

## The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error

Throughout the first epistle of John it is clear that the apostle is concerned about Christians being deceived. He wrote with urgency to warn them about anti-Christis in chapter two. In that context he said, “no lie is of the truth”, and, “who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?” In chapter 3:7 he said: “let no one deceive you”.

John had a realistic concern about Christians being deceived, for he knew the spirit of error as opposed to the spirit of truth. If that reality escapes our notice, we are in trouble today. “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of GOD; because many false prophets have gone out into the world”.

How important is it to “not believe, but test” the spirits? If you have ever watched religious television programs you know it is common for a preacher to tell his audience that he has the Holy Spirit, or that God personally appeared to him and told him to do or say certain things. Apart from the scriptures and not subject to any verification, can you be satisfied with the man or woman who simply says they have the Spirit? Consider what the apostle John says here: “Don’t believe all people who SAY they have the Spirit”.

There are many passages in the New Testament wherein belief (i.e. faith), is commanded. Look back in 1 John 3:23 – “And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ”. In Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, evidence is given upon which to base our faith in Christ. Belief is encouraged, urged and also commanded. But here, in 1 John 4:1, belief is PROHIBITED: “Believe NOT every spirit”. We have a command PROHIBITING the acceptance of anyone who CLAIMS to have the Spirit. WHY SO? Because it may be the SPIRIT OF ERROR! You simply cannot believe everything you hear.

Let me mention several fields of human activity: Politics – Medicine – Science – History – Computers. Can you believe everything you hear? What about religion? Can you believe everything you hear? If you listen to the various religious messages in the world today, you will soon discover that messages are in CONFLICT with

each other. All that we hear simply CANNOT be the truth. Some theological systems maintain that we are predestined without regard to the personal will of the heart. Others have built a sacramental system surrounded by traditions and man-made doctrine and practice. At large in “evangelical” religion, there is a primary concentration on belief in Christ, but often denying the role of baptism and downplaying obedience to the teachings of the apostles (Acts 2:42). Religious cults claim authority in their writings and structure. Human creeds are enforced. Some in world religions deny that Jesus Christ is the Savior, the only begotten Son of God. Do we just believe everything we hear?

The messages in modern religion are in conflict. So John says: ‘Do NOT believe everybody who claims they are telling you what you ought to believe and do in religion! Do NOT accept every teacher’s claim that he is telling you what the Holy Spirit revealed’. Rather, John said to TRY the spirits; TEST all religious teaching! Let me ask you – Which religious teachers today should we apply this test to? The answer is: every single one of them! Every single religious teacher should be tested in the same way by simply seeing if what he preaches is as the Lord and His chosen apostles preached in the Scriptures!

Let me state the matter in these terms. Never think that:

~ If a man is popular and brings in huge crowds, it means he must be teaching the truth!

~ If a man is a good public speaker and can hold the attention of an audience, this means he must be teaching the truth.

~ If you like the person, he must be teaching the truth.

~ If a man quotes a lot of Scripture, he must be teaching the truth.

~ If a man has academic, educational credentials, he must be teaching the truth!

There is only ONE way to determine if a man is teaching the truth – SEE IF WHAT HE SAYS IS WHAT JESUS AND THE APOSTLES PREACHED IN THE BIBLE!

It is a mistake to decide you like the man, so therefore you’ll accept everything he says. The better approach is take the message, compare that message with what is revealed; then accept the message – not because of the man, but because it is revealed.

One thing must influence everything we believe, teach and practice--The Word of God. There has to be something that is the standard by which all teaching can be "tested" to know whether it is true or a deception; whereby we can know the "spirit of truth" from the "spirit of error". The scriptures can be "twisted", i.e., distorted (2 Peter 3:16) when preached. The reality of false preachers in pulpits cause the need for "testing" all that is proclaimed. Satan has ministers in pulpits (2 Cor. 11:14-15). There must be a standard to "test". It is the teaching of Jesus and the apostles.

You cannot turn your soul's salvation over to men. You cannot just listen to a preacher you like and let that govern your response to God without searching the scriptures and comparing what a preacher today says to what the Lord and the apostles said. Hear, believe and obey the gospel message that Jesus and the apostles preached regardless of who is preaching today. Remember, **YOU CAN KNOW TRUTH FROM ERROR!** (John 8:32).