (Matthew 24:11).
 - "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matthew 24:24).

- The apostle Paul wrote in II Timothy 3:13, "But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived."
12. We need spiritual discernment to recognize false prophets because they are everywhere. But spiritual discernment is lacking today. That is why preachers like Joel Osteen, Rick Warren, Benny Hinn, T.D. Jakes, and other false prophets are so popular.
 13. We are told to "try (test) the spirits whether they are of God" (4:1) because demonism is rampant today. Demonism is spreading rapidly across the USA.
 14. Demonism is behind astrology, tarot cards, physics, fortune telling, ouiji boards, palm reading, séances, voodoo and Santeria, meditation, yoga, the new-age movement, witchcraft, Halloween, etc.
 15. I read an article the other day about a Satanic temple opening up in Detroit, Michigan. They already have Satanic temples in New York, San Francisco, and other big cities.
 16. This new Satanic temple will be led by a woman who calls herself "Jex Blackmore." The article showed photographs of Jex Blackmore, a skanky-looking young woman covered with ugly tattoos.
 17. She said, "We believe in a metaphorical, literary construct of Satan. He's a symbol for rebellion, a symbol of human nature, the thirst for knowledge."
 18. Her boss is a Satanist named Doug Mesner (he also calls himself "Lucien Greaves"), who said, "We don't worship Satan as an actual conscious entity."
 19. By the way, according to a nationwide survey conducted by the Barna Group, 60% of "Christians" in America believe that Satan "is not a living being but is a symbol of evil." Only a small minority of Christians indicated that they believe Satan is real.
 20. This new Satanic temple said there will be no animal sacrifices performed by their members. Jex Blackmore said, "The idea of sacrifice specifically is to appease some demon or some god, and that's a supernatural belief that we don't subscribe to."
 21. This new Satanic temple has recently launched an effort against Michigan's informed consent laws, which require women to read state-mandated and state-written materials before receiving an abortion.
 22. Jex Blackmore said the Satanic temple's plans for Michigan include offering same-sex wedding ceremonies for homosexuals, and advocating for "women's rights" (i.e., abortion).

23. Reading the article, I could not help but notice that this Satanic temple is very similar to most Protestant churches today -- anti-Biblical, pro-abortion, pro-homosexual, rebellious, worldly, egotistical, etc.
24. Therefore I was not surprised to see that Jex Blackmore was raised Lutheran. She could become a Lutheran minister and fit right in!
25. A few years ago, a man named Richard Bach wrote a big best-seller named, *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*. Mr. Bach claimed that a "voice" dictated the book to him and that it was not his style of writing.
26. The book was made into a movie in 1973.
27. There are many other examples of this. It is referred to as "automatic writing." "Stairway To Heaven" is considered one of the most popular rock songs ever recorded. It was produced by Led Zeppelin, a British band that was heavily involved with Satanism.
28. The composer and vocalist, Robert Plant, described how he wrote the lyrics: "I was holding a pencil and paper, and for some reason I was in a very bad mood. Then all of a sudden my hand was writing out the words." His hand was moved by demons.
29. Rock music and hip hop, etc. is heavily influenced by demons. For example, even secular newspapers noted that Beyonce's performance at last year's Super Bowl was filled with satanic symbols and imagery. Beyonce admits a demon she calls "Sasha Fierce" takes over her when she performs on stage.
30. Her statements are similar what Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison, and other rock stars have said.
31. It is foolish for Christians to listen to rock music, and it is wicked that some churches use it during their services.

II. HOW TO TRY THE SPIRITS (4:2, 3).

1. Verses 2 and 3 show us how we can try (test) the spirits.
2. The test of a teacher is found in Matthew 22:42. Our Lord asked the Pharisees, "What think ye of Christ?"
3. In the apostle John's day, the Gnostics denied that "Jesus Christ is come in the flesh" (4:2).
4. Interestingly, the NIV translation of I John 4:3 reads, "but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God."

5. They leave out "Christ" because "Christ" is left out of the Alexandrian line of Greek texts that had been corrupted by the Gnostics.
6. The Gnostics believed in a dualistic Jesus Christ. They taught that Jesus was the physical Jesus, and Christ was the spiritual Jesus.
7. This false teaching influenced some of the scribes who changed the Biblical texts to reflect their Gnostic beliefs.
8. The apostle Paul wrote, "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh..." (I Timothy 3:16).
9. The King James Version is based upon the correct Greek text. This Greek text says, "God (*Theos*) was manifest in the flesh."
10. But this verse has also been corrupted by the Gnostics, and so the modern versions (based on the corrupt Alexandrian text) say, "He appeared in the flesh" (NIV).
11. There is the Spirit of truth (the Holy Spirit) and there is the "spirit of antichrist" (4:3).
12. Some of the new translations have been corrupted by the "spirit of antichrist" (4:3).
13. A JW once admitted to me he disliked the KJV because it taught the deity of Christ.
14. Our Lord referred to the Holy Spirit as "the Spirit of truth" in John 14:17; 15:26; and 16:13.
15. First Corinthians 6:19 says, "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you?"
16. For years, surveys have revealed that the majority of Protestant ministers and Roman Catholic priests do not believe in basic Bible doctrines such as the deity of Christ, His virgin birth, and His bodily resurrection. "This is that spirit of antichrist" (4:3).
17. J. Vernon McGee said, "There are many false teachers that the child of God should avoid as he does a rattlesnake. These false teachers are inspired by evil spirits that deny the incarnation of

Christ and all His work of redemption that flows from it. The evil spirit denies the Person of Christ and His work. This is the final test. The evil spirit resists and opposes Christ. This is the spirit of Antichrist (see I John 2:22)" (*Thru the Bible*).

III. HOW TO TRY THE FALSE TEACHERS (4:4-6).

1. "They are of the world..." (4:5). The worldly crowd listens to them and agrees with them. This explains the appeal that many liberal ministers have in the world and their popularity with unsaved people.
2. But it is fleeting. Robert Schuller preached the "positive thinking" message popularized by Normal Vincent Peale. He started his Crystal Cathedral in a Garden Grove, Calif., drive-in movie theater in 1955.
3. It eventually became one of America's most prominent "mega-churches" with a congregation that had up to 10,000 members at the height of its popularity.
4. Crystal Cathedral Ministries filed for bankruptcy in 2010 and in 2012 they sold the building and its adjacent campus to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange County for use as their new cathedral.
5. The 87-year-old Schuller has had dementia for years and is living in a healthcare facility in southern CA. As far as we know he never repented of his false teachings. He is a lonely, broken-down false prophet.
6. When John uses the term "the world" (4:5) he is referring to Satan's anti-God, anti-Christ, anti-Bible system, that is deceiving lost sinners and steering them straight to hell (cf. I John 2:15-17).
7. Here is a definition of the "world" -- "It is the satanic system which man has built up in an effort to make himself happy without the Lord Jesus Christ. It may include the world of culture, the world of art, education, sports, music -- any sphere in which the Lord is not loved and welcomed."
8. Someone else defined the world as "human society insofar as it is organized on wrong principles, and characterized by base desires, false values, egotism, greed, fleshly pleasures, deceit, and vulgarity."
9. "Characterized by base desires, false values, egotism, greed, fleshly pleasures, deceit, and vulgarity." Joan Rivers' funeral was held the other day at a Jewish synagogue in Manhattan. The newspapers said it was "X-rated," with her friends giving disgustingly filthy eulogies.
10. That is a picture of the world -- dirty, obscene, with no fear of God.

11. We need not fret over Satan, his demons, false teachers, or any of Satan's servants. First John 4:4 says, "greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world."
12. "Greater is he that is in you" -- the Holy Spirit indwells each and every child of God (I John 2:20, 27).
13. Our Lord said in John 14:16 and 17, "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you."
14. Our Lord said to His adversaries, "He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God" (John 8:47; cf. I John 4:6).
15. Our Lord told Pontius Pilate, "Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice" (John 18:37b).

CONCLUSION:

1. The Lord instructs us to "try the spirits" (4:1). A number of years ago, many preachers were alarmed at Benny Hinn's strange behaviour and unscriptural teachings.
2. So they put him to the test. As articles and books started coming out, warning Christians about Hinn's heresies, he didn't like that.
3. He said, "If I had my way, I'd take my Holy Ghost machine gun and blow their brains out."
4. What a strange thing to say! Benny Hinn says he has a "Holy Ghost machine gun."
5. Some one needs to tell Mr. Hinn that Galatians 5:22 says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith."
6. Ephesians 4:3 says, "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."
7. Well, Benny Hinn may not like it but we are commanded to, "Try the spirits whether they are of God" (4:1).

