

When Unbelief is a Good Thing

(1 John 4:1-6)

11/30/16; Wed PM Pine Grove

Introduction

In 1983, the first holiday shopping craze hit stores..

It was the Cabbage Patch Kids craze, where people would line upon for days for a chance to buy these dolls for their kids...

There were fights over the dolls.

There were bidding wars.

There were arrests.

There was insanity as people became obsessed with purchasing a toy for their kids for Christmas...

And where there is obsession, there is fraud and crime...

In one of the most outrageous stunts trying to take advantage of people's obsessions with the dolls, a flyer was circulated around a town claiming that a store had secured 200 dolls for sale...

And in order to be fair, they were going to rent a helicopter and hover above the local high school football field where people wishing to purchase a doll were to hold their credit cards in the air..

And a photographer would take pictures of their credit cards, and the first 200 cards photographed would be mailed dolls the following week..

Now, obviously that was a phony offer that no reasonable person would fall for, but guess what?

Over 2500 people showed up at that ball field with their cards in the air, where a photographer in a helicopter stole 100s of real credit card numbers..

Talk about being gullible and falling for anything, yet that is exactly what those people did on that day...

And the same is true in 2016 as scams tricks 1000s of people each day..

I read just this week about a man who was arrested in August for a credit card phone scam that had netted him over 60 million dollars...

I see these stories and I often shake my head at how so many people can be fooled....

And I ask myself, "why is that?"

Are we simply too trusting of others?

Do we often assume the best of other people?

I think it goes all the way back to the garden of Eden, where Eve trusted the serpent too much and Adam trusted his wife too much and both of them fell into sin..

And it has become a part of our fallen nature ever since to be too trusting of others..

Now, look I am not asking you to be the world's biggest skeptic, but it is fine to question things in the world..

It is acceptable to not take everything at face value, but to examine things closely..

Being gullible is not something to be worn as a badge of honor...

Being easily deceived is not a an admirable characteristic...

Yet, we live in a day and age where people even laugh about falling for anything...

And where people find it amusing that they were tricked...

But it is not amusing to be deceived, and it shouldn't be something we take lightly especially in the church, where deception is everywhere...

There may have once been a time where you could trust most churches to be biblical but that day has long past, and the people of God need to have up their radar all the time...

As we come to chapter 4 in 1 John, we are going to see John beat a drum that he has beat before about the need to be discerning in the church...

Though it was just 90 AD, there were already de-ceivers in the church, and John was warning his readers to be on guard for their deception...

And this message hits home for us tonight as we live in the world in 2016...

Because we live in an age of the church where many people who call themselves Christians are very gullible...

And will often give anyone and anything a pass that is labeled Christian...

Even Christian bookstores will sell the books of false teachers...

And people in Christian bookstores will assume that everything in there is good simply because the store has it on their shelves...

So, how do we know what is good and what is bad?

How do we know what is God pleasing and what is not?

Well, John is going to help us tonight with a few characteristics of what is from the Spirit of God and what is not...

And it is our job to listen to John and to improve our “radar” and ability to discern of what is from the Spirit of God and what is not from the Spirit of God in the world...

So, let’s dive into verses 1-6 of 1 John 4 and equip ourselves to less gullible and more suspicious of everything we see and hear in the world and in the church...

And John simply starts out this section with a command and a reason to be on guard in the world...

I. A Test of Command (1)

Let's read verse 1...

1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Please take note of the two commands of this one verse...

Do not believe every spirit is a command from the Lord, yet it seems to be one of the most disobeyed commands of the Bible...

As people routinely trust anyone and everyone who claims to be from the Lord...

And then the second command is simply to test the spirits to see whether they are from God...

My grandfather on my mom's side was one of the most skeptical men I have ever met...

I spent a lot of time with him on the golf course and rising in his truck and he talked about a lot of things, but he was always filled with a little distrust toward everyone..

He died in 1992 and we cleaned out some of his things, and we found receipts from men who came to work his air conditioner and washing machine all the way back to 1972..

One of the men was even his neighbor who lived a few houses down the road.

I asked my grandma about why he saved them for so long...

She said he never fully trusted anyone and he wanted proof that he had paid them in case anyone ever claimed that my granddad owed them money....

Now, that is how my grandad viewed repairmen because he understood the fallen nature of men...

And that even men who provide a service to you can be liars and cheats and frauds...

And if that is the case with ordinary men, how much more is that the case with men who claim to speak for God..

And how important is it for believers to not believe every man who claims to be from God...

So, John lays out a very important command...

“Do not believe every spirit..”

Though the Bible speaks of the need to believe most of the time...

Unbelief can also be a good thing when it comes to listening to people who claim to speak for God..

