

Lesson for November 6, 2005

The Book of I John

Chapter 4:1-6

Verse 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.”

The Greek word for *try* is “dokimazo” and means to prove, to test, or to examine. The Greek word for *spirit* is “pneuma” and is referring to persons or personalities. The false prophets are apostate false teachers and are those who reject or distort the truth of the Word of God for selfish motives. These teachers are called *false*, which is the Greek word “pseduo”. They represent themselves as true in order to gain entrance into a ministry. II Peter 2 says they come in covertly, like a spy would infiltrate an organization. We know these false teachers are unbelievers from certain words in the context, such as “destruction.” *Destruction* is the Greek word “apoleia” and it means eternal destruction or eternal separation from God. Some of these unbelieving teachers deny the deity of Christ and deny the saving power of the Gospel.

These false teachers have deliberate motives, which include monetary greed, sensual pleasures, luxurious lifestyles, power, and fame. They actually train themselves in the art of greed and lust. The Bible says that they use fabricated words of flattery with promises of prosperity in order to extort money and material possessions. They are members of the “mutual admiration society”, pretending to admire certain people in order to gain acceptance. They literally make merchandise (the Greek word “emporeuomai”) of the unsuspecting, unstable, spiritually weak believer.

Verse 2

“Hereby know we the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.

Denying that Christ came in the flesh is to deny the Hypostatic Union, which means denying that Christ is deity and humanity in one person. By doing this Jesus Christ is rejected as God and as Savior. By confessing that you believe Christ came in the flesh is to confess that He is God and to accept all that He accomplished on behalf of the human race.

One of the first tests of apostasy, heresy or the spirit of antichrist is *the clarity of the Gospel message*. Those who distort the Gospel can be, even without knowing it, apostate, heretical and antichrist. In Galatians chapter one Paul tells us what the fate should be of those who preach a different gospel. He says that they should be accursed, which means to be destroyed. Paul is not saying that these people should go to hell. He is using a metaphor that they should be stopped from preaching a false message. The false message, of course, is already accursed. The Bible tells us to test the spirits of men. The best test is to consider what they say about salvation and eternal life. (Galatians 1:6-9)

Another test of apostasy, heresy, or the spirit of antichrist is *the doctrinal accuracy of the message*. This is where it takes a greater amount of doctrine in the soul to discern the false from the true. Only through spiritual growth can a believer avoid being deceived by these false teachers. There are some obvious signs that a preacher or teacher is presenting false doctrine. For example, the motive of most false teachers is to seek fortune, fame and power. There are some ministers, however, that appear to be sincere and appear to have correct motives, but have allowed themselves to be deceived. Both are still teaching false doctrine and are enemies of the Cross of Christ. (II Timothy 2:25-26; II Timothy 3:1-7)

Verse 3

“And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God; and this is that antichrist, whereof ye have heard it should come; and even now already is it in the world.”

“Antichrist” is defined as a person who assumes the identity of Christ or opposes Christ. “The spirit of antichrist” is defined as anyone who lines up in opposition to Christ. “The Antichrist” that is spoken of often in the New Testament is a person that will be revealed during the dispensation of the Tribulation. This person is indwelt by Satan and is the one who deceives the entire world (except for a small group of believers) into believing that he is Christ, though in reality he opposes Christ. This dispensation begins immediately following the Rapture of the Church when all Church Age believers will meet the Lord in the air. (II Thessalonians 2:1-12)

John has told us that there are already among us those who exhibit the same spirit of “The Antichrist”, which is opposition to Christ. The context seems to indicate that these people to whom John refers are unbelievers claiming to be believers, with the

purpose of deceiving. We also see that these false teachers have infiltrated the local body of believers. (I John 2:18-19)

It is John's purpose not only to warn us, but to help us recognize those who have the spirit of antichrist. John begins by reminding us that we have been anointed with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, our mentor and guide. It is only under the control of the Holy Spirit that a believer can detect heresy within the body of Christ. John goes on to tell us it is through knowledge of God's Word that we are able to distinguish between true and false doctrine. It is the Bible doctrine you have stored in your soul that the Holy Spirit uses to teach you and to guide you. Anyone who denies the deity of Jesus Christ is antichrist (against Christ). Anyone who denies that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, sent from God the Father to save the world, is antichrist. (I John 2:20-23)

Verse 4

"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."

God has given us a power system so that we can execute His plan, purpose and will while living in Satan's cosmic system. It is an encapsulated environment in which we can choose to live and it affords the believer all the necessary tools for a successful life as a Christian. Jesus Christ tested and proved this encapsulated life for us and now sits at the right hand of God the Father as a testimony to its effectiveness. As believers, we have been given the same power system that was given to Christ, which enabled Him to live a sinless life. Though we cannot live a sinless life, we can live a life pleasing to God when we reside in God's encapsulated environment and utilize His power system.

Only by residing in God's system can the believer overcome the craftiness and deceit of the devil. Satan is the great counterfeiter and will do everything in his power to stop the unbeliever from trusting Christ as Savior and to stop the believer from executing God's plan. Satan uses his power and genius to present himself and his followers as ministers of righteousness, while leading the unsuspecting and duped believer into a life of self-righteous arrogance or lascivious lawlessness. However, no one has an excuse when it comes to Satan's ploys. All believers possess the power of the Holy Spirit and can use their volition to reside in God's system. (Colossians 1:13)

Verse 5

“They are of the world; therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.”

The followers of the false apostate teachers are those who allow themselves to be seduced. They are those who reject truth and believe the fabricated lies of the false teachers. II Peter 2 tells us that many will follow their evil ways, so it should come as no surprise when these ministers of Satan “pack the pew”. The pivot (remnant according to grace) has always been a small elite group of believers who refuse to compromise accurate Bible teaching. The others who follow after the “about to” ministers (God is about to do this or that, but never seems to get around to doing it), have become enemies of the Cross of Christ and partakers in satanic activity. They have been enticed by words of flattery, which promise wealth and physical healing from a “fairy godmother” type of god.

Verse 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.”

We all have equal opportunity to succeed or fail in the Christian Way of Life. Success depends on positive volition towards Bible doctrine. A believer can learn *accurate* Bible doctrine only from a man with the spiritual gift of pastor-teacher. Accurate teaching requires the proper method of Biblical interpretation, which is accomplished through the principle of I.C.E. *The I.C.E. principle stands for Isagogics, Categories and Exegesis.* Isagogics means that the Word of God must be interpreted in the time it was written from a historical point of view. Categories of doctrine must be studied and taught in a logical, systematic way, letting the Bible interpret itself, so the hearer can understand and store this information. Exegesis is the verse-by-verse study and teaching of the Word of God, in order to understand it within it's context. Accuracy comes by examination of the original languages, the etymology of words, their tenses and grammatical use. *Learning, believing and applying Bible doctrine should be the number one priority for every believer. This is the only means in this age to grow spiritually, which results in pleasing God, being in His will and glorifying Jesus Christ.* Learning accurate Bible doctrine from a man with the gift of pastor-teacher is the only way to know the difference between “the spirit of truth” (God's truth) and “the spirit of error” (Satan's lies).