

THE EPISTLE OF FIRST JOHN

"Trial of Spirits"

1 John 4:1-6

Introduction

1. God is love. Therefore, there is a moral obligation upon Christians to love the Lord and love one another.

2. Chapter three speaks about the necessity of deeds in our relationship to God. This chapter speaks about the certainty of our relationship to God as attested by our deeds.

3. One of the peculiar identifying factors of our relationship to God and the certainty that we are His is the presence of the Spirit within us (3:24). This abiding Gift proves that the anti-Christians do not have it. The Holy Spirit is utilized in the believer to sift information and come up with the truth.

4. The information to be sifted relates to "false prophets." The perfect tense of the verb "gone out" (v. 1) notes that these prophets were then and there present in the world. They are to be judged--not by their miracles, but by their doctrine! Are they of God--that is the acid test. How is this to be done? Use these measurements for size:-

1. EXAMINATION v. 1.

This merely suggests downright careful and scrutinizing viewing of the situation. But do it this way:-

- a. Decisively The verb which John uses is the verb which means to approve something. The Spirit uses it to test seasons (Luke 12:56),

persons (1 Cor. 11:28), will of God (Rom. 12:2), work (Gal. 6:4), fellow-workers (2 Cor. 8:8), all things (1 Thess. 5:21).

b. Continuously. Constant surveillance is needed. One cannot let up for a moment. This becomes to some a problem, but to the true child of God who is reading the Word a matter of course. Present tense of verb here.

c. Personally. False spirits (true beings who have rebelled against God's order) lodge themselves in men! They are not bogey men, but true people who need to be examined. They are rivals of the true.

2. IDENTIFICATION

The Lord does not leave one in any kind of spiritual darkness about who the false prophets are.

a. Positively. They may be known by:-

- 1) Confession. This is something which is outward. Real faith will say so! Verb means to agree and this should be done heartily and with comfort!
- 2) Declaration. The point here is that the Messiah has come in the flesh. Bodily form to the Godhead! The verb is perfect tense, hence idea that He abides in this form. Answer to those who wonder how He is today (Acts 1:11).

b. Negatively.

- 1) Annotated. They are called antichrists. Do not confuse this with the personal antichrist who will come in the Tribulation. These are people right now who deny the Biblical PERSON of Christ Jesus our Lord.

- 2) Anticipated. The suggestion is that the church did not quite expect this sort of thing, but the denial of Him was already present. Surely, it should not surprise us in this age!

3. CHARACTERIZATION

To those who are really looking for the false prophets, they will find them as people who have:-

- a. Conflict. The true children of the Lord will be found at odds with those who are false. The perfect tense, however, leaves no doubt whatsoever of the final outcome nor of the present state of affairs. We are to claim right now the fruits of triumph. This is assured by the presence of the Holy Spirit within (cf. 3:24).
- b. Contact. They are of the world. Here the false prophets are detailed as those who are involved in an orderly system which is separated from God. Their teaching is sourced therein and in response this system gives them heed. Kindred spirits find acceptance! Only the believer will unhesitatingly listen to the true servant of the Lord. This conduct betrays one's contact.

Conclusion

What is the sum of these things? Simply this: One who loves God will not be a doctrinally enemy person. He will know the Lord and know the truth. He will be one who is always alert to false teachings. He will be everlastingly at it to be sure that what he hears is consistent with the Word of God!