Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

A Call to Discernment
Scripture: 1 John 4:1
Code: 62-32

Well, tonight we're going to be looking together at the Word of God and looking in 1 John as we move through this very, very wonderful epistle. I know that many of our people are gone on vacations in the summer, but I didn't want to break up the series nonetheless, so we're going to march right on through. We come to chapter 4 of 1 John and as you know, John cycles back around and around through the same truth, each time expanding our understanding of it. And so what we'll hear tonight we'll not be completely unfamiliar to us and yet it will be an enriched discussion of what has previously been introduced in this epistle.

The verses before us are 1 John 4: 1 through 6, let me read it to you.

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 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; and this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world and the world listens to them. We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error."

Clearly this portion of Scripture is to help us in discernment. The last statement of verse 6 really sums it up, "By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error." Or back in the first statement of verse 2, "By this you know the Spirit of God." It's critical for us to be able to discern between the truth that comes from the Spirit of God, and the error that comes from other spirits.

The Bible, frankly, is full of these warnings and I've been here, as you know, through the years going through passage after passage after passage in the New Testament. In fact, the only book we haven't studied in the years I've been here is the book of Mark, that's the only one left to preach through and we will have completed the whole New Testament. So we have literally discussed the issue of false teaching again and again from the vantage point of every passage basically in the New Testament. And here we are again with another warning about error and corruption of God's truth,

about lies and deception. This is a heavy, heavy emphasis in the New Testament. It's a heavy emphasis, as well, in the Old but more so in the New. We are continually warned against error and the corruption that comes with it because that is precisely the strategy of the kingdom of darkness. God reveals the truth in the world and Satan counters with lies. That is the great spiritual battle, folks. If you want to know what spiritual warfare is, I can define it for you very simply. It is the battle between the truth and error. That is what's spiritual warfare. It's not chasing demons around, that is not a true understanding of spiritual warfare. Spiritual warfare is the battle for the mind. It is the battle between truth and error. That is what occupies the great energy of the Scripture and the great energy and power of the Holy Spirit. And that is the great objective of the church, to bring the truth to bear on people who live in damning error. As we remember from 2 Corinthians chapter 10, people are fortified, they are living in fortresses of erroneous ideologies that have to be smashed to the ground by the truth so that the people can be liberated. Every lofty thought lifted up against Christ has to be torn down and in its place there has to be obedience to the truth of God in Christ revealed in Scripture. So spiritual war is a battle for the mind. It is a battle between truth and error. It calls for discernment.

I just want to warn you. People who don't like the idea of being discerning, people who don't like the fact that you're scrutinizing what they proclaim and what they teach are almost inevitably false teachers. Those people who through the years who have labeled me as a heresy hunter, who have, as it were, vilified me sometimes in print, sometimes on the media and very often in letters that I receive, those people who don't want their teaching scrutinized, who don't want their teaching brought to the test of Scripture are certainly those people who are teaching error and error cannot stand the test of biblical scrutiny. And so keep your eyes open to that fact that when you bring the Word of God to bear upon people and they don't like that, that very often is a dead giveaway that they are being exposed.

You remember when Satan came into the Garden of Eden in the perfect environment there, that he approached Eve and revealed basically the strategy that has continued to be what I refer to as spiritual warfare. Satan attacked God's Word. First of all, he said to Eve, "Has God said?" And one of the ways you attack the Word of God is by creating doubt, getting someone to doubt that this is true, that this is what God said, or this is what God meant by what He said. Then Eve responds by saying, "God said we shouldn't eat of this tree, neither should we touch it." Very possible that Satan planted that thought in her mind because it didn't come from God, so the second thing that Satan likes to do with the truth is make people doubt it, and secondly, make people distort it, twist it so that it's a misrepresentation of what God has said.

And then frankly the third, and sort of consummate strategy of Satan, came when he said to Eve, "God said you're going to die? You won't, God lied." And he literally denied what God had said.

Causing people to doubt what God said, causing people to distort what God said, causing people to flatly deny what God said...that's the strategy. God speaks, He speaks clearly, He speaks in His Word, He speaks unambiguously, and Satan comes along creating doubt, distortion and outright denial. These are the strategies that he uses and you can take doubt, distortion and denial and they all add up to deceit. This is what Satan does.

