

Place: Lurgan Baptist

8:10:2006

Reading: 1 John 4:1-6

BACK TO BASICS

13. TRUTH AND ERROR

From day one the world has never been without a plethora of cults and isms. **You name it, we have had it.** There have been always those who have plied their wares on unsuspecting saints, those who try to sideline the people of God. The sad fact is, that so many of God's people are gullible, they will believe anything that sounds remotely credible. The truth is, that God's revelation has always been counterfeited by false prophets and peddlers of error. Here John contrasts the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. You see, behind the world we perceive with our senses, there is a real unseen world. Do you recall Paul's words to the Ephesians, "*for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*" (Eph 6:12) In that spirit world a titanic struggle is going on between the forces of evil and the forces of good. There is a Spirit of Truth which is of God and there is a spirit of error which is of the devil. You see, *it's the purpose of God to confront us with truth, in order to direct us, but it's the purpose of the devil to confront us with error in order to deceive us.* My the whole purpose of the enemy is to deceive the human race. The word for "*deceive*," is found 19 times in the N.T. and it always has to do with the devil and his works.

The devil does not destroy God's wheat for he cannot (Lk 10:19) so he imitates it. God sows his children into the world, and Satan sows his counterfeit agents into the same world. No sooner does God sow the apostles into the world, than Satan sowed a crop of Judaizers and Gnostics along with a bunch of false messiahs. No sooner did God sow Martin Luther into the world (1483-1546) than Satan sowed Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556) the Jesuits and the counter reformation. No sooner did God sow John Wesley into the world (1703-1791) than Satan sowed Voltaire (1694-1778) with his sneering hatred of the things of God.

No sooner did God sow C.H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) and D.L. Moody (1837-1899) than Satan sowed another crop of tares, Robert Ingersoll with his bitter hatred of Christianity (1837-1899) Joseph Smith (1805-1844) Brigham Young (1801-1877) and the Mormon Cult, Charles Taze Russell (1852- 1916) and the Jehovah's Witness, Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910) and so called Christian Science. My God sows good seed but Satan sows tares. John, in his day was battling against an attack on the person of Christ. His warning brief and blunt, "*Beloved believe not*," (4:1) Now that word "*try*," can be translated "*test*," or "*prove*." In Bible days the word was used with reference to putting metals to the test to see if they were genuine. You and I are

commanded in the Word of God to apply spiritual tests to the things we hear. Paul says, “*prove all things hold fast that which is good.*” (1 Thes 5:21) Now how do we put things to the test ? How do we discover whether or not they are of God ? Well, did you notice the three personal pronouns that are used successively in the opening verses of this chapter ? In (4:4) we read “*Ye are of God,*” in (4:5) “*they are of the world,*” and in (4:6) “*we are of God.*” Now in those three pronouns John sketches for us three different groups.

(1) THE IDENTITY OF FALSE PROPHETS

In (4:1) John says, “*many false prophets are gone out into the world,*” and then in (4:5) “*they are of the world therefore them.*” Two things amaze me about the average man on the street, what he believes and what he does not. It is amazing to me that people believe evolution but they refuse to believe creation. They believe that man came from monkeys, but they refuse to believe that man came from God. They will believe in Mohammed, they refuse to believe in Jesus. They believe in reincarnation, but they refuse to believe the resurrection. They will believe in a scientist but they refuse to believe in the Word of God. There are former members of churches, who today are in the cults because they refused to test the spirits. *They could not recognise the wolf because he was dressed in sheep's clothing.* Yet the Bible warns us in many places of the encroachment of false prophets seeking to spread the spirit of error among the people of God. Do you recall that Christ Himself predicted that false prophets could come into the world ? He said, “*beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ravening wolves.*” (Matt 7:15) Again, the Lord warns us that these false prophets would seek to deceive many, “*that if it were possible they shall deceive the very elect.*” (Matt 24:11) Now if these false prophets and teachers come in sheep's clothing, if they look like the true, but in reality they are the false, how is the Christian to know when he encounters a false prophet or teacher ? Well, John says, “*Try, test the spirits, examine them, put them to the test, to see, if they are of God ?*” I want to suggest several ways to test every sermon, every message you hear, to determine whether or not it is of God ? I believe we can identify these false prophets by,

(a) THEIR MESSAGE:

Look if you will at (4:3) Or we could translate it like this, “*every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus is Christ come in the flesh is not of God.*” Now “*Jesus,*” is the name of the Saviour's humanity and “*Christ,*” is the title of His deity. Now do you see what John is saying ? He is saying that any teacher who does not confess the full deity and the full humanity of Jesus Christ is to be identified among the antichrists. (2:18) My the crucial question is always this, “*what think ye of Christ, whose son is He ?*” (Matt 22:42) You see, what folk think about Jesus Christ is the touchstone of correctness and truthfulness, in matters of the faith. Did you know that every major cult is in error concerning the person of Jesus Christ ? In John's day he was battling with the Cerinthian

heresy which said that Jesus was a human being and that the divine Christ came upon Him at his baptism and departed at his crucifixion. This heresy denies the deity of Christ and the work He came to do at the place called Calvary. So here is test number one ! What is being taught about the Lord Jesus ? (a)

