NEEDED: SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

(Beware! Someone might be lying to you!)

I John 4:1-6

7/28/2019

Introduction: "Believe not every spirit" (v. 1a)

***In a day in which deceivers and deception abound, we need to have spiritual discernment!**

I. *Those with spiritual discernment have . . .*
A <u>MIND</u> that <u>TESTS</u> everything they hear (v. 1-3)

II. *Those with spiritual discernment have . . .*
A <u>HEART</u> which is <u>INDWELT</u> by the Spirit of God (v. 4)

III. *Those with spiritual discernment have . . .*
An <u>EAR</u> that <u>HEARS</u> sound Biblical truth (v. 5-6)

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Introduction: "Believe not every spirit" (v. 1a)

We must accurately discern what is of God and what is not. Reasons:

1) The prevalence of diverse religions, cults, "isms," and philosophies

2) The popular acceptance of ecstatic speech ("tongues"), new revelations, alleged signs, and wonders

3) The popular New Age inquiry into the spirit world, spirit guides, channeling, alleged extra-terrestrial contact

v. 1 - "believe not every spirit" - Don't trust every spiritual teaching, movement, or man. This is a warning against spiritual gullibility.

(So many undiscerning professing believers in our land will trust the teaching of most any TV or radio personality because of his appearance, charisma, or popularity.)

Many people "are only too readily gullible to every front-door exponent of false teaching." (Guy H. King, p. 88)

There are only two spiritual entities that teach:

1. The Spirit of God (the Holy Spirit)
2. The angelic spirits
   --good angels often delivered messages from God during times when new revelation was being given - EX: Gabriel to Daniel or to Joseph & Mary.

   --demonic (fallen) angels have throughout history been putting ideas into people's minds (EX: "Doctrines of Demons")
   I Tim. 4:1 - Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;
   Cp. Ja. 3:5 - Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

- Don't be naïve
- Beware of "misguided charity" (many are poor stewards, giving to wolves in sheep's clothing)
- Watch out for tolerance and compromise toward false doctrine

"The Bible places the responsibility for determining the reliability or veracity of a teacher squarely on the shoulders of each believer" (Hocking, p. 53).

It is not merely the preacher's or church's responsibility to tell you who to look out for, or what heresies to avoid. You need to be equipped to know how to have spiritual discernment.

"We need to preserve the Biblical balance, avoiding on the one hand the extreme superstition which believes everything and on the other hand the extreme suspicion which believes nothing" (Stott, p. 153).

How do you determine whether a teaching be . . .

--from above or below?
--divine or diabolical?
--Biblical Christianity or a blasphemous counterfeit?

***In a day in which deceivers and deception abound, we need to have spiritual discernment!**

I. *Those with spiritual discernment have . . .* **A MIND that TESTS everything they hear** (v. 1-3)

"But try the spirits" - Note: John is not saying: "Don't believe any spirit" (as if we should ignore all spiritual teachers), but rather he exhorts us to put them to the test.

"Try" - *dokimazete* - to examine something; then only if it passes do you approve it (I Thes. 5:21 - Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.)

"Test" - "In ancient times the word used here referred to objects – most frequently precious metals – that were tested to determine their value or genuineness. The word is used 23 times in the New Testament as a verb, and always in the sense of examining something or someone to determine whether they are genuine" (Hocking, p. 54).

ILLUS: Things you test:

--You test drive a car before you buy it

--You test the water temperature (bathtub, pool, lake, etc.) before plunging into it.

Why are many so unconscientious when it comes to testing what they hear?

*They don't care about truth (too preoccupied with the world)

*They are lazy (to preoccupied with pleasure)
--It takes work to be a Berean!
*They are untrained (didn't take advantages of opportunities to learn God's Word)
*They are comfortable with popular opinion (they assume that because so many others believe this way it must be okay)

v. 1

"Whether they are of God" - God is not the author of all religions (as some would say), nor do all roads lead to the same place. Not all "spiritual teachings" have their origin in God. As a matter of fact, most do not!

Satan's plan to confuse the world is to introduce so many ideas, philosophies, and religions so as to keep people unaware of which way to go. He has "muddied the waters" with so many cults and "isms" that people apart from God could never see the bottom of the truth.