Now we know that this is not a human strategy, but this is really a strategy of spirits because it says at the beginning of verse 1 of chapter 4, "Don't believe every spirit." Every religious idea, every religious ideology has a spiritual source and there are only two spiritual worlds. There is the Spirit of God and there are the other spirits, demon spirits of whom Satan, of course, is one and the leader. Satan's demons then, demon spirits, wage a persistent and endless counter campaign against the truth of God propagating all kinds of deception. Their desire is to make people ignorant of the truth, to make them doubt the truth, to make them distort the truth, or make them flatly deny the truth. Consequently the Bible is loaded with this level of conflict that goes on all the time. Whether it was Moses who was passionately exhorting the Israelites to serve Jehovah and not forget His precepts, or whether it was other prophets saying that they needed to be obedient to God and His Word and not follow idols, or whether it was David giving the same counsel to Israel and in 1 Chronicles 28 to his son, Solomon, or whether it was Christ Himself saying, "Beware of false Christs and false prophets," in Matthew 24, or whether it was Paul saying to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20, "Grievous wolves are going to come in not sparing the flock, and they're going to come in with lies that will destroy this church," or whether it was Peter giving warning about apostates who were literally stains on the fellowship of the church, clouds without water promising something they couldn't deliver, wherever you find it in the Bible the picture is similar, God's truth under assault by Satan's lies. The Bible continually presents a problem of deceit as over against God's truth.

Now mark this because it's really the critical point in this passage I just read to you. This Scripture traces all this deceit to a deeper source. It's not human source. It's traced back to spirits, to spirits who deliver this to men who become its earthly propagators.

Turn if you will for a moment to 1 Timothy 4:1, just one brief look at a verse. The Spirit explicitly says, 1 Timothy 4:1, that in later times some will fall away from the faith. Falling away from the faith why? They will have come to hear the faith, perhaps to understand the faith, obviously not to believe it but being exposed to the truth they fall away from it like those in Hebrews 6. Why? "Because they pay attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons." That's the problem. You've got demon spirits whose goal is deception, concocting lies to assault the truth of God.

Now the means by which they use to propagate these lies is in verse 2, "Deceitful spirits, doctrines of demons are propagated by means of the hypocrisy of liars." That identifies the human liars, the

human false teachers, false prophets. And then he goes on to say in verse 2 that they are seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron. They go on merrily propagating their lies without so much as a twinge of conscience because their conscience is like scar tissue having been burned, having been cauterized, it feels absolutely nothing. They fell no conviction, they feel no remorse. They are the agents of deceitful spirits, propagating doctrines of demons. They are the hypocritical liars, the false teachers who without conscience, without guilt, without remorse, unfeelingly propagate these lies. But behind all false doctrine are seducing spirits.

I was having a conversation with a prominent person not too long ago. I said, "What you're telling me is not human."

He said, "I know that."

"There are only two possibilities...I said...it's either from the Spirit of God or it's from demonic spirits. And God has already declared Himself in His Word so the only thing left is demonic spirits."

You cannot consider any attack on Scripture, any assault that causes people to doubt or distort or deny the truth of God to be benign, or even to be human, for that matter. This passage emphatically links false doctrine with demonism as its source...doctrines of demons devised by deceitful or seducing spirits and propagated by hypocritical liars who are unconscionable. They have literally been cauterized by the powers of hell, as it were, and by the constant repetition of their lives so that they feel nothing.

Listen to James 3:15, this essentially says the same thing. "This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural...and one more word...demonic." There are only two kinds of wisdom. There is the wisdom of verse 17, from above which is pure and peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy, good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy, and the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. That's the wisdom of God. And it has all those virtues and it produces righteous fruit. There is that wisdom from above that comes down from God.

The other wisdom is earthly, it is natural but it is also demonic. Any lofty view lifted up against the knowledge of God has a spiritual source. It is not benign and it is not simply human. The purveyors of lies, the purveyors of false doctrine, the hypocritical liars who seem unconscionable about what they do, they are so attached to and so devoted to false teaching that they can propagate it with passion and feel nothing. These people are merely the tools which the seducing spirits use to propagate the lies against the truth of God. You can blame the hypocritical liars who proclaim that, but behind the human is the demonic. Behind the earthly and the natural is the demonic. The teacher is only a mouthpiece for seductive spirits.

