

# 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

#### 154. Testing the Spirits- Part 5

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WAOY Tuesday 02/19/08

Welcome again, my brothers and sisters in Christ. We are continuing to go over our verse by verse study of the Epistle of **1 John**, and today I want to continue to examine what John taught about testing the Spirits by looking at **1John 4: 1-6**- so let's read those verses 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 going over verse 1- so let's read that verse again together:

**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.**

Now again let me remind you that in the language of the Middle East at the time- the word, "spirit"- as used here in verse 1- refers not only to literal spirits but also to people. And because John is telling us here not

to believe every spirit- it is very likely that John was referring to what was being taught by people who were being influenced by evil spirits rather than literal spirit-beings. It is most probable that John was actually referring to the Gnostics- who were infiltrating the Church at that time. So, John instructs us here to not just accept what everybody says about a particular issue- but to test it or try it to see if that teaching is in accord with Divinely inspired Scripture or at odds with it.

We have to remember, brothers and sisters, that John- along with the other Apostles- was given the commission to establish Christianity on the earth. And they did that by receiving the final, full, and completed Revelation of God that has been recorded for us in the 27 New Testament Books. Of those 27 Books- five are what are called historical narratives- the four Gospels and the Book of the Acts. The Revelation is a New Testament prophetic Book which deals with those issues that are yet to come.

That leaves the 21 Epistles which were called the teaching Books of the Church. It is from these 21 Epistles that we get all Christian Doctrine- including how God justifies lost Man. And it is from these 21 letters that we get the correct understanding and proper application of the 39 Old Testament Books.

Everything that is contrary to the 66 Books of Scripture is a lie and is false and should be rejected by the believer. Any teaching that alters what Scripture teaches to any degree is not *from* God and is not *of* God and is therefore- by definition a lie- regardless of how popular the teacher may be or how many followers he has.

Now read with me a verse from another New Testament writer who did battle against false teachers. Let's read **Jude 4**:

**For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.**

Now here is the great test of all Church teaching. Notice in this verse that Jude says that these certain ungodly men will attack the Christian Faith on three fronts:

**... turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.**

So these are the three areas that all heresy and false teaching attack:

1. The Grace of God- which also includes Salvation
2. The Character and Nature of God the Father
3. The Person of Jesus Christ

Throughout the 2,000 year history of the Church- these are the three areas that all heresy fought against and so it is these three areas that we as followers of Christ need to fully understand so that we might be successful in fighting off what the false prophets teach.

Since the Resurrection- there have been literally thousands of attempts at distorting and corrupting Christianity. Many times over the 2 millennia of Church History, it looked as though the enemy was going to completely disfigure Christianity. But Jesus Christ is Lord of the Church and He has promised that the gates of hell would not prevail against His Church and so God was faithful to raise up men to expose the false teaching and to call the Church to repentance and to develop strong, Biblical Doctrine which serves as a hedge of protection that would guard the Church in that particular area.

But when you carefully examine all of these false teachings- you will find that there are only seven major roots to all the heresies that have attacked the Church since the beginning:

1. The heresy of the Judaizers
2. The heresy of the Antinomians
3. The heresy of the Gnostics
4. The heresy of the Modalists
5. Arianism
6. Pelagianism
7. The heresy of the Socinians

And of those seven major roots of false teaching- the first three- the Judaizers, the Antinomians, and the Gnostics were doing battle against Christianity while the Apostles were still alive, and the New Testament was still being formulated.

The Apostles James, Peter, and Paul did battle against the first group- the Judaizers. This heresy was brought into the Church during the early years of Christianity- when it became apparent that- for the

most part- the Jew was going to reject Jesus Christ and the pagan Gentiles were being saved by droves and entering into the Church.

A zealous group of Jews began to falsely teach that in order for the Gentiles to be saved- they first had to become good Jews and to be circumcised and to keep the ceremonial and dietary laws of Moses. This battle is recorded for us in **The Acts 15**.

