

# The First Epistle of John

## (Week 39 – 1John 4:1-6 part1)

### I. Spiritual Discernment (part 1)

#### A. Scams

1. The Internet is filled with scam artists
  - a. A lucrative industry in Nigeria scams foolish Americans by promising them millions of dollars
2. But more widespread than financial scams are spiritual scams
  - a. JW aggressively promote their heresy worldwide
  - b. Islam is rapidly on the rise
  - c. False teachings are preached in many churches today:
    - i. The gospel of prosperity
    - ii. The sinner's prayer (altar call)
    - iii. The "ordination" of homosexual ministers
    - iv. There are some who even say that the Holy Spirit is at work in other world religions
    - v. Many professing "Christians" are taught to "set aside doctrinal differences" -- as if doctrine didn't matter to God.
    - vi. There are even some religious teachers saying:
      1. The Church age is over
        - If this is so, then the gates of Hades eventually prevailed against the Church!
          - a. Jesus said the gates of Hades shall not prevail against the Church! (Matthew 16:18 ESV)
3. In light of the many false doctrines out there, John's encouragement to the Church is to preserve God's truths:
  - a. After telling the Church to "believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another..." (1John 3:23), John now goes on to say not to believe everything...

#### B. 1John 4:1 (ESV), "*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.*"

1. In context:
  - a. John had in mind the false teachers who had gone out from the Church but were not of it (1John 2:19)
  - b. They denied Jesus was the Christ (1John 2:22a)
  - c. They denied the Father and the Son (1John 2:22b)
2. In principle:
  - a. A disciple must learn to discern spiritual truths
    - i. Satanic forces are at work in the world and therefore, a disciple must be familiar with God's Word so that he can decipher truth from error
      1. Psalm 119:11 – Store the word of God within you
        - It will impart wisdom and insight (vs. 98-99), especially against false teachings.

- b. **Question: John mentions the false prophets going into the world. What does the word “prophet” imply?**
  - i. They do not appear as evil, sinister characters, but Christ-like!
    - 1. 2Cor. 11:14-15 (ESV), “*And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. <sup>15</sup>So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness...*”
  - ii. When one thinks of a prophet, one thinks “a person who speaks God’s Word”
- c. **Characteristics of these modern-day false prophets:**
  - i. They do not blatantly encourage Satan-worship
  - ii. They use spiritual lingo
  - iii. They profess to believe in Jesus
  - iv. They have attractive personalities and convincing arguments.
    - 1. Jesus described such people as wolves in sheep’s clothing (Matthew 7:15)
- d. This is why John urges the disciples to “test the spirits”
  - i. We are to test everything with the Word of God!
  - ii. Be like the Bereans (Acts 17:10-11)

C. In the context, John was dealing with Gnosticism

- 1. How do they test if a person was Gnostic or a true believers?
  - a. 1John 4:2-3 (ESV), “*By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, <sup>3</sup>and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.*”
    - i. The Docetists taught that flesh is evil, thus Jesus was a spirit-being that looked like a fleshly man.
    - ii. The Cerentian Gnostics taught the following:
      - 1. Jesus was a regular man
      - 2. At his baptism, the “Christ” entered him and guided his ministry
      - 3. The “Christ” left him at the crucifixion
    - iii. John’s test refutes both of these heresies:
      - 1. Jesus is the Christ, not some “Christ-possessed” man
        - Christ means “Anointed One,” “Messiah”
        - He came by virgin birth
        - He came from the Father
          - a. It is good to note that the phrase “*has come*” implies Jesus’ pre-existence as the eternal Son of God
          - b. In John 8:58, Jesus said, “*...before Abraham was, I am*”
            - i. Jesus Christ is Divine in nature; He is God come in flesh!
      - 2. Jesus “*has come*” in the flesh (natural birth) and He never sinned!

iv. To deny that Jesus came in the flesh is to deny the Christian faith that says He was made human in order to destroy the works of the devil and to make atonement for the sins of the people:

1. Hebrews 2:14-17 (ESV), “*Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,<sup>15</sup> and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.<sup>16</sup> For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham.<sup>17</sup> Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.*”

➤ If Christ hadn't partaken of flesh and blood, there would be no victory over the devil, no deliverance and no propitiation for sins!