**Try the Spirits**

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**1John 4:1** – “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.”

This caution is given by the apostle because he is defining the way that believers can identify whether or not they are being taught and led by the influence of the Lord or whether they are being taught and led by the influence of antichrist.

A lot of time has passed since John wrote this. The devil has had almost 2,000 years to refine his approach to people using demonic influence and lies to persuade people that what they are thinking and believing is from God. This is his most powerful tool. Today, there is a group of religious people who have killed thousands of innocent victims in the past 5 years believing with all their hearts that they are doing God a favor and believing that their murders are spiritually righteous. We call those people radical Muslims. In fact, the entire Muslim religion is founded on the idea that it is holy and righteous to kill people (they call infidels) who do not believe what they believe and who do not embrace their demonic religion. This kind of being influenced by a spirit of error is more widespread than just among Islamist extremists, though.

I have had American people to tell me that God led them to be doing something which was absolutely unscriptural.

I have had American people who refused to believe a doctrinal truth tell me that “they didn’t see it that way” when I showed or quoted them something right out of the bible.

What is all this? Can they be right and what we believe be right also (remember when I am talking about what we believe I am talking about what we take right out of the bible?) I don’t think so! So, what is it? It is people being influenced to believe something being presented by a spirit of error.

I believe much of the so-called Christian religion today has degraded to the point that a great deal of its teaching and most of its appeal has to do with beliefs in things that originate with Satan. This is the most dangerous element in our world today surrounding religion. People WANT to believe certain things that fit better with human thinking. People WANT to believe things today that water down the absolutes of God. And, worst of all, there are too many false prophets willing to supply humanity with these very kinds of teachings that feed the human attitude of not being able to endure sound doctrine.

People want to believe in the God of the bible, but for them this God needs to be a God of love only; He must not be angry at anything, and there must not be any accounting of sin demanded by this God

People want to believe in an eternity; but this eternity must not have a hell or a lake of fire in it; in this view, nobody goes to hell, nor spends eternity in the lake of fire.

People want to believe that it does not matter what kind of doctrine or practice you have; it is only important that you try to do right because we are all working to get to the same place, according to this belief.

The list can go on and on.

1. Where does this come from? It comes from following the spirit of error that our text is talking about.

* Which brings us to the common denominator in all these erroneous beliefs; what do they all have in common? Two things: 1) they all deny the plain teaching of the bible OR they alter the plain meaning of bible teaching to fit with their particular erroneous view, and 2) they all appeal to human feelings…they just feel good or they feel right to the human intellect!
* Let me give you something to illustrate how the thinking of even believers can be led off into error because of “I don’t see it that way,” or because emotionally it is not appealing. To illustrate: people who commit certain crimes should be put to death by being found guilty and sentenced by a public representative (a judge and jury) to execution.
* As you think about this, some of you may already be at the cultural place in your thinking that you don’t believe in capital punishment. Not only that, but most Americans now feel emotionally uneasy about putting somebody to death, even for a serious crime.
* Now, let’s turn to the word of God. In it we discover that God makes this same statement (**Exodus 21:12-17; 22:19; Lev. 20:13, 15, 16**).
* Some people have brushed these commands of God aside as being out of date or for the Jews only, while, in reality, they stand for a perpetual principle of God for humans to observe for all of time.
* Let us be warned when we see these two elements attached to what someone believes. Sound doctrine does not depend on what I think something says, nor does it depend on how I feel about it. Sound doctrine depends on what God says about it!

1. Now, I want to deal with an aspect of a giant web of deception the devil has woven among the race of man by looking at something about it that ought to drive every one of us who are true believers to being very cautious about believing anything that does not agree with the word of God. It ought to also drive us to being very cautious about making up our minds to believe things just because we “have a feeling” that it is right. So, let’s go to **2Cor. 11:13-15**.

* In these verses, Paul is defending himself before the church at Corinth against accusations by false teachers and defending the truths he preached. They had caused controversy in the church there by teaching and saying things that not only were against Paul and his apostleship, but they were contrary to the truths of the gospel which Paul had preached. We need to carefully note what Paul warns the church about regarding these false messengers:
* **V. 13** - For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, **transforming themselves** into the apostles of Christ.
* Transforming themselves – nothing is a bigger giveaway for revealing that a person is building his own image for the purpose of deceiving more than for that person to blow his own trumpet. Interestingly, a lot of people are first-class suckers for being led by the nose by people who make themselves to be somebody special. And did you know that the devil knows this perfectly?
* **V. 14** - And no marvel; for **Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light**. 15 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.
* If the very being who is the epitome of antichrist and evil can appear to be an angel standing in the very light of God, how much more can those who serve him be camouflaged to look like the very messengers of the light. If they are camouflaged to look like messengers of light, then they will appear to be bringing a message of light.
* Let this truth keep you from assuming that just because somebody SEEMS to be a religious leader that their message is from the spirit of truth. Let this truth keep you from believing what these false messengers of light tell you just because you THINK they are messengers of the Lord.