Now, they have a powerful influence on the world. Obviously you know that of the billions that are alive in the world today, the vast majority of them are under the full sway of the lies of seducing spirits, right? I mean, true Christians are a very small minority. This is a very successful strategy and Satan basically is the god of this age, the prince of this world. He rules over men in this world because they have bought into his lies. They take many forms but all of them counter to the Word of God.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 10, it might be good to just look at 1 Corinthians 10 for a moment. In 1 Corinthians 10 there's a discussion going on about the Lord's table, a discussion about the communion. And, of course, you remember that the Apostle Paul is saying, "Look, you people who were saved out of paganism, you people that were saved out of the lies of Satan, out of seducing spirits, demon doctrines, you that have been delivered from the hypocritical liars who propagated these things, you have now come to Christ, you are now partakers in Christ, you cannot maintain any connection to your former life. You cannot..." And the reason is given in verse 19, what do I mean then, that a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? I'm not saying that you can't do that because there is really a God in that idol, or that making a sacrifice to that idol is really anything at all. There is no other God, that idol is a false god, a non-existent god, but...look at verse 20, "I'll tell you what is a reality, that god is not a reality, but what is a reality is that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to...whom?...to demons, that's the issue, and not to God. And I do not want you to become sharers in demons. You cannot...verse 21...drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons, you can't go from the table of the Lord where you are drinking the cup of the Lord in the commitment to the truth of the Lord revealed by the Spirit of God, and then go over to some idol temple and engage in that because even though that idol is nothing, and there is no god there, and that is just wood or stone, or whatever it is, behind that evil system are demons. And people who sacrifice to idols while they are not sacrificing to the God they think they're sacrificing to, they are sacrificing to demons.

Now this is something we have to keep in mind. I mean, I want to give you the picture as clearly as I can. There is no form of religion, there is no information in the world that speaks to the issues of time and eternity and salvation that is benign. It is either the power of the truth of God, or the power of satanic lies. You can't ever make an easy truce with error because it is not static, it is not inert. It is energized by the forces of hell. Paul says an idol has no reality. They may think this is the goddess Diana, or they may think they're worshiping some other god, that god does not exist. But demons do exist who have concocted this worship as an assault on the truth of God to capture men's souls in a fortress that becomes their prison and ultimately their tomb. Anything other than the truth, any ideology, any philosophy, any theory, any viewpoint, any religion other than the truth is demonic.

This is not just New Testament teaching. Back in the Old Testament, you go back all the way to the law of Moses, the Pentateuch, just a couple of verses that I think are interesting. In the seventeenth chapter of Leviticus, the third book in the Bible, it says, Leviticus 17:7, "They shall no longer sacrifice their sacrifices to the goat demons with which they play the harlot." Creating a goat god didn't make that goat a god, all it did was give opportunity for demons to be worshiped. They're indicted by the Lord here for being engaged in the worship of a goat god which was essentially worshiping, playing the harlot with demons.

In Deuteronomy chapter 32 which is a pretty long chapter, just looking at verse 17, and it says essentially the same thing. Talks about Israel again. Israel, verse 15, forsook God, scorned the Rock of his salvation, made Him jealous with strange gods. But verse 17 says, "They sacrificed to demons who were not God and forgot the God who gave them birth." They sacrificed to demons who were not God. Psalm 106:37 essentially says much the same thing.

So, any form of religion other than the truth is a demonic operation...demonic. Can you be specific? Well, you know any world religion, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, you name it, any religion of any animistic tribe anywhere, any...any form of pseudo-Christianity...Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Christian Science, you name it, Roman Catholicism. That's demonic operation. That's a demonic system because it's either from the Spirit of God, or demons. There's no middle ground.

In the book of Revelation I think we see a rather graphic illustration of that. Turn to the sixteenth chapter of Revelation. And down in verse 13, this looks ahead to the time of the Tribulation that comes upon the earth. During that period of Tribulation, just before the Lord comes to set up His Kingdom, John says in one of his visions, "I saw coming out of the mouth...verse 13...of the dragon," that is the dragon symbolic of Satan, coming up and out of Satan, "and out of the mouth of the beast who is the Antichrist, and the mouth of the false prophet who is the cohort of the Antichrist, three unclean spirits like frogs." This is vivid imagery. Frogs are viewed as slimy subterranean creatures, sort of symbolic of demons. And in this vivid vision John sees the dragon who is Satan, he sees the beast who is the Antichrist, the false prophet who is the cohort of the Antichrist and up out of the mouth of these three come these slimy subterranean frog spirits. It's just a way to speak of them with disdain. And verse 14 says they are spirits of demons. Performing signs they go out to the kings of the whole world to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty. It's going to be in the end of the age that demons come out, seduce the world to come and make war against God. And that war, of course, as you know, according to verse 16 will be in a place in the Hebrew called Har-Magedon, Armageddon, the final conflict, the great end holocaust where Jesus comes back and wins the great victory.

The great battle of Armageddon will be a battle that is generated by demon powers literally coming out of the mouth, as it were, of Satan, the Antichrist and the false prophet. They are frog-like, unclean spirits, deceiving demons who delude and seduce the world into taking an insane act, an insane suicide march to Israel to stop Christ from setting up His Kingdom. And we know what happens, don't we? Revelation 19 says Christ comes down, destroys them all. But Armageddon, the folly and the idiocy of Armageddon will be a result of the seduction of demon spirits. Satan and his demons in the meantime use many different approaches, many different approaches. Sometimes atheism, sometimes agnosticism, sometimes polytheism, cults, idols, perversions of Christianity, whatever the form. These are the deceptions of the devil. And he will adjust and suit those deceptions to the environment of anybody. If you grow up in a country familiar with Christianity, he'll expose you to perverted forms of Christianity. If you grow up in another country not exposed to Christianity, he will seduce you by whatever religion dominates that place. These are what Scripture calls damnable heresies.

