

TRYING THE SPIRITS 1 John 4:1-6---1 Timothy 4:1,2

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils" (1 Timothy 4:1).

Along with these two references the Word of God is filled with warnings as to false apostles, false teachers, deceivers, etc., and thus we are not left in the dark concerning the days of spiritual darkness in which we find ourselves (Matthew 7:13-23; 24:24; Acts 20:28-31; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Timothy 3:5-8; 4:3,4; 2 Peter 2:1-3; 1 John 2:18-23; 4:1-6; Jude 3,4,16). These are times of spiritual declension and apostasy, and error abounds on every hand. These are the days of which these two apostles have warned. God is sending strong delusion (2 Thessalonians 2:11,12). While these days are upon us, and we cannot escape them, we must triumph in the midst of them. "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Ephesians 6:10,11). **The LORD JESUS CHRIST is our whole armour.** He is the Captain of our souls in the fight against these principalities, powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. It is His fight and our part is to pray and resist.

These warnings which abound throughout the Scriptures concern those who would seek to deceive even the very elect of God. "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matthew 24:24). They are said to be false prophets who come in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves, but we can know them by their fruits (Matthew 7:15,16). Paul warned the elders at Ephesus that they would enter in, and even of their own selves they would arise, but they were to watch (Acts 20:29-31).

He warned the saints at Corinth that they would "preach another Jesus," and would be false apostles transformed into ministers of righteousness (2 Corinthians 11:3,13-15). Christ told the disciples to beware of the leaven (doctrine) of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees (Matthew 16:6-12).

So we are warned of the errors and lies that are going to be around us. The spirit of Antichrist abounds (1 John 2:18-23). The perverted Bibles are Satan's great tool for the errors being taught. It has been said, "the most dangerous of all false doctrine is the one seasoned with a little truth." Also, "when half-truth is presented as whole truth it becomes untruth." Then there is this most terrible statement of Martin Luther (which I believe is undoubtedly true), **"Whom God intends to destroy, He gives them license to play with the Scriptures"** (Psalm 5:6; Proverbs 16:4; Jude 4). What does this say of all those today who have changed the Word of God? What does it reveal to us of those who use these perversions?

God has not left us to the mercy of the wolves in sheep's clothing, or to the ministers who appear as ministers of righteousness, but He has given us the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit of truth (John 14:17). "But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth" (1 John 2:20,21). We must avail ourselves of the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit constantly. "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). We must test everything we hear in the way of "Christian" teaching and experience that we come into contact day after day in our lives.

The Sevenfold Test by which we can try the spirits whether they be of God.

(1) Does the teaching glorify God? And how does this teaching affect our relation to God, our concept of God, and our attitude toward Him?

God being who He is, the eternal, unchangeable, omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient God, must be the supreme Judge of all things religious. The universe came into existence as a medium through which the Creator might show forth His perfection to all moral and intellectual beings. "I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images" (Isaiah 42:8). "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created" (Revelation 4:11). God repeats over and over that He is a jealous God and that is His Name (Exodus 20:5; 34:14; Deut. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15; Joshua 24:19).

The health and balance of the universe require that God should be magnified in all things. "Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable" (Psalm 145:3). **God only acts for His own glory and so the teaching which comes from Him must be to His own high honour.** Therefore, any doctrine, teaching, or experience that serves to magnify Him will be inspired by Him. On the other hand, anything that veils His glory or makes Him appear less wonderful than He is, is sure to be of the flesh and the devil.

What does this teaching do to my relationship to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? Does this teaching make me love God more? Has it magnified Him in my mind and heart? Has it purified my concept of His holy being? Has it caused Him to be more wonderful to me than before? If we can say "yes," to these questions, then the teaching is of God and the truth, and we have not wandered astray into the forbidden paths of error.

(2) Does this teaching exalt the Lord Jesus Christ? And how does this teaching affect our attitude toward the Lord Jesus Christ?

Whatever place present-day religion may give to Christ, God and the Scriptures give Him the pre-eminence in all things (Philippians 2:9-11; Colossians 1:18,19). When the Spirit descended upon the Lord Jesus after His baptism, God the Father said, ". . . This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). The Lord Jesus Christ said of Himself, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). Paul writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit said, "Who is the image of the invisible God, . . .," and, "For in him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 1:15; 2:9). He also wrote, "Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, . . .," and, "Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they" (Hebrews 1:3,4).

