

Series: 1 John

Title: Beloved, Try the Spirits

Text: 1 John 4: 1-6

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1 John 4: 1: Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. 2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: 3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that *spirit* of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. 4: Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. 5: They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. 6: We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

Every true preacher sent from God must declare to sinners three things: one, every God-sent preacher must preach the gospel of salvation by God's free and sovereign grace in Christ Jesus, the Son of God; two, every faithful preacher must preach the necessity of hearing the gospel, the necessity of being born of God of the incorruptible Seed and believing on Christ; and three, every preacher sent by Christ must warn brethren of false preachers. Some think we ought not expose and preach against false preachers. But Christ did. And we must also. The Master said,

Matthew 7: 15: Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. 16: Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? 17: Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. 18: A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. 19: Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. 20: Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

Today, folks say things like, "Well, that is *your* truth!" There is only God's truth. Salvation is by God's will, by Christ's works, according to God's word. If they preach man's will and man's works then they are false prophets!

Proposition: Every believer must try preachers by the word of God.

TRY THE SPIRITS

1 John 4: 1: Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God:

Every preacher or teacher is a spirit. He either speaks by the Holy Spirit of God or he speaks by the spirit of antichrist. He is either a preacher sent from God or they are one of the devil's ministers. Folks say, "*Oh, you ought to hear him quote scripture, he sure knows the bible.*" But does he know and preach Christ!

We must try the spirits—"try the spirits whether they are of God." This does not mean we are to have a critical spirit toward the preacher, finding fault for every little thing.

Brethren, preaching the gospel is the most difficult thing I have ever done. It is a heavy, heavy burden. The pressure is immense. It is easy to get carried away and something come out wrong. It is possible to hear the preacher in a wrong way—to take what he says in way totally foreign to what he meant. But our text does

not mean we are to be critical of every little word. And God's people are not! It means try his doctrine by the word of God.

Isaiah 8:20: To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.

Brethren, I insist that you try me by the word of God. I email my notes to you to make it easier for you to do so. Try what I preach by the word of God. But if the word that I preach *is* according to scripture—and it declares your doctrine to be false—if what I preach is according to God's word by contrary to some particular doctrine that you thought was true—then bow to the word of God.

Romans 3:4:...yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.

When we do not bow to God's word we judge God. When we do not believe God's word, a man essentially is saying that God's word is not right. They call God a liar by their unbelief.

But don't get mad at the preacher when you are rebuked—the word spoken is for the profit of God's people. Believers do not want our ears tickled. We want to be instructed. Spend as much time looking these things up in God's word and asking God for understanding, as the preacher spent preparing and asking God.

We need to learn to try the preacher by God's word then bow to God's word. Folks will hear you preach the gospel and run up and say, "*Are you saying my grandmother is lost?*" It is usually a relative. They very seldom say, "*Are you saying I AM lost?*" But that's what they mean. No, I am declaring God's word. If you or someone you know meets the qualification from God's word then they are lost. But God's word declared it; I preach God's word, not my own.

Or some say, "Well, Spurgeon said." Brethren, I do not care who said it or how many said it; if it is not according to God's word then let it go and bow to God's word.

MANY FALSE PROPHETS

1 John 4: 1...because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

The reason we must try the spirits is because there are many false preachers gone out into the world. He did not say there are a few. He said there are "*Many false prophets.*" Some receive and believe anyone who holds the office of pastor in a so-called church and some call every person who claims to believe on Christ "brother" or "sister." But God-sent pastors are rare and so are brothers and sisters in Christ. Christ said, "*Narrow is the way and few there be that find it*" (Mt 7:14).

At any given time in history, God has always allowed the devil to have more ministers in this world than God has—"*many false prophets are gone out into the world.*" By this God manifests his sovereign power to bring his child under the gospel and plant us in his church with his saints. God alone plants his people in his church.

Exodus 15: 13: Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation. [concerning mighty men, Moses said] 16:...by the greatness of thine arm they shall be as still as a stone; till thy people pass over, O LORD, till the people pass over which thou hast purchased. 17: Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place, O LORD, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in, in the Sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established.

False prophets do not profit God's people.

Jeremiah 23:32: Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD.

How do I know a true God sent preacher? What is the true test?

The test is not whether he preaches the law. Most every false preacher preaches the law. Listen to the apostle Paul:

2 Corinthians 11: 14: And no marvel, satan himself is transformed as an angel of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness whose end shall be according to their works.

But whose righteousness? Their own righteousness; they preach the lie of man's righteousness by the law]

Philippians 3: 2: Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. 3: For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Php 3: 2-3).

The test is not if he preaches church history. They put flowers on the graves of God's true preachers while they reject God's living preachers as antinomians.

The test is not if he preaches gifts of the spirit or claims to have healing powers. The ability to heal died out when the last of Christ's apostles died out; they were the only ones who could pass-on that gift; when they died those gifts died.

The test is not if he has degrees from seminary. A man can have more degrees than a thermometer and not have a clue who Christ is.

The test is not your experience. The devil might have given you your experience.

THE TEST

1 John 4: 2: Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: 3: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: 4: Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. 5: They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. 6: We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

The true test is what does he preach concerning Christ Jesus—"every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God", he preaches by "*the Spirit of God.*" What does that mean?

