DISCERNING THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH AND ERROR

I John 4:1-6

Because of the competition and contrasts between truth and error, Christians are called to be discerning.

I. THE CALL FOR TESTING (1)
- What is required for Christians?

A. THE COMMANDS
1. Stop believing every spirit
   - These believers were guilty of gullibility ... this needed to stop
2. Try the spirits - I Thess. 5:19-22

B. THE CONDITIONS
1. Naive innocence
   a. There was a real danger of being confused by crafty men - Eph. 4:14
   b. Because they weren’t testing, they were too trusting.
2. Numerous false prophets
   a. They on currently on a mission in this world
   b. Their goal is to ... 
      1) Deceive - Matt. 7:15
      2) Distract - Mark 13:22
      3) Destroy - II Peter 2:1

II. THE CONFESSION TO TEST (2-3)
- What do they say about Christ’s incarnation?

A. THOSE CONFESSIONING CHRIST’S INCARNATION (2)
1. The Formula: By this you know the Spirit of God
2. Their Faith
   a. They believe that Jesus is the eternal Son of God who came into this world as human flesh
   b. See John 1:14 and I John 1:1-3
3. Their Foundation - I John 5:1

B. THOSE NOT CONFESSING CHRIST (3)
1. Their Denial
   a. They do not acknowledge Christ and thereby refuse Him entirely
   b. They deny His incarnation - See I John 2:22-23
2. The Difficulty
   “If Jesus was not both God and man He could not be our Saviour. In order to die in our place, it was necessary that He become man; in order for His death to have infinite value, He must be from God.” [Donald Burdick, “The Epistles of John” – Moody, 1970, pages 68-69]
3. The Discovery
   - What they had heard about antichrist coming has now happened
III. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TESTED (4-5)
- How do they respond to their condition?

A. THE GODLY REST (4)
   1. They are sourced in God
   2. They are situated as family (“little children”)
   3. They are successful against the ungodly > Having overcome them
   4. They are strengthened by the Holy Spirit

B. THE WORLDLY TALK (5)
   1. Their Inspiration
      - Their speech is sourced in secular and sinful humanism
   2. Their Audience
      a. Worldly listeners whose interests are aroused by worldly talkers
      b. See Acts 17:19-21

IV. THE CONDITION OF THE TESTED (6)
- How do they respond to the Word of God?

A. THE GODLY LISTEN TO GOD’S MESSENGERS
   - They desire to grow and devote themselves to instructions from God’s messengers

B. THE UNGODLY DO NOT LISTEN TO GOD’S MESSENGERS
   1. The ungodly do not hear - John 8:47
   2. To the non-believing the Word of God is nonsense! - See I Cor. 2:14
   3. These turn away from truth - II Tim. 4:3-4

CONCLUSION:

By these things we can know the spirit of truth and error (6b)

1. Those influenced by the Spirit of truth ...
   a. Test the spirits
   b. Confess Christ’s incarnation
   c. Rest in the Spirit’s power
   d. Listen to God’s messengers
2. Those affected by the spirit of error ...
   a. Follow falsehood
   b. Deny Christ’s incarnation
   c. Listen to empty, worldly dribble
   d. Do not listen to God’s messengers

There is truth and error ... and they include discernable differences that we should know.

Feel free to use these notes for personal study.
If you wish to use them for any other purpose please seek permission from Pastor Circle.