

Studies in 1 John 06 Spirit of Truth and Error

by John W. Bramhall

The sermon emphasizes the importance of discerning the spirits and testing them to see if they be of God, using the confession of Jesus Christ as come in the flesh as the acid test.

Duration: 48:58

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, John 8:44, 1 Timothy 3:16, James 4:7, 1 John 4:4, 1 John 4:6, Jude 1:3

Topics: "Discerning Spirits", "False Prophets"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the importance of discerning between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. He emphasizes the need to test the spirits and not believe every spirit, as there are many false prophets in the world. The preacher highlights that the spirit of God confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, while the spirit of Antichrist denies this truth. He encourages believers to overcome the false prophets by relying on the greater power of God within them.

Transcript

Shall we turn in the word of God to chapter four in the epistle of John. The fourth chapter, reading today the first six verses of the chapter only. John writing by the Holy Spirit, Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try or test the spirits whether they be are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

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. And this is that Spirit of Antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come, and even now already is it in the world.

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. 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.

May God bless the reading and hearing of his word, and once again humbly but depending upon the Lord, by the Spirit we look for the help we need for the blessing of his truth as we meditate upon it today. Now you may have noted in the reading of the preceding chapter, the closing verse gives a direct reference to

the Spirit of God. It is the first occasion by name, by the name Spirit, John refers to the Holy Spirit of God.

And if he does mention the Spirit of God, he digresses in the first six verses of our fourth chapter, to touch upon one of the most grave subjects, solemn warnings that we should consider as God's children in his family. The subject I would give to the section would be this, it relates to the Spirit of truth, and the Spirit of error. The Spirit of truth, and the Spirit of error.

It is notable in the writing of John, as we've already suggested, the emphasis of the word life, or the word believe, and the word light, and also you find also, you'll find him emphasizing the word truth. And as we look at the section before us, though John emphasizes, and he will re-emphasize as we get to the next section of the chapter, the subject of love, he digresses at this particular place, to bring before the hearts of God's children, the grave dangers that we face within this world, as we travel through, in relation to the propagation of satanic error. And in its contrast, how we need to realize, recognize, discern, what is the Spirit of truth, versus the Spirit of error.

May I say very earnestly, all propagation of error, is an attack of Satan against the person of Christ. I am earnestly persuaded, that we as God's children, must never protect, maintain, and never depreciate, the blessed person of our Lord Jesus Christ, in all the revelation of his person, as found in the word of God. May I humbly say, many times I am grieved, to realize by some various modes of teaching, the person of my Lord Jesus, is depreciated, rather than exalted.

This is ever the work of Satan, to depreciate and attack the person of Christ. Whatever false doctrine may emanate, which does emanate, as we know from the satanic authority, it is always directed against the person of the Son of God, and our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Now you find this solemn warning of John, thus brings before us, not the separation of Christians from Christians, for as we have had in the preceding section, and as we shall continue in the following section, John is particularly separated, the believer that is walking in the truth, from the believer who may not be walking in the truth.

The believer that may be living righteously, and one who may not be living according to the truth of God. But in this section, his separation is in relation to the truth itself, and error. And you note the opening words as John begins it, and this is the problem, it is the discerning of the spirit that is teaching.

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they be of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. And again may I say, and may I re-emphasize it, it is not the discerning of true Christians, it is the discerning of the truth of God that is involved in this portion of scripture before us. And to discern the real character of those who are professing to teach and speak in the spirit.

Will you go with me to one verse of scripture in John's Gospel chapter 8? For I would like you to note very carefully the words of the Lord Jesus in the 44th verse of John chapter 8, pointing out to you the words of the beloved Savior, as we mentioned them even before, but repeating them and reading them. In chapter 8 of John in verse 44, to realize in this connection the power of the enemy. Ye of your father the devil, said the Lord Jesus to the Pharisees, and the loss of your father ye will do.

May I pause for a moment to emphasize the contrast that we recognize between what we have the joy of seeing as the children of God, fellowship in the family of God, fellowship with the Father, fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ. And what a blessing if it is to you and to me, my fellow believer, to realize we're in that family. But now look at the other side.

Look at the effect of one who is called the father of the devil. Ye are of your father the devil, and the loss of your father ye will do. And then realize his power.

He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not, now note, he abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own, for he is a liar and the father of it. Now what you have in substance in the epistle of John is that which should be discerned.