Gnosticism, more particularly, Docetism, was a heresy in the apostle John's day. But there are some who hold to similar teachings in our day. They believed all people and things in the earth was sinful. Therefore, if the Son of God took flesh they believed he would have been made sin. So they taught that it only "seemed" he was made flesh. "Dokein" means "to seem." They taught that God only treated Christ "as if"

he were made flesh. Therefore, it was “as if” he was made under the law, “as if” he was made sin, and “as if” he was made a curse. Some say it is this particular heresy that John is exposing in verse 2.

Brethren, the devil is subtle. He can trick people into denying some part of Christ’s work and make them think they are defending Christ’s glory. Gnostics of old denied Christ made flesh because they wanted to protect the glory of Christ. So they said he was not made flesh. They denied an essential truth and they did so in the name of protecting God’s glory.

John said, *“Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God.”* Does not everyone declare that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh? No.

Declaring Christ is come in the flesh is to declare Jesus Christ is eternal God. If he is come in the flesh then he was somewhere before he came and in another form before he came. Christ is God, the eternal Son. He is the Son of God who was Spirit who is now *God come in the flesh*. Christ is all God and all Man in one body. The fullness of the Godhead bodily.

Declaring Christ is come in the flesh is to declare what he accomplished and for whom. He is Jesus Christ—the successful Savior, anointed of God—*“thou shalt call his name Jesus for he shall save...”* It is to declare he came to save a particular people—*“thou shalt call his name Jesus for he shall save his people.”* It is to declare he came to save sinners who could not save themselves—*“thou shalt call his name Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins.”*

Declaring Christ is come in the flesh to save his people from their sins means God’s righteousness is manifest by him. He manifest how God can be just and Justifier of those who believe on his name. Christ Jesus is the sinless Substitute who himself never sinned and would never sin. He maintained his holy character, his holy nature, even while he hung on the cross. But scripture also says he was made sin for us. He was manifesting the righteousness of God. God is so righteous he would not pour out justice on his Son until he laid the iniquity of his people on him.

Proverbs 17:15: He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD.

Are we to believe that God laid aside his righteousness when dealing with our Substitute on the cross when the purpose for which he sent Christ was to manifest his righteousness? Are we to side with Gnostics and the Docetic by denying he was really made flesh, really made under the law, really made sin, really made a curse? Are we to say that would make him change? Some say Christ could not be made sin because he is *“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and forever”* (Heb 13: 8). Yes, he is! But scripture says *“he increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man”* (Lu 2: 52). Yet, while he did so he was still Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and forever.

In himself he died the Just for the unjust. He remained sinless and faithful to God on the cross. And as our Substitute, his obedience unto the death of the cross, was that he presented himself to the Father to *“be made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him”* (2 Cor 5:21). That is the only way consistent with the righteousness of God. And bearing the sin and curse of his people is the shame of the cross which our Substitute despised yet endured. Therefore, he is the righteousness of God, the righteousness of his people—the Holy One—who established the law for his people and declared God just and the Justifier. Oh, what a Savior! What a Substitute! What a God!

Declaring Christ is come in the flesh is to declare he is risen and successfully working *in his people*—*“Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the*

world.” John declares that you who believe have been born *of God* and that is why you have overcome the world.

1 John 5:4: For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world:

Ye are OF GOD, little children:

1 Corinthians 1: 29: That no flesh should glory in his presence. 30: But OF HIM are ye in Christ Jesus, who OF GOD is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: 31: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

Ye have overcome them: because GREATER IS HE THAT IS IN YOU, than he that is in the world—Christ in you! As the apostle Paul declared to the Colossians,

Colossians 1: 23: If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from THE HOPE OF THE GOSPEL, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister;...27: which is CHRIST IN YOU, THE HOPE OF GLORY: 28: Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: 29: Whereunto I also labour, striving according to HIS WORKING, which WORKETH IN ME MIGHTLY.

Our text declares that Christ working in his preacher is the reason his preacher preaches salvation through faith in Christ, apart from man’s works and Christ in his people is the reason his people hear and know truth from error—*“They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.”* It is because *“we are of God”*—born of God, taught of God, with Christ dwelling in us—so that *“he that knoweth God heareth us.”* Christ’s preacher preaches due to the Spirit of Christ working in him. Also, Christ’s people know God and hear Christ’s preacher with spiritual discernment due to the Spirit of Christ working in them.

All of these things are included in declaring that Christ is come in the flesh. We do not deny Christ is God come in the flesh. We do not deny his work *for us* on the cross neither do we deny Christ’s work *in us* whereby he creates in us a new man in righteousness and true holiness. We do not deny either because both are necessary.

Psalm 32: 2: Blessed *is* the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit *there is* no guile.

ANTICHRIST

1 John 4: 3: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that *spirit* of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world...

Those who do not preach Jesus Christ as all the salvation of his sinful, helpless people are antichrist. We can make excuses for those that go out from us but God’s word settles the matter—*“They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.”*

What keeps God’s people united with his people under the gospel? What saith the word of the Lord?—*“We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.”*

Amen!