

1 John 4:1

by John Gill

The apostle John emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between true and false teachers, and the need for brotherly love as a fruit of God's Spirit and grace.

Topics: "Discernment", "Brotherly Love"

Description

John Gill emphasizes the importance of discerning true teachings from false ones in his sermon on 1 John 4:1. He warns believers not to accept every doctrine or teacher without scrutiny, as many false prophets have emerged. Gill encourages the faithful to test the spirits against the truth of God's Word, highlighting that true ministers will affirm Christ's incarnation. He reassures the congregation that they are of God and have overcome these false teachings through the Spirit within them. The sermon culminates in a call to brotherly love, which is a reflection of God's love and a mark of true faith.

Transcript

INTRODUCTION TO 1 JOHN 4

In this chapter the apostle cautions against seducing spirits; advises to try them, and gives rules by which they may be known, and by which they are distinguished from others; and then returns to his favourite subject, brotherly love. He exhorts the saints not to believe every man that came with a doctrine to them, but to try them, since there were many false teachers in the world; and gives a rule by which they may be tried and judged, as that whatever teacher owns Christ to be come in the flesh is of God, but he that does not is not of God, but is the spirit of antichrist that should come, and was in the world, 1Jo 4:1, but, for the comfort of those to whom he writes, he observes, that they were of God, and had overcome these false teachers, through the mighty power of the divine Spirit in them, who is greater than Satan, and all his emissaries, 1Jo 4:4.

He distinguishes between seducing spirits, and faithful ministers of the word; the former are of the world, speak of worldly things, and worldly men hear them; but the latter are of God, and they that have any spiritual knowledge of God hear them; but such as are not of God do not hear them, by which may be known the spirit of truth from the spirit of error, 1Jo 4:5. And then the apostle returns to his former exhortation to brotherly love, which he enforces by the following reasons, because it is of God, a fruit of his Spirit and grace, and because it is an evidence of being born of God, and of having a true knowledge of him; whereas he that is destitute of it does not know him, seeing God is love, 1Jo 4:7, and having affirmed that God is love, he proves it, by the mission of his Son, to be a propitiation for the sins of such that did not

love him, and that they might live through him; wherefore he argues, that if God had such a love to men, so undeserving of it, then the saints ought to love one another, 1Jo 4:9.

Other arguments follow, engaging to it, as that God is invisible; and if he is to be loved, then certainly his people, who are visible; and that such who love one another, God dwells in them, and his love is perfected in them; and that he dwells in them is known by the gift of his Spirit to them, 1Jo 4:12, and that God the Father so loved the world, as to send his Son to be the Saviour of it, before asserted, is confirmed by the apostles, who were eyewitnesses of it; who also declare, that whoever confesses the sonship of Christ, God dwells in him, and he in God; and who had an assurance of the love of God to them, who is love itself; so that he that dwells in God, and God in him, dwells in love, 1Jo 4:14.

And great are the advantages arising from hence, for hereby the saints' love to God is made perfect; they have boldness in the day of judgment, since as he is, so are they in this world, and fear is cast out by it, 1Jo 4:17, but lest too much should be thought to be ascribed to love, that is said to be owing to the love of God to them, which is prior to theirs to him, and the reason of it, 1Jo 4:19. And the chapter is closed with observing the contradiction there is between a profession of love to God, and hatred of the brethren, seeing God, who is invisible, cannot be loved, if brethren that are seen are hated; and also the commandment, that he that loves God should love his brother also, 1Jo 4:20.

Ver. 1. Beloved, believe not every spirit,... The apostle having mentioned the word "spirit" in the latter part of the preceding chapter, takes an occasion from thence to return to what he had been suggesting in the "second" chapter, concerning the many antichrists that then were, and whom he points out, and here cautions against. By "every spirit" he means, either every doctrine that is pretended to come from the Spirit of God, or every teacher, who professes to be qualified and sent by him, and to have his light, knowledge, and doctrine from him. Every true minister of the Gospel has the Spirit, and the gifts of the Spirit, more or less, to qualify him for his work; he is separated, and called to it by him, and receives his spiritual light and knowledge from him; it is he that teaches him sound doctrine, and leads him into all truth, as it is in Jesus, and brings every necessary truth to his remembrance; and who succeeds his ministrations to the good of souls: but there are some who call themselves the ministers of the Gospel, who, though they may have some natural abilities, and a share of human learning, and a notional knowledge of things, yet have never received either grace or gifts from the Spirit; nor have they been ever called by him; nor are their ministrations according to that divine word which is inspired by him, nor attended with his demonstration and power; wherefore, though some professing to have the Spirit of Christ are to be believed, yet not everyone; and though the Spirit is not to be quenched in any, nor prophesying to be despised, yet care should be taken what is heard and received: some persons are so obstinate and incredulous as not to believe anything that is declared, be the evidence what it will; as the Jews would not believe Christ and his apostles, though what they said agreed with Moses and the prophets, and was confirmed by miracles; and others are too credulous; at once receive every teacher, and embrace every upstart doctrine: this they should not do,

but try the spirits whether they are of God; not by human reason, especially as carnal and unsanctified; for though the doctrines of the Gospel are not contrary to true reason, they are above it, and not to be judged of by it, and are disapproved of and rejected by carnal reason; but by the word of God, which is the standard of all doctrine; and whatever agrees with that is to be received, and what does not should be rejected. And so to do is very commendable, as appears from the instance of the Bereans, who on this account are said to be more noble than those of Thessalonica, Ac 17:11; and from the commendation of the church at Ephesus, Re 2:2. And this is what every believer, every private Christian should do; to them

it belongs to read and search the Scriptures, and prove all things, and judge for themselves of the truth of doctrine; and to such a probation or trial of the spirits, spiritual light, knowledge, judgment, sense, experience, and divine guidance are necessary, which should be asked of God, and an increase thereof; and all such diligent searchers, and humble inquirers, are capable of making judgment of persons and doctrines, whether they are from the Spirit of God or not, for the Spirit of God never speaks contrary to his word: and the reason why such a trial should be made is,

because many false prophets are gone out into the world: such who pretended either to a revelation of future things, and to foretell things to come; or rather to a gift of prophesying, or preaching in Christ's name, to be "prophets" and spiritual men, and ministers of the word, but were "false" ones; who either predicted what did not come to pass, or rather preached false doctrine, by corrupting the word, and handling it deceitfully, and so imposed upon and ruined the souls of others, as well as deceived their own: and there were not only one, or two, or a few of these, but "many", as our Lord had foretold, Mt 24:11; and which makes the reason the stronger for not believing every spirit, but trying them; and the rather, since they were not sent of God, not called out by his churches, but were "gone out" of themselves; of their own heads, and without any mission from God or man: and "into the world" too; they were in every part of it, and especially where there were any churches of Christ; into which they first crept in privily, and at unawares, but afterwards became public preachers of the word, and then separating from them, set up openly in the world for themselves.

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