We could list many other Scriptures in which the prophets, patriarchs, apostles, saints, psalmists, kings, and seraphim have told of His glory. "Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:30). He is our Lord and Saviour, our life, our hope, our peace, our all in all, both now and forever. Because of all this being true of our Lord, then it is clear that He must stand at the center of all true teaching and doctrine, and all genuine Christian experience.

Anything, anything, that makes Him less than God has declared Him to be, is pure and simple error and delusion, and must be rejected. It does not matter how good it sounds, or how satisfying it may seem for a time, it must be rejected!

Our day is a day of "Christ-less Christianity." This sounds contradictory, but it exists as a real phenomenon. What is meant by a Christ-less Christianity? The outright

ommission of the name "Christ," in most of the new versions of the Bible. If a Bible is used that has omitted the name of Christ, it is a Christ-less Bible. If anyone uses one of these Bibles, then they have a Christ-less Christianity. The Scriptures state, "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son" (1 John 2:22). Most of what is being done today in the name of Christ is false to Christ because it is conceived by the flesh, uses fleshly methods, and seeks fleshly ends. Christ-less Christianity becomes a business. If we discern closely their message we find that Christ is not central, He is not even a part of most of it, and He certainly is not all in all.

Whatever makes the Lord Jesus Christ dear to our hearts, inflames our love to Him, and exalts Him to the highest honour, will be sure to be from God.

(3) Does this teaching magnify the Word of God? And how does this teaching affect our attitude towards the Scriptures?

"I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy loving kindness and for thy truth: for thou has magnified thy word above all thy name" (Psalm 138:2). Does this teaching have its root in the soil of the Word of God? Does it spring out of the seed which is the pure Word of truth? Or is it concocted from the minds of men and so-called "scholars?" There are a good many preachers who can effectively play on the emotions of the people, or have some movie star give a testimony, or speak with prophetic certainty, and in so doing lead people astray because they do not test his conclusions with the Word of God. Whatever originates outside of the Scriptures, should for that very reason, be suspect until it is proven to be in agreement with the Word of God. When it is found to be contrary with God's Word, then it cannot be accepted as truth from God. **We must have chapter and verse which gives it authority. This must always be the last and final proof.** "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20).

Whatever we hear taught should be viewed with caution until we can furnish Scriptural proof of its validity. We also know that the Scriptures may not always be clear because of differences of interpretation among equally sincere men, but this test, what does it do to our love and appreciation for the Word of God? will furnish all the proof needed. The true test lies in the affirmation of the Spirit that inspired the true teaching of the Word. The Spirit of Truth cannot, and does not, operate apart from the Word, and a growing acquaintance with the Holy Spirit will always give an increasing love for the Word of God. The Scriptures are in print what Christ is in person, and the inspired Word is like a faithful portrait of Christ. Christ is the eternal Word of the Father and the thought which He has of Himself is inspired. The thoughts of the Holy Scriptures form a lofty temple for the dwelling place of God.

A true lover of God will also be a true lover of His Word. What comes to us from the God of the Word will deepen our love for the Word of God. When our love for the Word of God deepens, our faith increases, and our obedience becomes consistent and joyous. If the teaching fills our heart with a hunger to study and meditate in the Scriptures day and night, we have every reason to believe that it is truth from God. If the teaching abates my eagerness to eat and drink of the inspired Word of God, then the teaching is to be rejected.

(4) What effect does this teaching have on our life?

The Holy Spirit and the flesh are diametrically opposed to each other. "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Galatians 5:17). "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the

Spirit, the things of the Spirit. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Romans 8:5,7). The Spirit of God must take us into the crucified life and put the old man to death. Until self is dethroned, and Christ is enthroned, we cannot be filled with Christ and enjoy the liberty which we have in Him. This is why identification with Christ is an absolute necessity in our life.

If this teaching serves to humble me, and make me little and vile in my own eyes, it is of God. When the teaching debases self and exalts Christ in our life, it is of God. But if the teaching gives me a sense of self-satisfaction and instills pride in me, then it is a false teaching and must be rejected. Nothing that comes from God through the teaching of the Spirit of God will minister to man's pride. Pride is one sin that is mentioned over and over in the Word of God as an abomination to God.

(5) What effect does this teaching have on our relationship and attitude with other believers?

Does this teaching edify, and can it be shared with another believer without my attitude being offensive to them? Sometimes when we learn new truth from the Scriptures we tend to have zeal for that truth, but an uncharitable spirit. While it is truth, we need to have a discerning spirit as to how we present it. It has been said, "For of all things the beholding and loving of the Maker maketh the soul to seem less in his own sight, and most filleth him with reverent dread and true meekness, and with plenty of charity to his fellow believers." **Any spiritual experience that fails to deepen our love for our fellow believers is usually to be rejected.**

As we grow in grace we grow in love toward the brethren. ". . . and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him that is also begotten of him" (1 John 5:1). Simply put it means that if we love God we will love His children. All true Christian experience will deepen our love for the brethren. "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him" (1 John 3:18,19). Also "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" (1 John 4:7,8). Therefore I believe that whatever tends to separate us from one another in our fellowship with each other is not of God, but of the flesh or the devil. And also whatever causes us to love one another as God's children is likely to be of God.

(6) What effect does this teaching have on our attitude and relation to the world?

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever" (1 John 2:15-17). This is the world of carnal enjoyments, of godless pleasures, of the pursuit of earthly riches, of reputations, and sinful happiness. It carries on without Christ, and follows the counsel of the ungodly (Psalm 1:3-6), and is animated by the evil one. "Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2).

False teaching is a religion which has a form of godliness, without power, which has a name to live, but is dead (Revelation 3:1). It is unregenerate human society romping its way to hell, and is the exact opposite of the Body of Christ who are going soberly but joyfully to glory. **Any real work of God in our life will unfit us for this world and it's fellowship.** We must also regard that any spirit which allows compromise with the world is false, and must be rejected.

(7) What effect does this teaching have on our attitude to sin?

When God has quickened the soul, and the operation of grace within the heart has been transacted, the heart of the true believer will turn away from sin and desire to be holy. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:11-13). "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

It is obvious that the grace that saves, also teaches, and the teaching is both positive and negative. It teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lust, but at the same time teaches us to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. The true believer has no difficulty with this truth. It is a heart matter with the true believer and not a matter of simply being moral. There is an inward change wrought by God and a new nature is implanted in his soul. The true believer is concerned about sin in his life since the work of grace was wrought.

Any teaching that weakens our hatred of sin can be immediately identified as false to the Scriptures, and to our Saviour. He died that we might be fit for heaven, but He also died that we might be holy in this life. **The teaching that makes holiness more attractive, and sin more intolerable, may be accepted as Biblical truth.** "For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity" (Psalm 5:4,5). He who professes to be saved by grace, and uses that liberty as a license to sin, is deceived. He has believed false teaching and is seduced by the evil one.

(8) Summary.

Again the Lord warned, "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matthew 24:24).

Paul warned, "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into 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" (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

Remember that Satan changes his methods. In Paul's day it was **opposition** to truth, today it is **corruption** of truth. Satan imitates God in dispensational purpose and activity. When God spoke through Apostles, Prophets, and Teachers, Satan spoke through his human agents. Now that God speaks to men through His Holy Scriptures, Satan speaks to them through his unholy scriptures. Thus the multitude of books now produced, professedly in support of the Bible, are in reality in opposition to it. Confusion and corruption are Satan's weapons. Roman Catholics, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witness, Unitarianism, and science falsely so-called, etc. demonstrate his activity and cunning (Ephesians 4:14).

These verses describe our day to well to be coincidental. Let us seek the wisdom and discernment of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God lest we be found to be believing false doctrine and error. Let us continue to fight the good fight of faith knowing that our Lord Jesus Christ the Author and Finisher of our faith has already defeated our foe. "And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Colossians 2:15).

Let us stand with all our might upon His Holy Word as our only source of

truth. Let us remember which Bible is God's Word (KJV), and not be moved to hold to a Christ-less perversion. Let us claim the promise, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13). Let us stand for the truth revealed to us from the Word of God, and having done all to stand.