

Put it to the Test!

I John 4:1-6

Last week we looked at John's word of encouragement to find confidence in God. We saw that as human beings, our consciences are fallible and capable of being misleading or even deceitful. Despite the reality of truth or the reality of circumstances, our human consciences can come and bring contradictory emotions or thoughts, causing us to live more in the thought of the moment as opposed to reality.

If our consciences can be deceiving then how is it possible to have a clear conscience, free of the past, free of judgement, free of condemnation? John pointed out to us that a clear conscience isn't the result of our own ability, but is the result of God's ability through His Son Jesus Christ. It is because of Jesus Christ that our consciences have been sprinkled with his blood to make us clean.

As a result of our clear conscience, now we have the ability to have boldness, or fearless confidence not in ourselves but in God. A confidence in God's provision in order to see His name glorified, in order to see Himself pleased, and in order to see His will take place in our lives. If we ask for anything that falls into these three categories, we can be sure that God will answer our request.

John told us that we need to place our full confidence in Jesus. Do we trust him? Do we believe that the things he has promised us will, or have taken place? Do we believe that He has our best interest in mind? Do we believe that He is able to wash our lives clean of sin? John told us that if we do then it will show in our relationship with God and Jesus Christ.

If we really and truly believe and trust in Him then we will do what He tells us. We will no longer listen to our own conscience but rely more and more on the Spirit of God. We will not let our human nature control us, but we will control the human nature with the Spirit of God within each of us.

This morning we will continue to look at John's words in **I John 4:1-6**. In verse 1 we read:

Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world.

1. Don't Believe Everyone Who Claims to Speak for God.

In the church today, many claim to speak on behalf of God, dispensing harmful and destructive ideas that have come from the minds of men. Last week we saw that the human conscience is deceiving, and yet many rely on their own manmade ideas and tell others to follow them as they follow what they feel is right.

We have intellectuals challenge our society to think for themselves and not let others think for us. Truth is subjective to personal opinion. In essence our society tells us today that the human mind is able to decide what is truth from false truth.

We live in a time when we cannot believe everything we hear or everything we feel. We cannot believe something strictly because someone said that it was the truth by labeling it as "thus says the Lord," or because our own human emotions or thoughts tell us that we are right. Jesus warned about the coming of false prophets or false teaching in **Matthew 7:15-16**:

"Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep, but are really wolves that will tear you apart. You can detect them by the way they act, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit. You don't pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles.

These false prophets come outwardly appearing to be loving, tender, and concerned, but inwardly desiring only to wreck and ruin an individual. The Apostle Paul wrote in **II Corinthians 11:3-4** of his fear for the Corinthian Church.

But I fear that somehow you will be led away from your pure and simple devotion to Christ, just as Eve was deceived by the serpent. You seem to believe whatever anyone tells you, even if they preach about a different Jesus than the one we preach, or a different Spirit than the one you received, or a different kind of gospel than the one you believed.

There is a force that is out there that is trying to trip us up in our walk with God. We can see an example in **I Kings** where a false prophet trips up a true prophet. The true prophet received a word from God not to eat or drink while in Bethel, but listen to what happens in **I Kings 13:18**:

The old prophet said, "I am a prophet, too, just as you are. And an angel gave me this message from the Lord: 'Bring him home with you, and give him food to eat and water to drink.'" But the old man was lying to him. So they went back together, and the man of God ate some food and drank some water at the prophet's home. There while they were sitting at the table, a message from the Lord came to the old prophet. He cried out to the man of God from Judah, "This is what the Lord says: You have defied the Lord's message and have disobeyed the command the Lord your God gave you. You came back to this place and ate food and drank water where he told you not to eat or drink. Because of this, your body will not be buried in the grave of your ancestors.

The story continues on and tells us that the true prophet gets attacked by a lion and is killed and then buried in the false prophet's grave. The story is applicable to you and me today.

