

The Spirit's True Work, Part 1

Scripture: John 4:2–3

Code: A106

How can a true work of the Holy Spirit be distinguished from a false one?

From a careful study of 1 John 4, the great theologian and pastor Jonathan Edwards was able to identify five distinguishing characteristics of the Holy Spirit's work. In short, a true work of the Holy Spirit:

1. Exalts the true Christ,
2. Opposes Satan's interests
3. Points people to the Scriptures
4. Elevates truth
5. Results in love for God and others

The following material is condensed, adapted and excerpted from Jonathan Edwards's *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*.

It Exalts the True Christ.

"By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world." (1 John 4:2-3)

When a ministry raises people's esteem of the one true Jesus Christ, who was born of a virgin and was crucified—if it confirms and establishes their minds in the truth that He is the Son of God and the Savior of men—then it is a sure sign that it is from the Spirit of God. If the spirit at work among a people convinces them of Christ and leads them to Him; if it confirms their minds in the belief of the history of Christ as He appeared in the flesh; if it teaches them that He is the Son of God to save sinners; if it reveals that He is the only Savior, and that they stand in great need of Him; and if it begets in them higher and more honorable thoughts of Christ than they used to have; if it inclines their affections more to Him—that is a sure sign that it is the true and right Spirit. This is true even though we are ultimately incapable of determining whether anyone's conviction or affections reflect real saving faith.

The words of the apostle are remarkable. The person to whom the Spirit testifies must be that Jesus who appeared in the flesh—not another "christ" in His stead. It cannot be some mystical, fantastical "christ," such as the "inner light" extolled by the Quakers. This imaginary christ diminishes their esteem of and dependence on Jesus as He came in the flesh. The true Spirit of God gives testimony for that Jesus alone.

The devil has a fierce hatred against Christ, especially in His office as the Savior of men. Satan mortally hates the story and doctrine of redemption; he never would go about to stress these truths. The Spirit that inclines men's hearts to the Seed of the woman is not the spirit of the serpent that has such an irreconcilable enmity against Him.

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