So dont believe every spirit, but also test the spirits...

In other words, take what you hear and test it to see if it is from God...

And then to explain why there is a need to have this command to not believe and then to test the spirits, John gives us the reason at the end of verse 1...

“...because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

As long as there are men who teach the true word of God, there will be men who teach the false word of God...

For every Paul, there is a Judas...

For every true teacher, there is a false teacher..

And it is best to get our heads out of the sand and look around for false teachers are everywhere today and it is getting harder to spot them...

And so we have a command to test the spirits, but the question comes....

Well, how do we test the spirits?

Glad you asked.

John is going to give us two ways to test the spirits to see if they are from God or from Satan..

The first way to test the spirits is found in verses 2-3...

I call it...

II. A Test of Confession (2-3)

Let's read verses 2-3...

2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.

Once again, we go back to the very beginning of this letter where John says that a person's view of Jesus Christ is a essential test of true faith...

In other words, what you believe is important...

I get so sick and tired of people saying that theology isn't important, but it is what a person does that matters..

No, both are important to reveal if someone is from God or not...

You cannot be a Christian and have a wrong view of who Jesus is....

Look, you can jump out of airplane and not believe that the parachute works, but if you pull the cord and it opens, you will get safely to ground regardless of what you believe...

But if you don't have a proper of who Jesus is, you won't go to heaven regardless of what you do in life...

There is a mental aspect to salvation, and that is a right belief in the person of Jesus Christ...

You have to know who Christ is according to how He is described in the Bible and you have to believe what the Bible says about Him in order to be saved...

The false teachers in John's day were attacking the person of Jesus Christ....

They were claiming that He didn't come in the flesh...

In other words, he wasn't fully man like all of us...

He was a spirit body who didn't play by normal human rules...

In their false teaching, Jesus wasn't fully human.

Now, there are other false teachers who don't see Jesus as fully God...

There are equally spirits not from God...

You must see Jesus as fully human and fully God in order to be considered a true Christian....

Christianity has no room for people who don't have the right view of Christ...

And the key word is confess...

This is not just a checklist in your mind kind of confession...

That is not the meaning of confess, but it is a commitment of your life to the truth that Jesus is fully God and fully man...

He is fully God so you submit to His authority in your life and you obey His commands...

He is fully man so you cling to His sacrifice on your behalf to pay the price for your sins...

Confession is more than "yeah, I believe that today," but rather "Jesus is fully God and fully man, so I will live that is true everyday."

This may seem like Christianity 101, but is foundational to what it means to be truly saved..

Without a confession of who Jesus fully is, there is no salvation and there is Christianity...

This is where Islam and Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses and modern day Judaism fall way short...

They have the wrong belief about Jesus Christ...

And it is not that they fall short, they are not from the spirit of God and therefore are from the satanic influence...

Look at what John writes at the end of verse 3...

“.. this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.”

Mormons are not good people and neither are Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims and Jews...

They hold to a religion that is powered by Satan Himself...

If you get Jesus wrong, you get everything wrong...

And though I pray for people in these dark religions, and I share the true gospel with them when given the chance...

I cannot join hands with them, and certainly don't consider them Christian brothers and sisters...

They are believing in something that is the from the spirit of antichrist, and I can stand with nothing that opposes Christ...

So, John tells his readers and us to listen closely to what others say and believe about Christ...

Specifically, what they believe about his humanity and his deity...

If they don't see Jesus as fully God and fully man, they are not from God...

A final test is found in verses 4-6 of this opening section of chapter 4....

This is....

III. A Test of Conduct (4-6)

Let's read these verses...

4 You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. 5 They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them. 6 We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Now, John's readers were surrounded by false teachers....

They were surrounded by men who didn't claim that Jesus came in the flesh...

And John offers a word of encouragement to them in verse 4 before offering a final way to test the spirits in verse 5...

And the encouragement to John's readers and to true Christians throughout history and today is this...

The Holy Spirit that resides in you at salvation is more powerful than the deceiving spirits that are at work in the world...

The Spirit that resides in the true believer guides him or her back to truth when they hear error...

Again, this isn't a gut feeling or the hair standing up on your arms when you hear someone speak, it is the Spirit guiding you to truth in the Scriptures...

You may hear something and simply think to yourself...

“Does the Bible really say that?”

You may hear something and a verse that you memorized comes to mind that contradicts what is being taught....

You have that assurance if you are saved and walking with the Lord...

God, through His Spirit that resides in the true believer will guard and protect you from going down a path of error...

Because of that, we don't live with a spirit of fear of being led astray...

We live confidently as we don't believe everything, but we test everything by the Scriptures...

The Word becomes our measuring stick for everything...

And Who inspired the Word?

The Spirit of God.

The same Spirit that resides in the true believer will lead him or her to what He inspired in order to keep them on the right path and away from error...

Psalm 119:105...

Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path..

So we walk cautiously but confidently...

We walk by the Spirit and not in fear...

After saying that in the middle of these ways to test the spirits, John offers a second test in verses 5-6...

5 They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them. 6 We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Here, we are reminded that false teachers, prophets and the spirit of the antichrist is a product of the world in the first part of the verse 5...

This is the idea that the fallen world stands opposed to God..

The world's systems are under the power of Satan and have been ever since the fall...

The Scriptures say that those who are friends with the world are not friends of God...

Everyone lives in the world and most are married to the world and not to God...

Christians are in the world but not of the world...

Our home is in heaven where our Savior is...

We are strangers and aliens in the world...

The world is not our home, so we wander in the world and share the gospel with those of the world while we wait to go to our true home out of the world...

Yet, false teachers are worldly in every sense...

They love this world...

They are motivated by the greed and lust of the world....

They desire more of the world...

Therefore, we aren't surprised by the second half of verse 5...

They speak as from the world....

Their language is not heavenly or God glorifying, but worldly and insulting to God....

Look, the Spirit helps us identify the language of false teachers...

Their words are not the words of Scripture but the words of men...

Their speech may be sweet and smooth but it doesn't edify us or correct us or comfort us....

It usually just moves our emotion to love them more and not the Lord...

And here is the saddest part about false teachers....

The world listens to them...

Men who speak like the world attract the world to them...

And we need to be clear here...

If a person finds himself attracted to someone who is clear false teacher, their own salvation needs to be questioned...

Unsaved teachers attract unsaved people...

It is truly that simple...

John then writes this in verse 6...

People of God listen to those who speak the word of God...

Let me make a point here that is very important to understand in this testing of spirits...

Folks who are truly saved are teachable...

They listen to true teachers and they respond to their teaching...

Do you know what the false teacher or believer does when he hears true teaching?

He dismisses it...

He attacks it...

He ignores it...

In the early days of Benny Hinn's ministry...

And if you don't know Benny Hinn, he is the false teacher and preacher who claims to heal people by the power of God...

He will throw his jacket on crippled people and they will walk away limping...

Anyway, in the early days of his ministry, John MacArthur warned his church and the church in the world that Benny Hinn was a false teacher...

He took Benny Hinn's words and held them up to the test of Scripture and clearly showed that what Hinn preacher was not only false but clearly contradicted the Bible....

Well, word got back to Hinn...

And instead of sitting down and examining his ministry by the word of God and repenting and abiding by the Word, guess what he did?

He went after MacArthur...

MacArthur responded this way...

"I welcome you to take anything I have ever said and correct me by the Word of God, and I will correct any error that you find."

Hinn refused.

Instead, he went on TV and told a worldwide audience...

“I wish I had a Holy Spirit machine so I could blow his head off.”

That is man that won't listen to the word of God or the people of God, but speaks like the world...

And guess what his audience did when he said it....

They clapped and hollered..

Let me tell your something....

Teachability is a mark of true salvation...

If you are teachable, you probably aren't saved...

Salvation brings humility and strips away our pride, and if it doesn't, it probably wasn't true salvation...

False teachers aren't teachable...

They usually attack...

You can test a false teacher but what he confesses or doesn't confess about Christ and by his conduct in the world....

There are two ways to test the spirits that you hear in the world...

And there are only two options...

The spirit is from God or it is from Satan....

There is no third choice....

You can see that in the final part of verse 6...

Every spirit in the world is a spirit of truth from God or a spirit of error from Satan...

Everything that you hear is either truth or error, and it will serve you well to test everything by the word of God to see whether it is of God or not...

Conclusion

So, where does that leave us tonight?

First, it leaves us confident but cautious if we are a believer...

WE know that if the Spirit resides in us to guard us and lead us to truth, but we also know that false prophets are everywhere in the world...

So, we don't believe everything, and we test all things knowing that the Spirit will guide us to truth and not error...

Second, we understand that what we believe is important...

Salvation is a matter of the heart and head...

What you believe is important to whether or not you are truly saved...

You can't be wrong about Christ and right with God...

Finally, we see the importance of Scripture to help us test any spirit in the world...

We dont little voices in our heads or weird vibes to test if someone is from God...

We need to word hidden in our hearts and on the pages of Scripture to help us test the spirits..

This is the standard of whether someone is of God or of the devil...

The pressure isn't on us to make a decision...

God has described what true and false prophets look like and do in his word...

It is simply up to us to depend on his word to find out who passes the test and who doesn't...

Let us pray.