III. Now, this brings us to a very important question; this is a question of spiritual life or death: How can we know we are following the spirit of truth and not the spirit of error? In our text, John gives us two identifiers which cover an enormous amount of ground, so let’s look at them, beginning in verse 2.

* **1John 4:2** Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:
* I want us to understand something about this statement before we go further. This verse is talking about beings of the spirit world. That is, this is not about some man, woman, boy or girl “making a confession” of believing on Christ. It goes deeper than some verbal profession of faith. We will have a multitude of people in the great day of judgment who have confessed Christ whom the Lord will reject. I call your attention to **Mat. 7:22-23** – “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? **23** And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”
* You will have to admit that these people here confessed with their mouths Jesus Christ was real…had come in the flesh, both (apparently) while in their earthly lives, and now while at the judgment of God…but Christ rejected them…why? Let’s go back to our verse from John: Every **SPIRIT** which confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.
* Folks, mouthing a confession about Jesus Christ won’t do the job. That confession must be a **spiritual confession**. In fact, the Greek word here carries also the idea of a **confession about a covenant**. Which means, a spirit confesses to having a covenant relationship with Christ. (Very briefly, Christ has made a covenant or contract with God to save and preserve all the children of God through his blood, and that person who is part of the covenant is able to confess to being a beneficiary of that covenant – see **Hebrews 12:24** and **13:20**). If your spirit within you is confirming that you have a covenant relationship with Jesus Christ who came to this earth to redeem you…to pay your sin debt…to free you from slavery to sin, then your spirit confesseth that “Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.”
* Now, for you bible students, this fact about John’s statement here will answer any questions you may have about how the those many devils of **Luke 4:41** and the devils which possessed the guy in Gadara (**Luke 8**) could testify as to who Jesus was. They were not confessing about a covenant relationship.
* One last thing that this scripture should help us to see: regardless of what kind of Christ is preached among men, if that gospel message does not make it clear that Jesus Christ really was here, flesh and blood, and lived upon the earth as a man, then that so-called gospel cannot be a true gospel (mention the fact that there are so-called gospels of Christ out there that do not claim that Christ was physically here…in fact their message claims that there was no flesh and blood Christ [e.g. the Aquarian Gospel of Christ], but Jesus became a Christ by developing into a perfect man, and that any person can become a Christ, or the Christ by his/her own acts of purity and perfection).
* Now, John finishes this warning with this statement: **1John 4:3** – “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.”
* But, we must go on. Let’s look at the second thing John describes as something by which we can know whether it is a spirit of error or a spirit of truth:

1. **1John 4:6** – “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.”

* The very first thing you will notice about whether a spirit of error is guiding and influencing someone is that they will not listen to ministers of God.
* This characteristic shows itself the most obviously when ministers of God teach bible doctrine using the plain truth from the words of God.
* Let’s not confuse spiritual ignorance with following a spirit of error right here. There is a native fly around Tennessee that looks just like a bumble bee, but it has no stinger. People sometimes confuse the two. It’s a great illustration of how people sometimes mistake spiritual ignorance of believers and tend to identify these people as some who are following a spirit of error.
* Sometimes true believers simply do not see bible truths and not being able to see them, they don’t practice them. But when the word of God is clear, the only thing that can draw a true believer away from following that is a spirit of error influencing that person.
* I mentioned earlier that there were two things that were red flags to warn us about the presence of a spirit of error; 1) they deny the plain teaching of the bible OR they alter the plain meaning of bible teaching to fit with their particular erroneous view and 2) they appeal to the emotional feelings of humans
* Look for one or both of these in the attitude or position of people who will not listen to the Lord’s ministers.
* Now…why does this all boil down to listening or not listening to the Lord’s ministers? Here’s why:
* **Eph 4:11** And **he gave** some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;
* **Eph 4:12** **For the** perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:
* **Eph 4:13** **Till we all come** in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:
* **Eph 4:14** **That we *henceforth* be no more children**, tossed to and fro, and **carried about** with every wind of doctrine, **by the sleight of men**, ***and* cunning craftiness**, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;
* **Eph 4:15** **But** speaking the truth in love, may **grow up into him** in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ:
* **Eph 4:16** **From whom** the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.
* **Eph 4:17** This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, **that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind**,
* **Eph 4:18** Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God **through the ignorance that is in them**, because of the blindness of their heart: