

BC art. 7; I John 4:1-6; Acts 17:10-12; Testing the Words of Men I. The Warning against Believing Everyone II. The Call to Test the Spirits III. The Special Gift from God

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, in many ways we live in an age of information overload. I read this past week of new salon in London that offers a haircut in complete silence where you can enjoy a time of peace and quiet while your hair is trimmed. A novel idea. But why is this appealing? It is because we are surrounded by the constant noise and drum of information. From the moment we get up to the time we go to bed- our gadgets ring and buzz with every push notification. How are we to make sense out of all of this? How are we to know what is true in this age of false narratives and fake news. I remember as a kid listening to Paul Harvey with my grandfather- who would tell us the Rest of the Story. Events happen in a context- and information needs to be interpreted. We need to be on guard against gullible naivety in our world today. I saw a quote on this past week credited to George Washington saying- “don’t believe everything you read on the internet.” A funny reminder that you can’t believe everything you read. As you can see, the truth is easily turned into something else. So today we see that in our article and in I John 4 that Jesus is teaching spiritual discernment so that we might know the truth. Last week we saw that the Bible proves its truthfulness and authority since it contains fulfilled prophecy. This week we move on to consider the words of men- how do we know if they agree with the Word of God?

I. The Warning against Believing Everyone

In our first point, we see that Jesus begins in I John 4 by warning us against believing everyone. Do not believe every spirit- he says in v. 1. In many ways, the apostle John focusses on truth in his letters. Why do you think that when speaking about the truth, John begins with a warning against believing everything you hear or read? Well, have you considered why our court system needs to have a vow or sworn oath of truth – I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth? Why do people have to recite this oath before being a witness in the court of law? Well, the reason that this vow is needed is because man is not known for being truthful. James 3:2 says, we all stumble in many ways. We all say things that we should not, and we forget to say what we

should. We boast, or we conveniently leave out our own mistakes, and we slant the truth for our own interests. Our article puts it this way, all human being are liars by nature and more vain than vanity itself! Wow- that is not a very high view of man truthfulness! In reality, we see that our world's teaching is constantly in flux. There is not fixed standard for right and wrong. Added to this fact, as v. 1 concludes, there are many false prophets that have gone out into the world. Although the lying nature of humanity is bad enough, there are many who are sent by the devil with a message to deceive and lead astray! Much of what we hear from the world is designed to contradict the truth of God's word- to sow the seeds of doubt in our heart. As Eph. 4 puts it, do not be like an infant that is tossed to and fro by various waves of doctrine- deceived by crafty and cunning men. Rather stand firm with your anchor cast in the firm bedrock of truth. We should be critical- or skeptical concerning the teaching of man- because they are often rehearsing the words of their father- the devil- who is the chief deceiver and the liar of old. Do not be gullible or naïve! This is not to say that everything written by man is unprofitable. We can even learn from unbelievers as God gives them gifts for us all to enjoy. We can enjoy music and food prepared by an unbeliever- absolutely. But we must be clear in this- that no teaching of man may be considered to be equal in authority to the deivein writings. For His truth is above everything else.

II. The Call to Test the Spirits

This submission to the truth of God's Word first and foremost is what sets the standard by which we test everything else. So as Jesus continues in v. 1- do not believe everything, but rather test. How do we know who we should believe? How do we know which teacher or preacher we should listen to or which doctrine we should accept? Well, Jesus calls us to discernment. To test the words and teachings of others means that we must prove them, examine them, and hold them up to the light. I sometimes call this the smell test. If you come home from vacation and you want to know if your milk has gone bad- you smell it. By smelling you discern what is good and what is bad. In a similar way, the teaching and information that we receive is to be tested- if it does not sound right- if it does not agree with the truth- then that teaching must be rejected. We are called to test the spirits. There are two spirits at work in our world. The spirit of this age- the spirit of the fallen world or the devil

