

**THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH AND THE SPIRIT OF ERROR**

1 John 4:1-6

**Intro:** There are two things that should amaze us as we see what the Apostle John had to say about false doctrine as he wrote toward the end of the first century:

- 1) That there was such a problem so early in the history of the church.
- 2) That there was so much of it.
- 3) That he dealt with it, exposing it in such a simple way.

And yet I suppose we should not be at the presence of false teaching at that time since false doctrine was introduced into the human family in the Garden of Eden when the Devil told Eve that she would “not surely die” if she ate of the fruit that had been forbidden to them by God, when God had said to Adam and Eve that if they did eat of it they would “surely die.” So the Devil made sure that false doctrine got an early start, and the spread of it has never stopped. False doctrine has to be defined as any teaching that is contrary to the revealed will of God. Teaching that deviates in any way from teaching of God’s Word is false. There can be no compromise with the truth of the living God.

False teaching is especially dangerous because it is an attack upon the will of God. That is clear from that first instance of false teaching when the Devil encouraged Eve to do what she and Adam had been specifically told them that they were not to do. And in what the Devil told Eve he was encouraging her not *to believe* God. You can even see in his words that he was questioning the goodness of God. False teaching is like a tree which grows many different kinds of poisonous fruit.

So since the Apostle Paul was writing to believers about fellowship with God and the assurance of salvation, those are two areas of truth which the Devil hates, and which he always attacks.

Now this is not the first time in the epistle that the Apostle John has mentioned false teaching. And in preparation for what we are going to see in the first six verses of chapter 4, I want u to go back earlier in this same epistle to refresh our minds upon what John had said previously. You and I know that if you mention something in a letter there us really no need to go over it again because the readers are always able to read what has already been written. But we also know (and this applies to all of the repetition in 1 John or any other book of the Bible), repetition is for emphasis. John wanted his readers to knows that this was not a casual

point that he was making, but that it was a subject of immense importance.

So please turn to 1 John 2. Beginning with verse 18 we have what John said about false teaching right down to the end of that chapter. (Read and comment.)

The people to whom John wrote this letter had been taught that an Anti-christ was coming. But he also said that even then as he wrote there were “many antichrists.” Satan has always be against Christ, and his followers whom he called “antichrists” are always against Christ. They spread lies about Who He was, and what He said, and about what He had promised, and what He was going to do. All false teaching is anti-christ. False teachers either ignore Christ, or they spread all kinds of false information about Him, or both. Even the doctrine of evolution which now seems to be more in favor than ever before, is anti-Christ.

I hope that you remember, or have been reminded in reading this epistle over and over that the Apostle John exhorted believers in those days to do two things to protect themselves from being sidetracked into any form of false, anti-Christ doctrine:

- 1) They were to hold on to what they had been taught about the Lord Jesus Christ, and
- 2) They were to depend upon the Holy Spirit as their Teacher.

One thing that has been done in many churches today in favor of entertainment of some kind, *is that they have quit teaching the Bible. And so multitudes of professing Christians don't know the truth about Jesus Christ, and so they are inclined to follow anyone who seems to know more than they do.* My dear people, teach your children to read the Bible by reading the Bible to them, and teach them about the Lord Jesus Christ. Pray the truth of God's Word into their hearts so they will prepared to live in a world that will either tell them nothing about our Lord, or fill their minds with a lot of teaching that simply is not true!

Do you remember the story that took place after our Lord's resurrection when he joined two men who claimed to His disciples and they evidently lived in Emmaus which was just a short distance from Jerusalem. The Lord joined them as they walked, but the Bible tells us that “their eyes were holden that they should not know Him” (Luke 24:16). Well that day the Lord had an extended Bible study with them while He went over

many OT passages to show how they spoke of Him, the Messiah. But they still didn't know Who He was. But that night their eyes were opened and they knew Him, at which time the Lord vanished out of their sight. But what they said was, "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?" (Luke 24:32). You see, one reason, one big reason, that the Devil and all of his little antichrists don't want you to learn the truth about Jesus Christ, is because He is the Key to understanding the Bible – and these false teachers want to give you their interpretation hoping you will think that their interpretation is true. Take the time to read Luke 24:13-35. It will do your soul good.

False teachers, these little antichrists, may talk about Jesus, but you will never get the full truth from them. They throw enough truth in to pacify you, but the result is error intended to seduce, but deceive, you.

Now let us look at our text for this morning: 1 John 4:1-6. The subject is the same as in the latter part of chapter 2, but we have some more valuable information here.

John calls teachers, "spirits." Why? It seems to me because he is thinking of the real nature of our conflict, as did the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 6:12 where he wrote:

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

We are engaged in a spiritual warfare. We can see the human false teachers who are spreading false doctrine, but behind what we can see is the Devil, a fallen angel, and the countless numbers of fallen angels who are united with him against everything that has to do with God, with the Lord Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit. We know that no one has ever seen God. Right now we don't see the Lord Jesus Christ. Neither do we see the Holy Spirit. Yet we firmly believe that they are the Members of the eternal Godhead. The Devil appeared as a serpent to Eve, and he talked with her and she with him. He is called in Revelation 12:9 "the great dragon . . . that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world." The demons are likewise fallen angels, a mighty evil for which no man on earth has seen, or can see.