Satan want's nothing more than to deceive us and make us think of things and embrace certain ideas that will lead to our destruction. They may sound good and convincing yet stray away from the truth of scripture. In **II Corinthians 11:13** Paul tells the church in Corinth:

These people are false prophets. They have fooled you by disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. But I am not surprised! Even Satan can disguise himself as an angel of light. So it is no wonder his servants can also do it by pretending to be godly ministers. In the end they will get every bit of punishment their wicked deeds deserve.

Individuals will come in all different kinds of ways. They will look great on the outside but they follow after their master and merely disguise themselves. In **Romans 16:19** Paul talks of false teachers who cause division and upset people's faith.

Such people are not serving Christ our Lord; they are serving their own personal interests. By smooth talk and glowing words they deceive innocent people.

Nehemiah was given a so called prophetic word by Shemiah who told Nehemiah that his enemies were coming to kill him and that he need to find safety in the Temple of God. In **Nehemiah 6:11** we read Nehemiah's response:

But I replied, "Should someone in my position run away from danger? Should someone in my position enter the Temple to save his life? No, I won't do it?" I realized that God had not spoken to him, but that he had uttered this prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. They were hoping to intimidate me and make me sin by following his suggestion. Then they would be able to accuse and discredit me.

*"Don't let anyone mislead you. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Messiah.' They will lead you astray." **Matthew 24:4-5***

*So do not be attracted by strange, new ideas. Your spiritual strength comes from God's special favor, not from ceremonial rules about food, which don't help those who follow them. **Hebrews 13:9***

I always find it amazing how people will flock by the thousands to prophets who claim a new idea or some odd doctrine. People have implemented ideas, even within the last 5 years in the church, that are nothing but strange and new ideas that have caused people to seek signs and experiences as opposed to seeking God, or even have turned people off from the Gospel.

Somehow, somewhere there has sprung up the notion that those who question a spiritual experience or a word from the Lord, lack spiritual maturity or development. This has crept into the church. I have heard evangelists in the church tell us to not try and figure out God and be willing to accept anything that God wants to send us, even at the expense

of ignoring our minds and convictions. But God's word to us today is our next point this morning.

2. Test What is Being Said.

By measuring everything that is said with the truth of Scripture we can be sure not to get tangled up in some scheme of deception, or attempt to cause us to stumble. Even Pastor's or Evangelists are capable of being human at times, exposing their fallibility. In **Acts 17:11** we read:

And the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul's message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to check up on Paul and Silas, to see if they were really teaching the truth.

In **Revelation 2:2** we find word of praise for the Church of Ephesus.

"I know all the things you do. I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance. I know you don't tolerate evil people. You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not. You have discovered they are liars."

Let two or three prophesy, and let the others evaluate what is said. I
Corinthians 14:29

Test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good. I
Thessalonians 5:21

We are to test everything. Why? Because many people CAN be led astray. The Apostle Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:14** tells us to grow spiritually. He says:

Then we will no longer be like children, forever changing our minds about what we believe because someone has told us something different or because someone has cleverly lied to us and made the lie sound like the truth.

The Apostle Paul told Timothy in **I Timothy 4:1-2** of the reality that people will follow a lie. He says:

Now the Holy Spirit tells us clearly that in the last times some will turn away from what we believe; they will follow lying spirit and teachings that come from demons. These teachers are hypocrites and liars. They pretend to be religious, but their consciences are dead.

Paul told Titus of the same danger in **Titus 1:10**:

For there are many who rebel against right teaching; they engage in useless talk and deceive people.

Test everything that is said. If the Bereans felt it necessary to test the words of the Apostle Paul, then we should be comfortable to test the words of those in the church today. Test everything. **Proverbs 14:15** tells us:

Only a simple man believes everything they are told! The prudent carefully consider their steps.

It is good to test the teaching we are exposed to. It guards us from embracing ideas that can lead us astray. But John continues on in **I John 4:2-3** and says:

This is the way to find out if they have the Spirit of God: If a prophet acknowledges that Jesus became a human being, that person has the spirit of God. If a prophet does not acknowledge Jesus, that person is not from God. Such a person has the spirit of Antichrist. You have heard that he is going to come into the world, and he is already here.

3. The Spirit of God Points to Jesus Christ.

The Bible is very clear that Jesus came to earth in a human body. He was born of a woman, not a deity, and he bled and died as a human being. To believe otherwise would be to question what the Apostles saw with their own eyes. And if the Apostles were lying then they would be no different than the false teachers that they were teaching against.

But I think more importantly, the Bible is very clear as to its central theme. All through the Old Testament we find symbolism and clear indications of the coming of the Messiah. Then Jesus comes and does his work here on earth. He dies and is resurrected and then goes to his Father in heaven. Then the remainder of the New Testament is written to explain the purpose and freedom that we can experience because of the work of Jesus.

If the Bible's main theme is Jesus Christ, then the teachings of godly men should be the same.

There clearly was a teaching going around at this time that Jesus was a spirit or some other form. In **II John 1:7** we read John's words:

Many deceivers have gone out into the world. They do not believe that Jesus Christ came to earth in a real body. Such a person is a deceiver and antichrist.

To deny the fact that Jesus was not a human being, would be to deny the truth proclaimed by the prophets in the Old Testament and the Spirit inspired claim of the Apostles. The Bible would simply be a book of good ideas, as opposed to undeniable truth.

Those who preach or prophesy must point to their central theme of Jesus Christ and His work of salvation. John continues on in **I John 4:4** and says:

But you belong to God, my dear children. You have already won your fight with these false prophets, because the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world.

4. We are Victorious Over False Doctrine.

As children of God we have the power of the Holy Spirit at work within each of us. As long as we pay attention to the Spirit of God we can find protection from falling into false teaching. God has the ability to protect us. David said in **Psalms 55:18**

He rescues me and keeps me safe from the battle waged against me, even though many still oppose me.

God spoke through King Hezekiah to the people of Jerusalem in **II Chronicles 32:7-8** and said:

"Be strong and courageous! Don't be afraid of the king of Assyria or his mighty army, for there is power far greater on our side! He may have a great army, but they are just men. We have the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles for us!"

Although the enemy is out there looking to trip us up, we have a God who is able to keep us from falling into the enemies hands. I know for myself, I want to be open to ways that God wants to move through His church. I want to see God bring freshness to His church. But I know that God wants me to test everything, and rely on Him to give me insight and discernment. God wants me to be equipped to make right choice and embrace right teaching. John continues on in **I John 4:5** and says:

These people (false prophets) belong to this world, so they speak from the world's viewpoint, and the world listens to them.

5. False Prophets Tell People What They Want to Hear

In **II Timothy 4:3** Paul tells Timothy:

For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to right teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever they want to hear.

Micah tells us about Israel's embracing of false prophets in **Micah 2:11**:

Suppose a prophet full of lies were to say to you, "I'll preach to you the joys of wine and drink!" That's just the kind of prophet you would like.

Conclusion

So John this morning is telling us not to just accept so called truths from anyone. Considering the fact that as human beings we are capable to making mistakes he tells us to test what is being said against the Word of God.

We need to identify the fact that there are those out there that want us to embrace their false teaching merely to cause us to stumble or even for their own financial or emotional gain. They use words that sound good and, as the scripture stated it, "used smooth talk and glowing words." They even speak to the desires of the world, giving them what they want to hear.

They deceive people into thinking that all you need to do is live a good life and everything is okay. Their teaching of deception tells us, "You need to be tolerant of all people, you need to be open minded, you need to think for yourself." All of these ideas that lead to mankind hearing what he wants to hear. The world finds those who give them permission to continue to live in their sin. And in the end the final authority is the minds of men.

But God tells us that as long as we listen to the Spirit of God, as long as we weigh everything against the word of God, and as long as we listen to those who will bring our focus to the work of Christ, we have the ability to remain victorious over such false prophets.