

Day 235, 1 John 4

by David Servant

David Servant teaches that authentic conversion is verified by both theological and social tests, and that perfect love casts out fear.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:2

Topics: "False Prophets", "Genuine Love"

Description

David Servant delves into the theological and social tests of authentic conversion as outlined in the book of John. He emphasizes the importance of discerning false prophets by their denial of Jesus coming in the flesh and the need to test the spirits that motivate individuals. David highlights the presence of demonic influences and the necessity of genuine love as evidence of being 'born of God.' He explores the significance of confessing Jesus as the Son of God not just verbally but through actions, passing doctrinal, moral, and social tests.

Transcript

John centers today on the theological and social tests of authentic conversion. With a warning about false prophets, he begins this chapter with the theological test: Any person who denies that Jesus came in the flesh is not from God (4:2-3). Apparently, that particular heresy was prevalent in John's time.

You may have noticed that John referred to the testing of spirits rather than the testing of prophets (4:1). The two are related, however, because at least some false prophets are motivated by demonic spirits that empower them with a degree of convincing (and deceptive) supernatural power. There are, of course, "lesser" false prophets who just prophesy from their own imaginations with no accompanying supernatural manifestations, of which there are hoards today.

It would seem to be impossible to test a spirit directly, because spirits are invisible, inaudible beings that exist in the spiritual realm. It may be possible, however, to test the spirit that is motivating or inspiring a person by asking that person if Jesus came in the flesh. If he responds in the negative, that would be a telling sign. I suspect, however, that there are many false teachers and prophets who would readily confess that Jesus came in the flesh yet who deny other essential truths about Him. So I would not make this one doctrinal position the only litmus test for determining if someone is a false or true prophet.

The only time when it might be possible to test a spirit directly would be when that spirit is in manifestation in the physical realm. For example, if a person began to prophesy under the inspiration of a demon spirit, it

could perhaps then be questioned. I have heard of such instances, but have never experienced any myself. It seems that the Corinthian church faced a similar problem during their assemblies in trying to determine who was speaking under the influence of the Holy Spirit and who was speaking under the influence of a demon spirit. Paul told them that no one who was speaking under the influence of the Holy Spirit could say "Jesus is accursed." However, no one under the influence of a demon could say "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor. 12:2-3).

In any case, we can be thankful that we have nothing to fear when it comes to demon spirits, because we've overcome their former dominion over us through Christ. We are no longer listening to their lies as everyone else is, because we've believed the truth. Greater is He who is in us (the Holy Spirit) than he who is in the world (the devil and evil spirits) (4:4).

Beginning with 4:7, John returns once more to the social test of authentic conversion. Because God has regenerated our spirits, we now possess His unselfish nature within us, and it gives us the capacity to love as He does, unselfishly. That unselfish love verifies that we've been "born of God" and "know God" (4:7), two synonymous expressions. True Christians are the "love people."

Is it true that whoever simply "confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God" (4:15)? It is true if a person's confession is more than just a verbal confession, and one that is lived out in his daily life so that he not only passes John's doctrinal test, but also his moral and social tests. Lots of people these days claim to believe that Jesus is the Son of God but deny their profession by their actions.

John's words, "Perfect love casts out fear," have been misconstrued by some to mean, "If we really understand how much God loves us, then we would never fear being punished." The truth is, however, that God loves the worst of sinners, and those who haven't repented should certainly fear the punishment that is waiting for them. John means that those who grow perfect in their love for others, obeying God and thus assuring their hearts before Him, find that fear of punishment fades away. John wrote that the one who fears punishment is "not perfected" or "complete" in love (4:18). If that speaks of you, then the solution is obvious: Love more!

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