I don't think that the Apostle John was saying that there is a demon working behind every false teacher, but he is certainly indicating that we have

a powerful enemy which none of us can see, which makes them even more dangerous. So when the Apostle John said in verse 1 of our chapter that we are to “believe not every spirit, but to try the spirits whether they are of God. There are two, and only two, great forces in the unseen world, the spirits which are of God, the good angels, the elect angels, on the one hand, and the fallen angels, or demons. The conflict between the forces of God and the forces of the Devil, have been in conflict since before the creation of the world.

We are to be able to “try the spirits,” which means *to prove them* and so to approve or disapprove, to listen to them, or to reject whatever they have to say. And the reason that we need to be able to test them is simply because “many false prophets are gone out into the world.” I don’t know how many there were in John’s day, but I imagine that he would be startled to know how many there are today. Maybe he does know.

But the Spirit of God, Who is behind all faithful teachers of the Word, has given the test that needs to be applied. We have it in verses 2 and 3. The true teachers confess “that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.” They are of God. Those teachers who “confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh,” are not of God. And we are not to listen to them. The denial in any way that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is the message of the antichrist teachers.

So the test center on Jesus Christ.

Now there is more to this than at first meets the eye. There are many cults and false teachers who have nothing to say about Jesus Christ. They may use the Bible, such as prophecy, or they may not use the Bible. But their message has nothing to do with Christ. These, of course, are not to be given any opportunity to minister to us. In 2 John 10 and 11, the Apostle John wrote these words:

10 If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine (*i.e.*, that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh), receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed:

11 For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds. This would apply to people who have nothing to say about Jesus Christ, as well as to those who in any way deny that He came in the flesh.

But let us look at this test a little closer to see just what we are saying when we say that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.

We are saying what we believe about Jesus Christ. We believe that He was and is the Son of the living God, which is indicated by the name Christ. Peter said in his confession of Christ, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). And Christ means *the Anointed One, the Messiah* who was expected by OT saints. “Jesus” is the name He was given after His birth because He would save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21).

Furthermore, we believe that He *came*. His place originally was heaven, not earth. He came to earth, not in a chariot from heaven, but He came born of a virgin, without a human father, and since He came as Jesus Christ, we believe that He did not cease in any way to be the Son of God even in His humanity. He came, not as a King to reign, but as a Savior to die. He came not to do His own will (although He came willingly), but He came to do the will of the Father Who had sent Him. Furthermore, His coming was a confirmation of all of the prophecies and types found in the OT which had predicted His coming. The Gospel is written all over this statement “that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.” This is the message, and the full message, that confirms that a teacher has come from God.

What a simple test this is, and yet how profound – deeper than the deepest ocean, and higher than the highest heaven. I hope that all of us can say that we believe that “Jesus Christ is come in the flesh,” knowing a little better what it means.

A lot of things are being said about Jesus even in some churches, which would be very complimentary if they were said about you or me, but nothing but this message, this test, can prove that a teacher has come from God. Some teachers will speak of Him as Jesus, but they do not speak of Him as Jesus Christ, or as the Lord Jesus Christ. Many Jews in His day were saying that He might be John the Baptist, or Elijah, or Jeremiah, or one of the other prophets, but Peter’s confession was, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” If the Lord were suddenly to appear to you, and ask you what He asked His disciples when He said, “But whom say ye that I am?” Needless to say, the Lord experienced great joy in His heart to hear Peter say, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Peter passed the test. So don’t be afraid to read 1 and 2 Peter because his answer showed that he was of God.

What comfort it must have brought to his readers when they read the

Apostle's words to them in verse 4: "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them." Who are the "them"? They were all of the false teachers under whom they had been raised. But why had they overcome them? "Because greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world."

We learn from verse 5 that others were not so fortunate. Their teachers were "of the world." The world had an ear for them. Men will prefer error to the truth unless the Lord gives them a heart to know Him Who is the Truth.

The Apostle John wants us to contrast the "they" of verse 5 with the "we" of verse 6. The Apostle John was including himself with others when he said, "We are of God." Those who knew God, hear him and his fellow-teachers. Those who were not of God, did not hear him. There are only two possible sides: those who will hear the truth, and those who would rather listen to error.

If people believe the truth about Jesus Christ, they know the spirit of truth. If they don't, they take sides with the spirit of error. On the one hand is the Holy Spirit; on the other is the Devil. We all need to ask ourselves, to which side do I belong. There are only two possibilities. Error is error regardless of how much the error is, and the truth is always the truth. You may not know much about the Lord Jesus Christ, but it is important that you want to know more.

Give all teachers a hearing, but listen carefully to see if they are saying what they need to say about Jesus Christ to prove that they have the Spirit of truth.