(b) *THEIR MAGNETISM:*

For speaking of these false teachers in (4:5) John says, “ *they are of the world, therefore speak they of the world and the world heareth them.*” Test number two. Check their popularity ! Now I am not saying that popularity is proof positive that a teacher is not of God. Of course, that would not be true. Many great Bible teachers are very popular, multitudes of people come to listen to them as they expound the Word of God ! But one of the marks of an unfaithful prophets is that he appeals to the masses of the people. John says, “ *the world heareth them.*” For the Christ they preached, a watered down Christ, a mere man suited the world. My the world has always been ready to make room for a Christ like that, because such a Christ poses no threat to this world’s policies, pleasures, philosophies, or pursuits. You see, the world has no trouble accepting a powerless Christ, such as that preached by the Jehovah Witnesses, a carnal Christ as that presented by the Mormons, or a de-super naturalized Christ as proclaimed by the liberals, or a ghost Christ as recognised by the Spiritists or a wafer Christ as portrayed by the Romanists. Sure these people gather large followings, build massive empires and appear very successful, but the apostle Paul exposes them when he says, “ *they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus,*” (Rom 16:18) These false teachers are also identified by,

(c) *THEIR MOTIVES:*

Test number three, check their commercialism. Peter speaking of false teachers says, “ *and through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you.*” (2 Pet 2:3) Peter says the underlying motive of these false teachers is not love of the truth, but love of money (2 Pet 2:14) They exploit, their followers commercially ! My is this not a trait of false prophets ? They are constantly appealing for money. We think of all the scandals in the U.S.A. that has brought the cause of Christ into disrepute. The constant appeal of the “ *tele evangelists,*” asking people to send in their offerings. John says, “ *test the spirits, examine them whether they are of God.*” How can we know a false teacher when we encounter one ? Well, they are also identified by,

(d) *THEIR MORALS:*

John referring to such speaks of “ *ungodly men turning the grace of God into lasciviousness..*” (Jude 4) False prophets who rationalise sinful things in their lives. One leading speaker who went all over the U.S.A. holding meetings, and making a million dollars in the process died an alcoholic. Another cult leader who had been convicted of adultery said, “ *my private life is my own. My public*

life is dedicated to the Lord.” A minister in one of the major cities in the U.S.A said this, “ *it is idiotic to bar sexual relations except in marriage, we will soon get virginity before marriage to the vanishing point where it should be.*” What kind of life does a particular teacher live ? Well, John says, “ *test the spirits.*” My in a day when so called “charismatics,” seek extra biblical revelations by means of “*tongues,*” utterances and spirit instigated “*prophecies,*” “*test the spirits.*”

In an age when people make all sorts of wild claims, that they can do this, that or the other “*test the spirits.*” In an hour when the enemy would seek to infiltrate the pulpit, and deceive the saints through “*false doctrine,*” “*test the spirits.*” Is that what you do ? Do you know your Bible ? Are you looking for the truth, the whole truth, and nothing by the truth ? Do you recall what it was said of the Bereans, “*they received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.*” (Acts 17:11) (1)

(2) THE MINISTRY OF FAITHFUL PREACHERS

For did you notice what John says in (4:6) “ *We are of God,*” that is, the apostles and true teachers who labour in the word and doctrine. Now how can you tell a faithful preacher of the Word ? Well, John gives us here two specific tests ! Notice that a faithful preacher will be marked by,

(a) HIS ACCORDANCE WITH THE BIBLE:

Look if you will in (4:2) Or we could translate it, “ *every spirit that confesseth that Jesus is Christ, come in the flesh is of God.*” The word “*confess,*” means “*to say the same things,*” or “*to agree with.*” My faithful preachers will say the same thing the Bible says. They will in harmony, they will in agreement with the Word of God. They will never raise question marks in the minds of their hearers about the authenticity, the authority, the inspiration of the Word. Faithful preachers will be one hundred percent clear on the person and work of Jesus Christ ! The doctrine of Christ is like the seamless robe that He wore, it is of one piece. To rip it any point is to damage the whole. My to deny any fundamental doctrine concerning the person and work of the Lord Jesus is to undermine the whole. But the ministry of the faithful preacher will accentuate His Virgin Birth, His Virtuous Life, His Vicarious Death, His Victorious Resurrection and His Visible Return.

My check them out. Find out if they agree with the Bible. When I stand to preach the Word of God in this pulpit, the only authority I have is the authority derived from “***thus saith the Lord.***” That is why you ought to bring your Bible. Check me out ! Put me to the test ! If what I say disagrees with the Bible, then discard what I say, but if what I say is what this Book says, if what I teach is in harmony with the Word, then take it into your heart and live by it ! But the faithful preacher will not only marked by his (a) But by his,

(b) ACCEPTANCE BY THE BELIEVER:

Do you see what John says in (4:6) ? John is saying that faithful preachers will get one of two responses from a congregation. There will those who will not hear them and there will be those who will. I'm sure John knew what it was to preach to a company and encounter the cold, indifferent, hostile, stares of those minds were not stirred by the Word of God . Those whose ears are not tuned to listen attentively to the ministry of the Word. My is this you ? Could it be that you go through the worship rigmarole week after week, put your money in the box, exchange all the usual pleasantries, but when it comes to the proclamation of God's Word, it goes in one ear and straight out the other ! Have you little interest in the things of God ? Well, listen carefully to what John says, “ *he that is not of God heareth not us.* ” On the other hand what a joy it is to minister to those who have an ear for the Word.

There is a keenness, an eagerness, a receptiveness, in the hearts of such people that lets the servant of God know, the Word is being received ! Tell me, have you still an ear for the Word of God ? Do you come to this place with anticipation, believing that God will bring some word to your soul just when you need it ? (1) (2) But John mentions a third group here.

(3) THE VICTORY OF FEARLESS PEOPLE

We are living in a world where there is the spirit of truth and the spirit of error, where behind human teachers who propagate false doctrine are demons inspired by Satan. (1 Thes 5:20-22) So the question is, how we are to cope with this as God's people ? Well, John's statement in (4:4) gives us some wonderful encouragement, for John tells us three things here about God's fearless people. First of all he speaks of,

(a) A RELATIONSHIP THAT IS WONDERFUL:

He says, “ *ye are of God.* ” (4:4) There is a relationship. You belong to God. You are His, and therefore on His side, even if, in your own circumstances, you stand alone, the only real Christian, facing opposition, engendered by these ungodly spirits. My will you continually remember that “ *even one with God is a majority.* ” (a)

(b) A REALITY THAT IS HELPFUL:

Look at (4:4) “ *and have overcome them,* ” Who ? The false teachers inspired by demons who were troubling John's congregations, because their false doctrine distorted the truth and opposed Christ ! Do you realise that doctrine is important ? How are you going to detect false teaching if you don't know this book ?

(2 Cor 11:13-14) Indeed John says, “ *hereby we know,* ” or “ *but this we know, the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.* ” By what ? By the Word of God ! You see, false teachers either reject the testimony of God's Word or else they add

elements to it. (2 Cor 4:2 Rev 22:18-19) But did you know we have,

(c) A RESOURCE THAT IS POWERFUL:

“ Greater is He that is in you, than He that is in the world.” (4:4) You see, the Holy Spirit is God’s alarm clock that is set to go off every time someone tries to teach you something that is not true. My the devil is no match for the Holy Spirit, and although Satan may not be afraid of us, he is desperately afraid of God’s Word, God’s Son, and God’s Spirit ! ***Isn’t it just wonderful to know that there is One in us who is mightier than Satan.*** I heard about a lion who was walking through the jungle one day. He was such a proud lion and he came up a little rabbit and he said to the rabbit, “ *Grrr, who is the king of the jungle ?*” The little rabbit just trembled and said, “ *you are, oh mighty lion.*” The old lion shook his mane, twitched his tail and walked off. He came up to a monkey and said, “ *Grrr, who is the king of the jungle ?*” The little monkey said, “ *Oh, mighty lion, you are the king of the jungle.*” The old lion shook the dust off his mane and went on. Finally, he came to a bull elephant, who was about sixteen feet tall, with husks about six feet long.

He said, “ *Grrr, who is the king of the jungle ?*” That old elephant looked down at that lion, put that long trunk around his body, lifted the lion over his head and threw the lion against the oak tree. As the old lion slid down to the base of that tree, like melted butter, he looked up to the bull elephant and said, “ ***Well, just because you don’t know the answer you don’t have to get sore about it.***”

My I know the answer to Satan. His name is Jesus Christ and He lives in us by His Spirit. “ *Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.*” (1) (2) (3) An anxious passenger approached the Captain of the ship on which she was voyaging. The ship was approaching a headland, and the breakers were dashing themselves to foam on hidden reefs on every hand. The passenger asked, “ *Captain, are you sure you know where all the rocks are ?*” “ *No Madam,*” the Captain replied, “ *I do not know where all the rocks are, but I know where the deep water is.*” My that is all that is required of us. If we stay with the Spirit of Truth, we need not worry about the false prophets for we will have victory over error.