

6. 1 John 4:1-6 of a Verse by Verse Study of the Letters of John and Jude

Chapter 3 concluded by telling us how we know the Spirit of God is in us. In 1 John 3:24, John said, "24 Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us." John compares the Spirit of God in this passage to the spirit of the antichrist in chapter 4, verse 3. John had introduced the idea of an antichrist in 1 John 2:18-19:

18 Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. 19 They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.

In chapter 4, John returns to the subject of the antichrist, relating the spirit of the antichrist to false prophets. The evil of the antichrists and false prophets is from the devil. According to John in 1 John 3:8-10, all evil is from the devil:

8 He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. 9 No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. 10 This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.

In chapter 4, John returns to the subject of the antichrists.

Testing the Spirits

4 *Dear friends, 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. 2 This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.*

John warns the church to test every spirit to see if they are from God. We are not to believe every spirit for there are many false prophets gone out into the world. This is a repeated warning given by all the inspired writers to the church. Human nature is to believe the spirits of those who come to us. In our society, we have the common expression: "Take him in good faith." Because the false prophets are so many and so deceitful, we **must not believe every spirit but test every spirit**. The warnings to us are many:

2 Peter 2:2: "2 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them — bringing swift destruction on themselves."

2 Thess 2:8-10: "8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing."

Rev 19:20: "20 But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur."

Rev 20:14-15: "14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. 15 If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

That the false prophets have the same fate as the devil and the antichrist repeats itself throughout the New Testament.

In verse 2, John tells us how to distinguish between the Spirit of God and the spirit of the antichrist:

2 This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

We may identify those who have the Spirit of God by two unchanging principals. First, they must acknowledge Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. Jesus related this acknowledgement to eternal life in John 17:3: "3 Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and **Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.**" To deny that Jesus came in the flesh is to deny the very foundation of the gospel. John had written earlier in John 1:14: "14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." Luke had recorded the words of the angels of heaven testifying of Jesus Christ who had come in the flesh in Luke 2:9-14

9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

14 "Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

Second, they must acknowledge that Jesus Christ is from God. Here again, John goes back to the premise of the gospel as he had revealed it in John 1:1-5:

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning.

3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

Not only did the Christ come from God, but also he came so that men might be born of God according to John 1:10-13:

10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

On the other hand, the spirit of the antichrist, who does not acknowledge Jesus come from God with all the power and might of a Christ, is **not from God**. He is the antichrist. He is manifest as anyone who rejects the word; for Jesus Christ is the word. At the time of John's writing, the spirit of the antichrist was already afoot in the world.

Recognizing the Spirit of Truth

4 You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. 5 They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. 6 We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God

does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

The one, who is in us, Christ, is greater than the one, who is in the world, the antichrist. As long as Christ is in us, we overcome the antichrist. The antichrists (plural), the false prophets, are from the world and speak the viewpoint of the world. The test is whether teachers and preachers speak the viewpoint of the world or the words of the inspired writers. Whoever knows us listens to us (the inspired writers of scripture). Whoever is not from God will not listen to the scriptures. This is how we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

John had begun his gospel by differentiating between truth and falsehood, emphatically teaching that the truth is from Jesus. John 1:17 teaches, "17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and **truth** came through Jesus Christ." Jesus taught that the truth was in him. In John 3:21, he teaches, "21 But whoever lives by the **truth** comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God." In John 8, Jesus separates truth and error; Christ and the devil. In John 8:32, he teaches, "32 Then you will know the **truth**, and the **truth** will set you free." In John 8:44, the Lord castigates them for belonging to the devil – a liar and the father of lies:

44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, **not holding to the truth**, for there is no **truth** in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Jesus had said in his prayer to the Father that truth is the word of God in John 17:17: "17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth." The truth then is the word of God, and the truth is the Gospel. Paul wrote in Eph 1:13, "13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation."

The truth is the key to recognizing the spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

Do you listen to God in his word of truth, the gospel of your salvation? Or do you listen to the views of the religious world not found in the scriptures?