"Many false prophets are gone out into the world" - Satan has opened the flood gates of hell and has unleashed his wolves on the unsuspecting world.

EX: Jer. 23:14, 16-17, 21, 25-26, 31-32 - I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah.

16 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, *and* not out of the mouth of the LORD.

17 They say still unto them that despise me, The LORD hath said, Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you.

21 I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied.

25 I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed.

26 How long shall *this* be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? yea, *they are* prophets of the deceit of their own heart;

31 Behold, I *am* against the prophets, saith the LORD, that use their tongues, and say, He saith.

32 Behold, I *am* against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD.

Old Testament tests to determine a false prophet:

1. If his prediction does not come true (Dt. 18:22)

2. If his message leads you astray from God (Dt. 13:1-5)

3. If his message does not match the rest of Scripture

v. 2

How do I know when a man, movement or message is from the Spirit of God?

A. Listen to what they say

"Every spirit that confesseth"

--Don't be swayed by their charisma
-Don't be baffled by their signs and wonders
--Don't be buffooned by their popularity

The acid test is not what I see or "feel" about them, but what do they say; does what they say line up with Scripture? Ask. . .

--Is this teaching really coming from the test being quoted?
--Is he taking this out of context?
--Does this teaching line up with the rest of the Bible's teaching on this subject?
--Would this teaching lead me to disobey any other Bible teaching?
--Would this teaching (if obeyed) glorify Jesus Christ?

"Confesseth" - not a mere knowledge of a fact (as even the demons can render - Mk. 1:24, 3:11, 5:7-8; Acts 19:15)., but a personal confession (*homoogein*) of faith.

B. Listen to what they say about Jesus Christ

If they are teaching on the person and work of Jesus Christ, what do they say about Him?

(Remember: the Holy Spirit's job is to promote Christ. John 15:26 - ¶ But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, *even* the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:

Cp. John 16:13.

Other than teaching about his Lordship or deity, the Holy Spirit will also teach these major truths about Jesus Christ:

1. He is Savior (Jesus = Jehovah is salvation)
2. He is Messiah (Christ = anointed One)
3. He is pre-existent ("came")
4. He became a man ("in the flesh" - incarnate

"For many years this passage troubled me, because I could not see why such tremendous issues should hand upon so simple a thing as the acknowledgement that Jesus Christ was an historical personage. Of course He was; even these false spirits will agree to that. Secular historians, quite independently of the Bible—Josephus, Pliny, for instance—record the fact." (King, p. 88).

The fact that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah) and that He came to earth and became "flesh" is a recurring major point of emphasis in John's first epistle.

I Jn. 1:1-2 - ¶ That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life;

2 (For the life was manifested, and we have seen *it*, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;)

I Jn. 2:22 - Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.

I Jn. 5:1a - Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God

I do not believe that John's point is merely to correct docetism (the teaching that Christ appeared human but was not), but rather Judaism, which denied that Jesus was the Christ who came to earth in a physical body.

"This is not talking merely of Jesus being a man who lived on earth; it is talking about the pre-existence of Christ, as well as the deity of Christ. . . Did God become flesh." (Hocking, p. 54).

"The best translation of verse 2b is: 'Every spirit who is confessing jesus as Christ come in the flesh is of God'." (Donald W. Burdick, p. 67).

v. 3

"This is that spirit of Antichrist whereof ye have heard that it should come" -

In the last days, Satan's teachers will increasingly attack the fact that the Messiah has come. And why will he so vigorously deny that Christ came in the flesh?

Answer: To pave the way for the other false Christs which shall appear (Mt. 24:23-24) and ultimately to prepare the Jewish nation and the world for the coming of the Antichrist - I Jn. 2:18).

"Anti" - means "instead of"

An Antichrist is a counterfeit Christ or an imitation Messiah who comes instead of the true Christ who came in the flesh.

"Even now already is it in the world" - "This does <u>not</u> imply that the Antichrist was already in existence in the first century. However, the spirit which will be characteristic of Antichrist when he comes was then active and still is." (Burdick, p. 68).