What is the spirit of truth? What is the spirit of error? Now may I point out very clearly from the words of the Lord Jesus, where does error come from? It is only one source. Many years ago in the north, a beloved brother of the closer of the ministry came to me and said, brother Bramhall, why does Dr. So-and-so, and he named a prominent ecclesiastical figure known in Christendom in our land, why does he believe and teach such a thing? And as he named a particular doctrine, he said, where did he get it from? I looked at my friend, I said, brother, there's only one place he got it. It came from the devil.

Beloved look, all truth can be traced back to God. All error must be traced back to the devil. The truth in itself comes from God.

Well did the Lord Jesus say, I am the way and the truth, and he is the embodiment of divine truth in his person and in his character. And when Pilate said to the Savior as he stood before him, what is truth? Without doubt in sarcasm, the very embodiment of all truth was standing before him at that very moment. And the source of all truth is God.

But please, whatever cult, whatever false teaching may prevail, the source of it is the devil. It is the liability of the adversary. And you can make sure of this one fact, as the Lord Jesus said, the truth is not in him.

Thus we may recognize the power of the enemy. May I say, I wonder if I should, and I believe I ought. Perhaps the greatest power of the enemy is not leading men astray by the acts of sin, but rather leading the minds of men astray from the truth of God.

Very subtle. It was the very first thing he did in the Garden of Eden, to cast doubt after the word of God. And the power of Satan against the truth is manifested as thus through unclean spirits.

They emanate the lie of the devil. It's quite significant if you read the Gospel according to Mark. Have you ever noticed the first miracle that the Lord Jesus did in the Gospel of Mark? It was the casting out of an unclean spirit in the synagogue of that day.

O beloved, let us not fail to realize the power of the enemy, and certainly recognize the enemy is strong in relation to the denial of the truth by the propagation of error. And may I say, even in the days of John, and this is what we have before us in the problem, there were some who denied the humanity of Christ. There were some who denied the deity of Christ.

And there were some that denied the union of both the humanity and the deity of Christ. And John had to refute them in his day. May I give the suggestion John in his ministry of this epistle was writing much later than his Gospel, as well as in the late days of the apostolic era.

Paul had warned the elders of Ephesus in chapter 20 of the book of Acts, that after his departure, grievous woes should come, not sparing the flock. And then men from amongst them would arise perverting the truth. And John and all of the apostles may have lived to see the corruption of the truth coming in, in the days of the early church.

All you need to do is read the closing writings of Peter, the closing writings of Jude, as well as John. And you can recognize they lived to see the development of error, and the spirit of error increasing in the days of the early church. And their words of warnings are written for us.

John particularly calls them, as you note in the first verse of our chapter, they are false prophets which have gone out into the world. And he has named them in the preceding chapter, as we saw in the warning of the young children, Antichrists. And thus John would remind us who they are.

May I point out another verse of Scripture that is certainly one that has much bearing upon this subject. 1st Timothy chapter 4. 1st Timothy chapter 4, please, and verse 1 and 2. The words of the beloved apostle Paul, as he writes in verse 1 particularly, will do, these words saying, Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart apostatized from the faith, meaning the truth, giving heed, and the expression suggests, yielding their minds to seducing spirits. First they yield their thoughts, their thinking, their minds to the seductive spirits, and then the teaching of demons, which is the proper word, demons, and the doctrines of demons.

Beloved, we can recognize again the distinction. There is the true doctrine of Christ, the true doctrine of God, and there is the false doctrine of demons, which are prevailing and present within this world. Now look at verse 2 of our chapter in the epistle of John.

Here is the test that the Spirit of God through John gives that you and I should certainly follow, and it is the confession of the person of Christ. Be very careful to realize the meaning that John implies in these words. They're important.

Hereby know ye the Spirit of God. Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God. Now let me reemphasize, and I want to develop the emphasis properly.

It is the confession of the person of Christ, and particularly what is involved in this confession. John very properly writes, here is how you can recognize when the Spirit of God is speaking through his servant. That servant will acknowledge Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.

Now don't take it very lightly, the expression. It is so easily to gloss over these words in their simplicity, and not recognize the profound depth that is included regarding the person of Christ. The name Jesus, as many of you, I trust all of you do know, the name Jesus is the Old Testament name in the Hebrew of Jehoshua, meaning Jehovah.

We know there were many people that have been called Jesus. The Old Testament meaning of Joshua's name is Jesus, and you have it translated in the book of Hebrews chapter 4 as the apostle refers to Jesus. It really is the Old Testament Joshua to whom he refers, and his meaning was the meaning of his name Savior, Joshua.

There are many other Jesus's that have been manifested and taken the name here upon the earth. But the word implies in the Greek form of its use, in correspondence with the Hebrew meaning Jehoshua, this is Jehovah. And may I say that one doctrine that Jehovah's Witnesses don't believe, that the Jesus of the New Testament is the same Jehovah as the Old Testament, meaning Savior, Deliverer.

May I point out to you that the false prophets don't believe that. They may not deny the existence of Jesus. Muhammad, Muhammadism confesses that it was the Jesus.

Judaism, the Jews may confess that there was a Jesus. Historically they will admit there was a Jesus, but if you pin them down to acknowledge is he the Son of God, you'll have difficulty getting the right answer. I remember years ago in Savannah, I went into a store to buy a coat for myself, just to travel in, and the salesman helped me, and then came the manager, who I recognize as a Jewish character, and he tried to of course sell me a lot more than what I wanted to buy, but he began to ask me.

He said, as I told him I wanted it just to travel in, and for riding. He said, what do you do while you were salesman? No, I told him what my ministry was. Oh, he says, and you know the first thing that Jew said to me, you know he said preacher men ought to be born again, and I looked at him and said, what do you mean born again? And he said, every man has some spark of divinity in him that needs to be rekindled, and we entered into conversation, and later on I found he was reading the New Testament, and he told me, he says, I go to hear preaching, he said, at the different churches, and I even offered him a New Testament, and he said, I've got one.

I said, where did you get it? He said, in New York City, a man was preaching in the open there, and he offered a New Testament that was particularly written really for the Jews to enjoy, proving the Messiahship of Jesus, and he showed me his New Testament. He says, I mark it, statements that I like. I underscore them.

I don't know whether I should, and then as he went on, I pinned him down with a question. Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God? And he looked at me, and very vehemently he said, no. He acknowledged Jesus, but not as the divine person of the Old Testament who was very God.

The Spirit of God will acknowledge he's the Jehovah of the Old Testament. God manifests in the flesh. Oh, beloved, let's recognize the distinction.

It's not the historical Jesus, but the one of whom Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 3.16. Great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifest in the flesh. Not only is his name Jesus, but the Christ, meaning the Anointed, God's Anointed One.

And may I humbly but earnestly state, don't take this expression of John too lightly. There's depth of meaning to the name. Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus is the Christ, that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God.

Now, let me point out something about John's gospel. For when you look at the writings of John, all the way through his writings, in his gospel, in his epistles, as well as in the book of Revelation, how he magnifies the person of the Son of God, the person of Christ. And in his gospel, you know the purpose for the writing of that gospel in John 20, verse 30 and 31.

Many other signs did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, but these are written that ye might know that Jesus is the Christ, and the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life in or through his name. John was contending against the Gnosticism of that day that prevailed around him, when many were denying and infiltrating the church to deny the person of the Messiahship of Jesus, together with his deity. And John seeks and completely proves that by the gospel which he writes, not only the Messiahship, but the deity of the Son of God in that one blessed person.

Oh, may I repeat it, it's not the historical Jesus, the liberalist, the modernist. He'll preach that historical Jesus, but sometimes you wonder if you should ask them the question, as Jesus did the blind man whom

he healed, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? For this is who he is, and the person who teaches the truth regarding the person of Christ. May I suggest the conviction as to who the person of Christ is, is the criterion of true ministry.

When Christ in the character and the fullness of his person is made known by the preaching and teaching of the word, it is the criterion. That is the voice of the Holy Spirit of God. Now look at verse 3, as you'll go down our chapter, and you'll find the apostle confirming.

Those that are false prophets are but the spirit of Antichrist. Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God. This is that spirit of Antichrist, whereof he affirmed that he should come, and even now already is within the world.

Can I give you this illustration from a true incident that took place in the city of St. Louis? A dear brother, very dear to my heart, very faithful to the word of God, in one of the local assemblies there. One day one of the young persons in the assembly came to him and told him, he said, I've got a companion at school whom I believe is a Christian, and he wants to visit the assembly some prayer meeting night. Well he said, bring him along, be glad to have him come.

Well he said, I want to warn you. He said, he believes in speaking in tongues, and he's very much in the charismatic movement, and he said if he comes I don't know what he'll do. So the warning was given, and sure enough the young fellow came, and it was the prayer meeting night when the brethren were participating, praying before the throne of God in the assembly, and this young fellow did get up, and he began to pray.

And then after he had gone a little bit, then he broke into that, you really have to say it was an unknown tongue all right, then he broke out into the language that nobody could understand, and he kept going on. My brother went over to him quietly while he was praying, and as he stood next to him he addressed these words. He said, I direct my words not to you but to the spirit that is speaking through you.

Do you believe that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh? The boy kept going on, so he repeated the question once more. I direct my words not to you, meaning the man that was speaking, but to the spirit speaking through you. Do you spirit believe that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh? And suddenly the boy stopped.

He said, where am I? What happened? I don't know whether I could try that or not, but it worked. My beloved, the dangerous days that we are living in, and perhaps we may be all aware of the fact, the testing of the spirits needs to be done today as never before. The ark of movements that are taking place are but magnifying the departure in the last days from the truth of God.

And I beg and I plead with you as well as with my own heart, we may test the spirits to see if they be of God. And may I repeat again, that the acid test is regarding the person of Christ. What think ye of Christ? Who is he? Not that he was Jesus, but who it was that came and was manifested in the flesh by the name of Jesus the Christ.

Oh beloved, isn't it a good thing to go back and realize who it was that came to redeem you and came to redeem me, the person of Christ, the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the flesh, God in the flesh, please may I suggest, he could have appeared in some other form of his glory. He could have appeared in angelic glory, for he's the head of all the angels.

And in the Old Testament he manifested himself as the angel of God again and again, but it was God manifest in the flesh. How many believe that the babe of Bethlehem in the arms of Mary was Emmanuel, God with us. What a test this is.

No evil spirit will confess him as such. James tells us that the demons believe, but they tremble. And when they ever came in the presence of Christ when he was upon the earth, they feared him, they shuddered.

Art thou come to torment us before our time? Now I want to tell you very frankly, may God help me to realize it. You too, my fellow believer, demons are afraid of him, his very person. They tremble before him.

I know it's a great mystery how that they are so free and liberated to have their way, and that, as Paul well said, we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rules of the darkness of this world, against wicked spirits in high or heavenly places. But let us realize they tremble, for they know who he is. Who he is! And when he was on the earth, we know they had to confess who he was as they came into his presence.

Oh, beloved, we may well realize that the test of false teaching is that acid test regarding the person of Christ. And God help us to realize that. Know what he goes on to say in the same third verse? At the end of it, this is that spirit of Antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come.

You know, I often think today, many times, I'm sure, to one another we speak. Many of fellow believers have said to me, concerning the conditions of the day, the departure that we have from the truth. Many have mentioned this and speak of it deplorably, and yet John says, you heard it would come.

You heard of it. We told you about it, we dear people of Jude. And Jude says, the apostles told you so that the apostasy would come.

And if we were to turn to the beloved apostles, they would say, regarding the days of departure from the truth, we told you so. And they heard that it would come, and it was even now present. Read the epistle of Timothy, that second epistle alone, how Timothy is warned in that last epistle of Paul regarding the departure of the truth.

In chapter two, and I think in verse 19, you have these words, that of how many of some fine leaders who have strayed, who have erred from the truth, go down to chapter three and verse eight, and he writes of men, illustrated by Jannes and Jambres of the Old Testament, men who resisted in the court of Pharaoh Moses, even these last day apostates, they also resist the truth. Then you come to chapter four, verses three and four, and Paul tells how in the last day men will have itching ears, giving their ears, turning their ears away from the truth, and giving heed to fables. Beloved, you've got to confess, there's a lot of crazy fables in this world.

When it comes to what you have to listen to, which is the spirit of error, you heard that it should come, and it's now already in the world. Thank God for the Bible. Four, warning and reminding us of the days that are at the end time.

Now look at verse four, and please note that first word. Now there's one thing in the writing of the Greek New Testament that I appreciate, and you'll find particularly if you have a Derby translation, there is particular emphasis given to personal pronouns that are called emphatic, and John says to the children of God, ye are of God, dear children, ye are of God. They belong to the family of God, and you've overcome them.

And oh beloved, let us rejoice and give thanks that we have overcome the false prophet. And how do we overcome them? Note the rest of the verse, because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. Praise the Lord.

Who is in us? Oh can we not say God dwelleth in us? Shall we not say Christ liveth in me? Shall we not say the Holy Spirit? My beloved, let us rejoice. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit is in us. Amazing grace.

Taking possession, dwelling within the heart of his child, greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. Praise his holy name. And then John goes further to say, and please note, as he speaks of those false prophets, they are of the world, therefore speak they of the world, or from the world, and the world heareth them.

Bless your soul. You can find more people listening to those kind of preachers than myself today. You know as well as I do the world will listen to any old thing.

It does. The multiplicity of movements today that almost seem fanatical has a great response from the world. And how we may realize they speak only from the world.

