

The Lord's People Are to Try the Spirits  
(1 John 4:1-6)

Introduction:

1. This morning we studied the information given in 1 John 4:7-19.
2. This evening we are concentrating on the information presented in vs.1-6.
3. As we study these verses we must remember that John wrote this letter to Christians who were being influenced by some people he called "*antichrists*."
  - a. Some of the "*antichrists*" denied that:
    - 1) Jesus is the Christ (2:22)
    - 2) Jesus came in the flesh as the Son of God (4:3).
  - b. According to 2:18, there were many "*antichrists*."
  - c. John mentioned their origin in 2:19.
  - d. John warned against their influence in 2:26.
4. Because of the abundance of false teachers, John instructed the Lord's people to "*try the spirits*."

Discussion:

- I. JOHN WROTE THIS LETTER TO PEOPLE HE DEARLY LOVED
  - A. John referred to those who first read his letter as:
    1. "*my little children*" (2:1a)
    2. "*brethren*" (2:7a)
    3. "*beloved*" (4:1a).
  - B. These expressions indicate that John had strong feelings for the Christians who first received his letter.
  - C. I mention this because some people have the mistaken idea today that love should lead us to overlook things that are wrong.
  - D. John's love led him to address some unpleasant issues that existed.
- II. (vs.1) JOHN INSTRUCTED HIS FELLOW CHRISTIANS TO "*TRY THE SPIRITS*"
  - A. John identified the "*spirits*" he was writing about in vs.6b -- "*the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error*."
    - B. Before John said, "*try the spirits*," he first said, "*believe not every spirit*."
      1. In other words Christians must not accept blindly everything that is taught.
      2. Spirits must be "tried" [tested, proved] because:
        - a. there is a spirit that is from God -- "*the spirit of truth*"
        - b. there is a spirit that is not from God -- "*the spirit of error*."
    - C. Why was "trying the spirits" so important?
      1. (vs.1b) "*Many false prophets are gone out into the world*."
      2. These false prophets claimed to be speaking on behalf of God.
    - D. John originally wrote his letter to Christians who had received "*an unction*" ["*anointing*"] (2:20, 27).
      1. Spiritual gifts existed in the early church (1 Corinthians 12:8-10).
      2. "*Discerning of spirits*" was one of the gifts.
      3. Christians who possessed this gift could determine whether spirits were of God.
    - E. Christians who did not possess this gift needed to follow the example of the Bereans (Acts 17:11).
  - III. (vs.2-3) JOHN REVEALED THE BASIS FOR "TRYING THE SPIRITS"
    - A. (vs.2a) "*Hereby know ye the Spirit of God*."
      1. (vs.2b) "*Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God*."
      2. Teachers from God can be detected by what they teach.
      3. True teachers taught what John wrote in John 1:1-3, 14.
    - B. (vs.3) How could the "*spirit of antichrist*" be detected?
      1. "*Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God*."
      2. How are Christians to react to such teachers? (see 2 John 9-11)

- IV. (vs.4-6) GOD'S CHILDREN ARE DISTINGUISHED FROM CHILDREN OF THE WORLD
  - A. The children of God
    - 1. (vs.4) God's children have a special strength because of who is in them -- through God's strength, false teachers can be overcome.
    - 2. (vs.6a) God's children listen to those who teach the truth.
  - B. The children of the world
    - 1. (vs.5) Children of the world speak of the world, and the world hears them.
    - 2. (vs.6b) Children of the world do not listen to those who teach the truth.
- V. THESE ISSUES ARE ADDRESSED IN MANY PASSAGES
  - A. Matthew 7:15-20
  - B. Romans 16:17-18
  - C. Galatians 1:6-9
  - D. Titus 1:10-11
  - E. 2 Peter 2:1-3
  - F. Jude 4, 12-13, 16-19

Conclusion:

- 1. John wrote to Christians who were being influenced by "the antichrists."
- 2. We need to listen carefully to the things he wrote.
- 3. Unfortunately, there is still an abundance of false teachers.
- 4. Let us continue in the Lord's Word (John 8:31-32).