continues to spout false information. This is the spirit of the anti-Christ of v. 3. Everyone interest information. A person's worldview directly influences their conclusion. No information is received and transmitted in a vacuum. So if a person is following the spirit of this age, their conclusions will be suspect. But there is another Spirit- and that Spirit is the Holy Spirit! It is He who is called the Spirit of truth as we will see in our next point. So every teaching or doctrine that man gives must be weighed or tested. Like gold that is tested in a refiner's fire, the words of man must be weighed. What is the standard? Well, the standard for truth remains God's Word. The rule for our doctrine and life is the Holy Scriptures. That is Word is the scale by which every man's life and teaching must be weighed. Even within the church this holds true. As John was writing his letter to the saints- that they must test every spirit or teaching- so this call still applies today. Paul would say in I Cor. 2- consider my words- test my speech and message. These are not built upon the wisdom of men but the power of God! Now we have elders within this church whose very office requires them to test the words of the pastor to see if it is true. But we all have a responsibility. We should be like the good Bereans of Acts 17- as Paul preached to them, they received the message and examined the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. They tested Paul's words- and found them to agree with the OT. So we should all listen to a sermon with our Bibles open on our laps. But not just at church. Children, while you are at school you must be discerning- weigh the words of your teachers. When watching TV- does this person display and teach the wisdom of God or the wisdom of man? We need to examine each doctrine before placing our trust in it!

III. The Special Gift from God

Now this is a big responsibility- one that we are all called to be faithful in. But God does not give us this command then then leave us alone to do it. He also gives us a special gift to enable and ensure that we do indeed test and can faithfully weigh the words- so that we might embrace the truth. And the first gift we are given is found in v. 2- we have the gift of the Holy Spirit- or the Spirit of God. We are each responsible for searching, testing and discerning. We cannot leave this up to others. But God in His grace has given us each His Spirit- as I Cor. 2 says, God reveals these things to us through the Spirit. We have the Spirit who if from God so

that we might understand the things from God. Each Christian is a Spirit filled vessel- and by the Spirit we are lead into all truth. It is by this Spirit's indwelling that we can overcome the devil as v. 4 continues. By the Spirit we can discern who is from God and who is not. So the first gift God gives is the Spirit- the agent of truth. But we have a second gift in these verses- which a holy summary of truth. If you want to know if a person is Spirit filled and is from God, look at their life and listen to their teaching. Not only will their life be filled with sanctified fruit, their teaching will be in accordance with God's Word. And specifically- as v. 2 reveals- ask this teacher about his view of Jesus Christ. As Jesus himself asked His disciples, who do men say that I am? Who do you say that I am? What does this person say about Jesus Christ? Is He only a good teacher or a moral example? Did He die a divine tragedy being misunderstood? Who is this man who was hung upon the cursed tree? Well, if you are from God and you have the Spirit of truth within you, then you will say that this Jesus is the Christ- sent from God and He has come in the flesh. This is the cardinal truth- this is the defining mark- what do you say about Jesus? Is He truly the one promised of old who came in order to fulfill the prophecies? Did He die as our substitute- taking on our sin and becoming a curse? Did He rise again and ascend into heaven- does He mediate and intercede for us? Who do you say that He is? Answering the question about the person and work of Jesus Christ is what sets the church apart from the world- those who are filled with the Spirit of God and those led by the spirit of this age. And by the Spirit, we will believe in the name of Jesus Christ as 3:23 commands. Only those who believe the truth about Christ, who also trust in and obey Him, are to be accepted as a true teacher.

To conclude, the truth is something that does not change. Jesus said that by the Spirit we will know the truth, and that this truth will set us free! The Spirit leads the church and He causes us to remember and apply all that Jesus taught. We live in a confusion age- but Jesus calls and equips us to be discerning. We must reject anything that does not agree with God's word. For the truth of His Word is above everything else. Men will lie and their stories will change. But the Word of the Lord endures forever! In this Word we find out who Jesus is and what He has done- and in knowing Him we have life everlasting! The Bible contains everything we need to know so that we might be saved! So trust in the Word of God and not the words of men!