

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

157. Testing the Spirits- Part 8

WAOY Tuesday 02/26/08

Welcome again, my beloved in Jesus Christ. We're continuing our verse by verse "journey" through the Epistle of **1John**, and today I want to continue to examine what John taught about "Testing the Spirits". So let's open our Bibles and read **1John 4: 1-6**- again 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 just who John was referring to here in verse 1 by looking at the three major heresies that John said that we are supposed to test that attacked the Church during the age of the Apostles.

We studied last time about the Judaizers or the legalists who taught that Grace was not enough for Salvation. These heretics preached a Gospel that contained human effort and which taught the gentiles that in order to become good Christians – they first had to be good Jews by keeping the Sabbath; being circumcised; and keeping the dietary laws of Moses.

Now we might be tempted today- especially in our very lax culture to applaud these men who taught that we have to do something noble and good in order to earn Salvation. But dear friends, anytime you teach that Salvation is dependent upon what we do- you are in reality attacking Grace- and that is neither noble nor good.

So to get a proper picture of how we need to think about this heresy- we need to look at how the Apostles reacted to it when it came knocking at their door early in the first century by reading **The Acts 15** together. So, let's begin by looking at verse 1:

Some men came down from Judea and *began* teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

So we can see that when Luke wrote this Book- he called these people by a very interesting term. Luke said, "**some men**". Now why did Luke use this term? Was this just a figure of speech? No- it wasn't. Luke used this term for a very specific reason. And to find out- we need to read Jude 4. The fourth verse of Jude says:

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 Jude is the only Book in the New Testament dedicated solely to exposing heretics and false teachers by giving us the characteristics of those who bring in damnable heresy into the Church. And here in **Jude 4**- the half-brother of Jesus tells us that all false teachers; all heresy; all apostasy fights God's Church- not with external armies and weapons; not with politicians or bad laws- but heretics fight against God's Church over the issue of Truth- what the Church believes and what the Church teaches.

In other words- the battleground for heretics is over the issue of Doctrine- which is far more dangerous and far more deadly than physical weapons and physical armies.

Jude tells us in this verse that all heresy is along three lines:

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

So any teaching from anyone for any reason which contradicts or which adds to or takes away from what Scripture teaches about these three issues is not innocent- it isn't harmless- it is an attack- by the devil against Biblical Christianity and it should be confronted; exposed for what it is; and soundly defeated- by teaching what the Scripture does say about these things.

Notice that Jude uses the very same term to describe the heretics and false teachers that Luke used to describe the Judaizers in **The Acts 15**. They both said that these people were “**some men**”. Jude goes on to say that these “**certain persons**” were also “**ungodly persons**” who were ordained to this condemnation.

So I think it is safe to say that the Apostles didn't view people who were trying to monkey around with essential Doctrines to be nice guys. They didn't view them as being well meaning but wayward souls either. No, the men whom God used to raise up the Church viewed anyone who tried to alter what God had revealed about essential Truth to be enemies of the Cross and people who need to be stopped before others were deceived.

So in Luke's account in **The Acts 15** says that these certain, ungodly heretics from Judaea were teaching the Gentiles that in order to be saved- they had to be circumcised after the manner of Moses. Now what's so bad about that? I mean isn't God the One Who told Moses to circumcise the people of God? Yes, He did. So what's wrong with teaching that Salvation was the result of being circumcised?

Here's why. When God told Moses to circumcise Israel- it had nothing to do with Salvation. Not one single area of the Law of God that he gave to Moses had anything to do with Salvation. Moses was not saved because he kept the Law. Abraham was not saved because he kept the law or because he was circumcised or because he was moral or because of anything that he did. Abraham was saved- because he believed- period. And his faith was counted to him for all the Righteousness that he needed to stand in Heaven with God.

Beloved- we are not saved because we do anything. Salvation is not a wage that is paid to those who have earned it. No, Salvation is a free gift of Grace from a Sovereign God to undeserving sinners.