Now this battle against the heresy of the Judaizers gave us the pattern for which all future battles over Truth would be fought. The first thing that comes is the lie. Church Doctrine doesn't come first- the false teaching rises up first and then the Church leaders convene a council to carefully hear the argument put forth by the false teachers. Once the false teaching has been fully presented- the leaders of the Church carefully search the Scriptures to see if the teaching is in accord with or in opposition to the Word of God. If the teaching is in accord with Scripture- it is incorporated into the body of teaching that the Church accepts as being true.

But if the teaching is in opposition to the Scriptures- if it puts forth some new doctrine that the Scriptures do not teach or if it takes away from some existing Divine Truth that the Scriptures clearly affirm- then the teaching is labeled as a heresy and is rejected by the Church as being false. The teachers are then given opportunity to repent and to recant or denounce what they once taught. If they refuse to repent- they are placed under the four step process of Church Discipline outlined in **Matthew 18** and if they continue to refuse to repent- they are excommunicated from the Church and labeled as unrepentant heretics who are reprobate concerning the Faith.

Again, the standard for making this determination is not politics or personal preferences- but the standard is Scripture- does the new teaching uphold what Scripture says or does it add to or take away from what Scripture says.

Now anytime that I get into this issue- I get phone calls and letters from people telling me that this is barbaric, mean, cruel, legalistic, unloving, or even unchristian. My response to these remarks is always the same. I didn't write the Bible, beloved. When Paul and Peter and James and John wrote down these words- they never even consulted with me about these things. Blair didn't say to test the spirits- John did. Blair is not the one who said to give heretics two chances to repent and then reject them- the Apostle Paul did in **Titus**

**3:10.** Blair is not the one who taught about the four step process of Church Discipline which absolutely includes excommunication- Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church did.

The truth of the matter is that we are so laid back about these serious eternal issues today that we really don't care what someone believes as long as they have a good personality and they agree with us on the great social issues of our day like abortion, homosexual marriages, and conservative Supreme Court Judges.

But thank God John did care about Truth. Thank God that people like Paul and Peter and Jude were in charge of the Church back then. If those men were as nonchalant about Doctrine as we are today- the Christian Church would have been overrun with heresy and wouldn't have lasted 20 years.

Once the teaching has been clearly identified as being a heresy- the Church then goes about to gather all of what Scripture teaches about that particular issue and puts it all together and formulates what is called Doctrine. You see, when you say the word, Doctrine- you are saying the same thing as Divine Truth. Doctrine is not man- made; it isn't the result of human reasoning or human logic. Doctrine is not the product of tradition or rulings by pastors, elders, bishops, or popes. Doctrine – true godly biblical Doctrine- comes from Scripture and from Scripture alone.

Dear friends, nobody, no group or church or organization has the right or the authority to articulate new Doctrine that is not clearly spelled out in Scripture. That is fundamental. So when Kenneth Copeland or Norman Vincent Peale or Joseph Smith or Ellen G. White or Muhammad or Pope John Paul II or me or anyone else says that God the Holy Spirit spoke to them and gave them a new revelation or a new slant or a new vision which creates a new Doctrine that Scripture does *not* teach or that takes away from a Doctrine that the Scripture *does* teach – that person is deceived and he is going about to deceive another and this person should be called on the carpet and should be held accountable to the one standard of Holy Scripture. This is exactly what John is teaching here in verse 1.

You see, you can burn down the Church building and the Church will go on. You can kill the pastor and persecute the members and the Church will go on. But if you successfully attack Truth; if you alter what God said; if you add to or take away from the Words of Scripture

or attach new wayward meanings to what the Scriptures actually say- Christianity itself is attacked and the Church is damaged by that.

If we don't have a single standard of Divine Revelation- then we don't know what to believe. And if we don't know what to believe- how do we preach and how do we teach? When Scripture is either ignored or altered- Truth becomes as flexible as a string and is nothing more than opinion. And that would make Truth both unknowable and unworkable. But Divine Truth is not an opinion. Divine Truth is not flexible- it is very, very rigid and it is unmovable, and it is steadfast and sure and certain and authoritative and Divine Truth is eternal.

The Apostle John saw that what God had said was under attack in his day and so he gave us a test which would expose all falsehood and all heresy.

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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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.