

14. Learning to Test the Spirits

In our last topic, we saw that one of our goals as Christians should be to help our physical and spiritual children learn to enjoy the benefits of godly living. In 1 John 3:22-24, we saw three benefits. We saw that: Christ promises to answer our prayers, we are given power to obey the new commandment, and we have been given the Holy Spirit who now abides in our lives. Today, we want to learn how to help our physical and spiritual children learn to test the spirits so they will not be deceived by false spirits. Because they have the Holy Spirit living in their lives, we want to help them realize they do not need to be deceived by false spirits.

1 John 3:24 concluded the previous chapter by saying, “Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.” In that verse, we are reminded that each of us, as Christians, have the Holy Spirit abiding in us. However, we want to help our physical and spiritual children realize that there are also many other spirits. That is why 1 John 4:1 says, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” Here, we see that there are many false prophets. They get their message from evil spirits or demons. That is why it is important to help our children learn to test what they hear in order to see if what they are hearing is from the Holy Spirit or from other spirits.

We see that we want to help our children learn to test every teaching they hear to see if it agrees with two things. First, we want to show them how to test what they hear to see whether it agrees with the doctrine of Christ. 1 John 4:2-4 says, “By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” We want to help our children realize that the Holy Spirit will give true teaching about Christ, while other spirits will not give true teaching about Christ.

In the verses above, we see one thing false teachers, who get their teachings from other spirits, often deny is the fact that Christ has come in the flesh. It is important to help our children understand that Christ became a true man with true human flesh. John 1:14 says, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” Many false teachers deny the humanity of Christ. The Holy Spirit will help our children quickly recognize that a person is a false teacher if that person denies that Christ took on true human flesh when He came to this earth.

Earlier in 1 John, we also saw that the Holy Spirit will reveal another false teaching that comes from demonic spirits. 1 John 2:22-23 says, “Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.” Here, we see that another common message of false teachers is denying that Jesus is the Anointed One of the Father. In

doing this, such false teachers are denying the Deity of Christ, and the fact that He is One with the Father. The Jews clearly understood that if Christ and the Father are One, Christ is truly God. In fact, John 10:30-31 says, “...I and My Father are one.’ Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him.” The reason the Jews were ready to stone Christ was due to the fact that they did not want to accept His statement that He was equal with the Father.

In fact, it was this very statement that caused the Jewish religious leaders to condemn Christ to death. Matthew 26:63-66 says, “But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, ‘I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!’ Jesus said to him, ‘It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.’ Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, ‘He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy! What do you think?’ They answered and said, ‘He is deserving of death.’” The chief priests and other religious leaders were controlled by the very same false spirits that control false teachers today. That is why they condemned Christ to death.

John wanted to make it clear to his spiritual children that some false teachers deny that Christ truly came in the flesh, while other false teachers deny that Christ is from the Father and is equal with the Father. The spirits that gave these false teachers their false message in the time that John wrote are just as active today. That is why we want to help our children understand that there are many false spirits who are giving false teachers their false teaching that deny either the humanity of Christ or the deity of Christ. In fact, John said, in 1 John 4:4, that is one of the reasons why all Christians have been given the Holy Spirit. That verse says, “You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” The Holy Spirit will help our physical and spiritual children to recognize that these false teachings are false.

Ephesians 4:14 says, “That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.” Here, we see that it is possible for a very immature Christian to be deceived by such false teachers. That is why every Christian needs a spiritual parent to help them grow up in their spiritual lives. The next verse, Ephesians 4:15 says, “But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ--.” Here, we see that such immature Christians need a spiritual parent to help them grow up so that they learn to speak the truth in love, instead of continuing to be deceived by false teachers. Then, such true Christians will no longer be deceived.

We said earlier that we want to help our children learn to test every teaching they hear to see if it agrees with two things. The first thing was to see whether the teaching given by a spirit agrees with the doctrine of Christ. If the teaching is from the Holy Spirit, it will agree with the doctrine of Christ. The second thing we want to help our children learn is to test each teaching to see if it agrees with the Word of God. 1 John 4:5-6 says, “They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.” Here, we see that these other spirits are of the world. This is due to the fact that they are demonic spirits who follow Satan.

False teachers who get their teaching from demonic spirits will be very popular. Verse five tells us that such teachings will be very popular with the people who are of the world because such people do not have the Holy Spirit in their lives. 2 Timothy 4:3-4 tells us the goal of such false spirits when those verses say: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” False teachers have always been popular with the world, because they tell sinful and rebellious people what they want to hear, instead of telling them the truth.

In fact, the goal of false teachers is to turn people away from the truth and to turn them to fables. In all five places where the word “fables” is used, it is used in the context of false teachings. In fact, the reason Paul said he left Timothy in Ephesus is recorded in 1 Timothy 1:3-4. “As I urged you when I went into Macedonia--remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith.” As we saw earlier in Ephesians 4:14, Paul recognized that there were some very immature Christians who were being deceived by these false teachers who would actually lie in wait to deceive the immature Christians.

In 2 Timothy 4:2, the verse just before Paul warned about false teachers, Paul told Timothy, “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.” Both Paul and John focused on the fact that true teaching will always come from the Word of God. We also want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to teach and answer questions from the Word of God instead of giving their own opinions. When John wrote the book of Revelation, God led him to write, in Revelation 22:18-19, “For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.” We want to show our children, by our own example, that we do not add to the Word of God or take away from the Word of God.

We help our physical and spiritual children learn to test the spirits as we help them understand the true doctrine of Christ. That includes both the fact that He came in the flesh and that He is the Son of God. We also help them learn to teach the Word of God from its context, not their own ideas or opinions. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your physical and spiritual children learn to test the spirits so they are not deceived and do not deceive others.