

Subject: *Straight Talk about Truth and Error*

Scripture: *1 John 4:1-6*

John goes back and forth between the doctrinal tests and the practical tests of real Christianity. This is what real Christians believe and this is how real Christians behave. We live in a world that says it is unchristian and unkind to question what people believe and teach. Everybody should get along and go along. To draw lines of truth and error is divisive, so they say. I remember what Adrian Rogers once said: "It is better to be divided by truth than to be united by error." Everything in the spiritual world is not true or good. If you go into a typical bookstore you will find a section with spiritual books. Some of them are based on truth and some on error. This is like a grocery store. Everything in a grocery store is not edible. Some things are good to eat, but some things will kill you if you eat them, for example: cleaning solutions and detergents.

There is such a thing as truth and error. Truth is essential for life and growth. Error is like a poison that leads to death. We need to have discernment, the ability to recognize the difference between truth and error, and to have enough sense to love truth and avoid error. Think again about a grocery store. What if someone were to change the labels or the contents in the containers? You pick up a bottle of apple juice, but it's filled with floor bathroom cleaner. That would be deadly, wouldn't it? Everything labeled "Christian" is not necessarily Christian. We must look beyond the labels and the package. For example, Christian Science is neither Christian nor science. John points out the difference between truth and error.

1. Realize the Danger of False Teaching

John begins this passage by warning believers not to believe every spirit and reminding us that many false prophets are in the world. This is not a small, isolated danger but a widespread danger. The Old and New Testaments are filled with warnings about false teachers and their teaching. Sometimes false teaching came from outside the family of faith and sometimes from within.

- Moses warned about this danger - *Deuteronomy 13:1-3*¹ *If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder,*² *And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them;*³ *Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.* The book of Deuteronomy warns about anyone who would lead his family into false teaching and worship of another god. This person was to be reported and killed even by his own family.
- Many OT prophets warned – *Jeremiah 29:8* *For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Let not your prophets and your diviners, that be in the midst of you, deceive you, neither hearken to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed.*
- Jesus warned – *Matthew 7:15* *Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.* *Matthew 24:4-5*⁴ *And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you.*⁵ *For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.*
- Paul warned – *Acts 20:30-31*³⁰ *Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.*³¹ *Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with*

tears. **2 Corinthians 11:13-14**¹³ *For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.* ¹⁴ *And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.*

- **Peter warned – 2 Peter 2:1** *But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.*
- **John warned – 2 John 7** *For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.*

During the Gold Rush years men went to find gold out west. Some thought they found gold, only to learn that it was iron pyrite. They called it “fool’s gold.” As you can imagine they were deeply disappointed because they thought they had struck it rich. Millions of people follow false teaching and they are eventually going to be disappointed and even doomed because of it.

All false teaching comes from the same source (Satan, ***John 8:44*** *Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.*) See Genesis 3. Satan first used doubt, then denial, and finally deception. Satan knew this was a powerful lie because he believed it.

2. Recognize the Difference between True and False Teaching

John commands us to try (test) the spirits to see if they are of God. The word “try” (test) was used of metalworkers. They would test or examine their metals for purity.

- ***1 Thessalonians 5:21*** *Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.* “Prove” is the same word used in 1 John 4:1.

How can we tell if it is truth or error? John gives three tests to recognize the Spirit of God.

- **The Spirit of God teaches the truth about Jesus Christ (vs. 2-3)**
Jesus Christ is God’s eternal Son who came to earth as a real man. He is fully God and fully man. Any person who believes or teaches otherwise is not a Christian. If you are wrong about the person and work of Christ, then it doesn’t matter what you are right about. Real Christians don’t always agree on every point of doctrine, but real Christians always agree on the basic truths of who Jesus is and what He did for us. By this test alone we know that Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons are false believers. John makes it clear that false teaching about Christ is the spirit of Antichrist. Antichrist is a term that means opposed to Christ and in place of Christ. False teaching about Christ is to stand in opposition to Him and to seek to replace Him with another idea or person.
- **The Spirit of God overcomes and rejects false teachers (vs. 4-5)**
We need to notice the pronouns “ye” in verse 4 (believers), “they” in verse 5 (false teachers), and “we” (John and others who are true spokesmen for God). The one who is greater is the Holy Spirit. He is greater than the spirit of Antichrist in the world. Believers need to be aware of false teaching but we don’t need to be afraid of it because we know the truth and have victory over all false teaching. This is a battle, but victory is certain (“have overcome” is perfect tense meaning that victory has been

won and the results will continue). We have a built-in truth and lie detector, the Spirit of truth. See 1 John 2:20, 27; Rev. 2:2.

- The Spirit of God receives the apostles' teaching (vs. 5-6)
True believers receive what the apostles taught. Truth is not new or ever-changing. It is unchanging and firm and it is recorded in the Scriptures. If a doctrine is new, it's not true. **Acts 2:42** *And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.* We must test all spiritual claims and teachings by the scriptures.
2 Timothy 3:16 *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.* The Spirit of truth is preaching and teaching the same truth today as when John was preaching.

It is not politically correct to say that the Bible is absolute truth and Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation, but that is doctrinally correct. I heard Coach Bobby Bowden, retired head football coach at Florida State University say recently: "I'd rather be theologically correct and be politically wrong." Amen, Bobby. Amen.