Any teaching that attacks the Messianic incarnation of Jesus is of the devil!

II. *Those with spiritual discernment have . . .* **A <u>HEART</u> which is <u>INDWELT</u> by the Spirit of God** (v. 4)

"Ye are of God" = You are from (*ek*) God; your spiritual life (with all of its unction and discerning qualities) comes from God.

"Little children" - i.e. little children of God. We have been born again out of the Spirit of God, and therefore have a spiritual enlightenment which comes from being a child of the king. (cp. I Jn. 2:20, 27).

"And have overcome (conquered) **them" -** Who are the "them"? The false prophets of the lost world.

We already have the victory in hand.

"Greater is He (the Holy Spirit) **that is in you, than he** (Satan) **that is in the world" -** In every way God's Spirit is greater than the spirit of Antichrist (Satan).

The Holy Spirit is greater than Satan in His nature:

--The Holy Spirit is <u>God</u>; Satan is a created being.
--The Holy Spirit is <u>eternal</u>; Satan (Lucifer) had a beginning.
--The Holy Spirit is <u>omniscient</u> (knows all things); Satan only knows what God has revealed (and not even all of that accurately).
--The Holy Spirit is <u>omnipotent</u>; Satan can't do anything unless God allows it.

--The Holy Spirit is omnipresent; Satan must roam from place to place.
--The Holy Spirit is holy (pure); Satan is unholy.
--The Holy Spirit will endure into eternity; Satan will be shut up in abottomless pit and later cast into a lake of fire.

We have a discerning ability because the teacher of truth Himself lives inside of us!

- He is in you if you are "of God" (Rom. 8:9 - But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

- He has illuminated you once and for all time (Heb. 6:4, 10:32)

- He opens our minds to the mind of God (I Cor. 2:9-16)

III. *Those with spiritual discernment have . . .* **An EAR that HEARS sound Biblical truth** (v. 5-6)

v. 5

"They are of the world" = Any false teacher (who errs on cardinal, fundamental doctrine, particularly about the nature of Christ) has his spiritual brains from the lost, blinded world.

"Therefore speak they of the world" - They speak from (*ek*) the perspective ("viewpoint" - NIV) of the world.

False teachers will always exalt man and lower God. Their messages will glorify man's involvement in his salvation and detract from God's gracious offer of eternal life. They will magnify mortals and minimize Jesus.

--the world will elevate the Virgin Mary and applaud Mother Theresa, but disdain, ignore, or even curse Jesus Christ.

--The world will glory in Mohammed (the father of Islam) and lower Jesus to the level of a mere mortal.

--The world will seek angelic spirits or the dead "saints" and fail to seek the living and true God.

False teachers are not only detected by what they say (v. 1-3) but by who listens to them (v. 5).

"And the world heareth them" - Why does the world so readily give ear to false teachers?

"The world recognizes its own people and listens to the message which originates in its own circle" (Reinecker, citing Stott, p. 793).

The world has been blinded by the "God of this world" - Satan (II Cor. 4:4).

"Birds of a feather flock together."

v. 6

"We are of God" - John and all fellow believers who know and believe God's truth, have their spiritual origin in God.

"He that knoweth God heareth us" - Perhaps some of you today are <u>hearing</u> (accepting) what I am saying. Reason: You know God. Others could care less, because they are not of God.

"My sheep hear my voice" (Jn. 10:27).

Before Saul of Tarsus knew God (through Christ), he did not, would not, could not hear God's messages. He, like those who stoned Stephen, would have stopped his ears at the message about Christ.

"Truth. . . error" - There are really only two spirits (actually there are only two religions in the world) -

--God's way - the Truth (Bible Christianity)
--Man's way - the error (all other cults and world religions)

There is <u>no in-between</u>.
There are <u>no</u> other <u>alternatives</u>.

Jesus said, "Blessed are your ears for they hear."

Do you want to hear God's truth? Is there in your heart a desire for spiritual things? Do you love to hear the Bible? If not, then perhaps you are not "of God", have never been born again. You will desire God's Word if you are saved (I Pet. 2:2).

Conclusion: