

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

169. Testing the Spirits- Part 20

WAOY Tuesday 03/18/08

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 looking at verse 5- so on today's broadcast- I want to see verse 5 in light of verse 6- so let's read those two verses again together:

- 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.**

John says here that the distinction between truth and error is made

clear by knowing to whom you listen. If you listen to the voice of the world and if you listen to the things that false teachers speak because it pleases your carnal senses or it tickles your ears- you are in error. But if you listen to the voice of God and if you listen to that which the Apostles speak and you seek to hear truth- not just what is popular- you are in truth. So by this we can clearly see that what you listen to and who you listen to is very, very important.

John says in verse 5 that the heretics are of the world and since that is true- these people speak things that the world likes to hear and so those who are lost in the world hears and accepts what the heretics speak- because it soothes them and it agrees with what they already think.

But those people who are of God hear what John and the other Apostles speak- because John and the other Apostles speak those things that are of God. John speaks truth- the kind of truth that brings conviction; the kind of truth that exposes sin and lukewarmness and backsliding and the wickedness of man's heart.

Nobody who is lost loves to hear that they are lost. They would much rather hear someone tell them how good they are. No one who is in sin wants to hear that sin is a horrible offense to God. They would much rather hear someone tell them that sin is not that bad and nobody's perfect and boys will be boys and don't worry about it. And this has always been true.

You see, dear friends, the Gospel has never been popular with the masses of people. All throughout history- faithful men of God have been hated and despised and persecuted and hunted down and abused- all because of the Gospel that they preached.

For example- God sent His prophet Ezekiel to His own people to call them to repentance and to call them back to holiness and to call them back to being under subjection to the Father of spirits and for the most part- that which Ezekiel spoke to the people was ignored.

And at the same time that the people were ignoring God's true voice through Ezekiel- another group of false prophets- similar to what John was dealing with- began to teach contrary to what God has told Ezekiel to say and were deceiving thousands.

And like John- Ezekiel stood alone against all the false prophets of his day. These false prophets would have nothing to do with the

message of righteousness and impending judgment. Instead, they prophesied an era of peace, ease and prosperity.

In **Ezekiel 13**- we find the very word of Jehovah against preachers and prophets who accommodate people with flesh pleasing words they say were from the Lord. Their words were designed to make God's people comfortable in the face of impending judgment.

In fact, they were not satisfied to simply prophesy good times ahead from their great houses and ivory beds of ease -- they also sought to provide a pillow for every elbow. In the original Hebrew- **Ezekiel 13:18** says- "**Woe to those who sew pillows unto all elbows...**" and then he said in verse 20 "**...Behold, I am against your pillows whereby you hunt lives...**".

Ezekiel was horrified at the sight of prophets who had developed an art of making God's people comfortable in their sins. The Lord had said in **Ezekiel 14:1-5**, "**My people have set up idols in their hearts; they are brazenly setting up stumbling blocks in iniquity; they are all estranged from Me because of their idols**".

The true Word of the Lord in **Ezekiel 12:17-24** was, "**Jehovah says -- eat your bread with trembling, and drink thy water with grieving and fainting -- and say unto the people, her land shall be emptied of its fullness, because of the violence -- cities will be laid waste, the land made desolate -- there shall be no more vain visions or flattering prophecies**".

So while Ezekiel went about calling God's people to humility and repentance- trying to prepare God's people for the soon coming judgments- these "pillow prophets" went about prophesying the dreams and imaginations of their own hearts. God had not spoken to them, even though they prefaced their predictions with, "Hear the Word of the Lord." But God said, "**I did not send them: they do not speak for Me.**"

These false prophets carried with them fancy pillows to place under every elbow for all who flocked to hear their false prophecies. They placed handkerchiefs on the heads of every one of their disciples, a statement to others that meant, "*Nothing but good times ahead. I see nothing ahead but peace and luxury.*" They walked among the poor and sick, with a lace kerchief on the head, as a sign of their arrogance and their confidence in the message of self-indulgence and comfort.

But Ezekiel thundered the Word of God at them- as the masses congregated to hear their pleasant words. In **Ezekiel 13:16**, the prophet said, "**You see for God's people a vision of prosperity, when there is no**

prosperity, saith the Lord Jehovah". And in verse 3 Ezekiel said, **"You follow after your own imagination - when actually you have seen nothing."**

The pillow prophets of Ezekiel's day were also in John's day and they are still with us in our day! And even though their heresy is ancient- it still deceives people today just like it did thousands of years ago. These antichrists talk about the Word of God and about prophecy and they salt their soothing messages with a lot of Scripture. But there is a falseness in what they preach. They are not preaching the Cross or holiness and separation. They make no demands on their followers. They seldom speak of sin and judgment. They abhor the very mention of suffering and pain. To them, the heroes of **Hebrews 11** were faithless cowards and penniless losers who were afraid to claim their rights.

And like the pillow prophets of Israel- the supreme desire of the modern heretics is to promote luxurious lifestyles and make people comfortable in their pursuit of the "good life". We need to know that these people are not speaking for God. All they are doing is passing out pillows. One for every elbow of every follower. No wonder the crowds flock to sit under their message -- it's painless. There is not the call of Christ to deny self and take up a Cross.

So what is the difference between the pillow prophets and Jehovah's true spokesmen? The preacher or layman who doesn't know the difference is on dangerous ground. With so many going about gathering huge followings- it is imperative today for us to have Holy Ghost discernment. The confused prophets will be exposed by Truth.

Now most of these modern false pillow prophets sound like sincere, Bible loving men of God. But the Lord has given His people infallible tests to prove what is true and what is false. We are to test every man and test every message- John says that we are to test every spirit - by the whole Word of God.

Let me bring to your attention three characteristics of a true prophet of God.

1. A true man of God is consumed with a vision of the Lord Jesus Christ. He has been so overwhelmed, so mastered by that glorious vision of Jesus- that he can speak of nothing else. He preaches the whole counsel of God – without fear or apology because he is not ashamed of the Gospel.

God said of the false prophets in **Ezekiel 13:3-** **"Woe unto the deceiving prophets who follow after their own imaginations... they have seen**

nothing". Yet of Moses- a true man of God, it was said in **Hebrews 11:27- "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him Who is invisible".** (Hebrew 11:27).

Jesus said of Abraham in **John 8:5&6- "Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad".**

Stephen had a glorious vision of Jesus and **Acts 7:5&6** says **"And he said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God".**

Ananias said to Paul in **The Acts 22:14- "The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His Will and to see the Righteous One and to hear an utterance from His Mouth".**

And to His own disciples, Jesus said in **John 14:19- "After a little while the world will no longer see Me; but you will see Me; because I live you will live also."**

You see, beloved, the one thing every one of these men of God had in common was their life-controlling vision of Christ the Lord. Christ was the great and only Cause in their life. They saw Him through the eye of faith.

Moses willingly forsook the ease and prosperity of Egypt to suffer in a wilderness because he had been mastered by a vision of Christ. Nothing else mattered now- not even his dream of becoming a great deliverer. Moses saw beyond all human ambition. He was weaned from all that was earthly because he had really seen Christ. He could endure anything- because nothing on earth could compare with what his spiritual eyes had seen.

Abraham became totally detached from this world and willingly became a foreigner on earth- because his eyes were fixed on a city whose builder and maker was God. But best of all- Abraham had seen a vision of Christ on His throne in that holy city. Never again would he settle for things temporal or earthly. His faith was built upon his continual vision of Christ. He rejoiced and was glad, for he had eyes for the invisible, the eternal, Christ!

The moment Paul saw Jesus- everything else on earth became dung to him. The very moment Christ was revealed in Paul- he determined to know nothing else among men except Jesus Christ and Him Crucified. He gladly endured hardships, shipwreck, stoning, beatings, imprisonment and none of these things moved him or robbed him of his joy because he gloried in his vision of the Lord.

Any teacher or preacher who is tied to this world or the things of this world and who speaks of this world has seen nothing. John says they are in error- no matter how popular they are. If he had a vision of Christ- if he was in constant union with Jesus Christ- he would preach of nothing else. He would stand before the crowds, proclaiming, "I count it all loss -- it's all dung! It is Christ and Him alone. He is all; He fills all things. He is my very life!"

Like the prophet Isaiah- the true man of God who sees the Lord, high and lifted up, will fall on his face and weep over his sins and the sins of God's people. Then he will be purged and go forth in the power of his awesome vision to preach Christ. And John tells us here to test the spirits of these people so that we will not fall into error.

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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