So the real issue here that was brought to a head because of the false teaching of the Judaizers was not even Salvation- it was Grace.

If we have to do something to earn Salvation- then what is Grace? If we need to be circumcised or baptized or keep Communion or attend Mass or speak in tongues or do anything so that we can be good enough to go to Heaven- then why do we need Grace? Grace is unmerited favor- so by definition Grace is something that you cannot have any merit to get- or in other words- you cannot earn it and you cannot deserve it. If you earn it or deserve it- then it ceases to be Grace and is now a wage.

So by the Judaizers teaching that the Gentiles could not be saved unless they were circumcised- they were in effect teaching that Grace was not enough- that Grace was not sufficient for Salvation- and that Man had to add something to Grace to help it along so that people could be saved.

Now in my travels, I run across people all the time who ask me, *“Brother Blair, what’s the big deal? I mean who cares about this fine point of Theology? All we need to do is love Jesus and that’s all it takes to be saved.”*

Is that so? Well let’s look at how Paul and Barnabas reacted to this teaching by the Judaizers to see if these men thought that this was simply a fine point of Theology that really didn’t matter. Let’s read **The Acts 15:2:**

And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, *the brethren* determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.

What does it mean when we read here that Paul and Barnabas had **“great dissension and debate with them”**? Does this sound to you like Paul and Barnabas thought that this matter was simply a fine point of theology that really didn’t matter? It doesn’t sound that way to me. It sounds to me like Paul and Barnabas took John’s exhortation in **1John 4:1** seriously and tested the spirits to see if they were of God and they found out that the Judaizers were not of God and so they got right in these people’s faces and argued against what they were teaching.

But it went even further than personal confrontation. Paul and Barnabas saw that this issue was such a terrible attack against Grace that they took it a step further. Look carefully at the end of **The Acts 15:2:**

... the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.

We read here that neither Paul nor Barnabas were content to simply confront these heretics personally- no- they saw what the Judaizers were doing was so serious that there needed to be an official and formal response from the Church about this issue- so they sent word to Jerusalem- back to the original Apostles and asked them to convene a Church Council to decide the matter.

As you finish reading **The Acts 15**- you will see that Paul himself spoke with James and Peter at the Jerusalem Council and after they consulted with the Scriptures- the Apostles determined that the teaching of the Judaizers was a heresy and an attack against Gods' Grace and rejected their false teaching and those who were teaching it.

The statements that came from this Council and which are recorded for us in **The Acts 15** are what were used to develop our Doctrine of Salvation that we teach today.

The point is that this is the way that all of our historical Church Doctrines were formulated. Doctrine is the result of a crisis of teaching like this one. The way that it works is that some heretic rises up and begins to teach things contrary to Scripture. So the Church convenes a council and to carefully hear the evidence about the teaching. Then the Scriptures are consulted and a decision is made about whether or not the teaching is in accord with Scripture or is against it.

If the teaching is in accord with the Word of God- then that teaching is commended and brought into the Church and added to that body of Truth that the Church accepts as being inspired from God. But if the teaching is contrary to Scripture; if it adds new Doctrine that the Apostles themselves did not teach or if it contradicts Doctrine that the Apostles taught- that teaching is correctly labeled for what it is- a heresy that is poison to the soul.

This is the way that hundreds and hundreds of Christian Doctrines were formulated over the 2,000 year history of the Church and up until the dawn of the 20th century- the Church thought it wise to teach these Doctrines to those who were in leadership in the Church. I have no idea why this stopped but to not teach these things to pastors and elders and deacons and lay leaders has proven to be a terrible mistake that we need to fix quickly.

I understand and agree that not all Church Councils were right- but that is because they forgot or they neglected to consult with the Scriptures about the matter and arbitrarily made rulings based upon human logic and tradition. But all Church Councils which did consult with Scripture and all Church Doctrines which did come from Scripture are true and they are useful to us today to help us to obey what John taught as we try the spirits to see if they are of God.

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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