They're not in touch with the divine things, only in relation to the world which is under Satan's power and his authority. And for the source of all the world's teaching is Satan, as we've already suggested. But now note what John goes on to say in the closing verse.

We, now I want you to note again an emphatic pronoun, but I want to present to you the meaning of that word we. We are of God. Who is John speaking of? It is now in verse 5 or 4 rather, he said you are of God.

Now in verse 6 he says we are of God. And he that knoweth God heareth us. He that is not of God heareth not us.

But who does he mean by the word we? May I say very simply but clearly and firmly. I believe the apostle is associating himself with the apostles of the New Testament. For it's through the apostolic ministry that you and I have the truth of God.

Where does the truth come from? We have stated the source of it is God through Christ by the Spirit. God is called the God of truth. Christ is called the truth.

The Spirit is called the Spirit of truth. But it is pleased God to use the human instruments to complete the New Testament. And John is declaring that the apostolic ministry, not only of his own ministry, but of his companion apostles, it's of God.

Now beloved I can say with encouragement to you, listen to what the apostles have to say. Don't you settle things by what I say. Take the words of the apostles.

Paul well wrote in Ephesians 2.20 that we are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. The New Testament apostles and prophets. They laid, they ministered, they gave testimony to the truth of God in its completion.

Paul writing in chapter four of Ephesians said that the risen head gave some apostles and some prophets and then the evangelists, shepherds and teachers. And the apostles and New Testament prophets were the foundation gifts. When you think of Paul standing up in the midst of chapter 27 of the book of the Acts,

when in that storm at sea and saying to the ship master, to the centurion, you should have listened to me.

I'm going to be very frank. You and I should listen to these apostles who have finished the New Testament. For God gave them authority and God approved their writings and well did Paul write.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness that the man of God may be complete, truly furnished unto all good works. Oh my beloved, I say it lovingly, that God entrusted his ministry, the written ministry of his word to complete the word of God to these beloved apostles of the New Testament. They are the ones to listen to.

No preacher can say that today. No preacher can claim that the Holy Spirit inspired them in their words that every word was the word of God. And our Lord Jesus gave authority before he left the earth that the apostles would complete the word of God.

That the Spirit of God, when he shall come, he shall guide you into all truth. And may I say, beloved, let you and I go along with what Paul teaches, with what John teaches, with what James teaches, and Jude and so on. For in the body of the New Testament, confirmation of all of God's truth, we've got the divine ground, it's of God.

And well does John declare, he that knoweth God heareth us. Please may I say to you, my fellow believers, don't you pin down your confidence on what John Branagh may say, but lay your foundation for the confidence of God's truth on what his word declares. All I can do is seek to expound the truth that's already been given.

I can't give you any new truth. It's all in the book, and in that precious word we find it. And he that is not of God, heareth not of us.

You don't have to go very far to find fellows that are preaching. They're not of Paul, they're not of John, they're not of Jude, they're not of Phoenix, they're not of James. The denial of the truth of God.

But we that know God and are his children, we would listen to the truth that God has imparted through his divinely appointed servants in our New Testament books. And we hear him. Hereby we know what? The spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

I remember many years ago a dear old brother was telling me of a Bible reading and of the one of the leading brothers that was speaking and leading the discussion and study of the word of God on that occasion. Speaking along this line evidently of knowing the truth of God. And he told an incident that when he was a youngster he had often times to go and find the family cow which had been grazing around you know in different places of the pastures.

And he would always listen for the cow bell. Because they had a cow bell on that cow that was only in its tone was the only one in the neighborhood. And so he would listen for the moving of the cow and the cow bell ringing.

And if he couldn't hear it he might have heard another one. And if he heard another one he would say that's not my father's cow bell. And you and I should be very careful what we listen to.

Do we recognize the father's voice? The word of truth coming through his sermons. For we live in the day when the great danger of the spirit of error is abounding. But oh may God help us to do what the wise man

said by the truth whatever it costs you and sell it not.

Shall we pray? Blessed father we're so grateful for the warnings in thy word thy deep concern that we may know the spirit of truth when the spirit of God is speaking to our hearts. Coming only through the word of truth for thy word is truth said the Lord Jesus. We pray for thy people today the spirit of error is greatly abroad.

Lord we ask thee teach thy people to test the spirits whether they are of God so that we may not stray nor wander from thy blessed truth. Sanctify these thoughts to us in our hearts in our lives and in our character. May we ever be able to say as the Lord Jesus said when he was here my sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me.

A stranger will they not follow. May we hear the shepherd's voice constantly through the precious word for we ask it in our savior's worthy name and for his glory. Amen.

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