In fact, the words of Peter are so important. Let me read to you 2 Peter 2:1, "False prophets also arose among the people just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce damnable heresies, or destructive heresies, heresies that damn people." And verse 2 says, "Many will follow their sensuality. Because of them the way of the truth will be maligned." Now there you have, folks, the strategy. You bring damning heresy and you attack the way of the truth. This is the battle. This is why Paul says the church has to be the pillar and ground of the truth. Demonic deception leaves no Christian doctrine unattacked. If you want to espouse the authority of Scripture, hypocritical liars representing seducing spirits and doctrines of demons will come and attack the authority of Scripture, attack its inerrancy, attack its inspiration, or attack its true interpretation.

If you affirm the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, along will come some seducing spirits through their human instruments and attack the virgin birth. If you espouse the sinless life of Jesus Christ, some will come and attack that.

I read again this week the horrific treatment of Jesus Christ as one who had an affair with Mary Magdalene. If you want to affirm the sovereignty of God, people will come along and attack the sovereignty of God. That's going on now in the new openness theology which purports to be evangelical and a truer interpretation of the Bible, it doesn't matter what doctrine it is. You affirm salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, along will come every imaginable attack against that, it's not all grace, it's not just faith and Christ is not necessary. There are simple systems of delusion, there are complex systems of delusion. There are some that are anti-Christian that are Islam, and there are some that are pro-Christian who call themselves Christians and yet they produce a seducing, destructive, damning message.

We're not just talking about Hinduism, Buddhism and the world religions, Islam, Spiritism in any form, Theosophy, as we said, Mormonism, you name it, even Roman Catholicism, theological liberalism, easy believism, all those things attack the truth. And one of the things that is a responsibility of a minister, of a preacher is to be a soldier in the battle, right? And the battle for truth is the most important battle because if we lose the truth, then what message do we have?

Now in the community of believers where John lived and to whom he was writing there was an attack going on...you can go back to the fourth chapter of that epistle...that we don't know specifically all of the nuances of that attack, but we get a pretty good idea of some of it as we go through this epistle. There was a very specific group of seducing spirits that had managed to find some willing hypocritical lying teachers without any conscience who would gladly teach lies. And so into the fellowship of believers with which John was familiar, and to which he wrote, came these lying teachers energized by doctrines of demons and they propagated doubt and they propagated distortion and they propagated denial. And in the end, of course, it all added up to people being deceived. Their kind of spin was that they had the higher knowledge, they had the more elevated knowledge. They had the secret knowledge. They had the esoteric exalted knowledge. That that which these people believed was lowly, this stuff that they believed was mundane, was crass, was infantile and never got even close to decoding the spiritual realities of the universe.

John is very concerned about these false teachers assaulting the church, very concerned about them because they were false Christians, they were...they were, like Paul said, disguised as messengers of light, but they were really messengers of darkness. And John says at the end of verse 6, "You have to know the spirit of truth from the spirit of error." This is critical because salvation is dependent upon what you know to be true and therefore believe. The most important thing that happens in the church is the proclamation of the truth. I don't know how to get that message across to the church today, we're working hard at it, but the most important thing we do is to proclaim the truth. Week after week, service after service, relentlessly and endlessly we proclaim the truth. I don't know, I guess it's a particular passion of mine, I don't know why everybody doesn't feel the way I do. One of the people in our ministry said the other day, "You know, you could slow down a little bit if you'd stop writing books." I don't write books for the sake of writing books, that's a lot of work. It really is a pain to have to do that all the time and always be overextended and beyond your deadline and running against the clock, and, you know, sort of wearying yourself with something you've gone over fifty times trying to get it right. But it's not about writing books, it's about proclaiming the truth. You understand that? It's about countering the deception, it's about helping people who struggle with the doubts. It's about fixing the distortions. It's about calling people to what God has truly said.

Really, it's very simple to understand the battle that's going on in the world. It's a battle between truth and lies. And the more truth you know, the more important you are to the battle because the more

you bring to bear, the bigger your gun. And I don't expect to be firing my weapon off and not have a negative reaction from people who are either in doubt, distortion, or denial of the truth. And John knows how important it is for his people and for ours to hold on to the truth, to guard the treasure. Paul said to Timothy, "Guard the treasure." Jude said, "Contend, or fight, for the once-for-all-delivered-to-the saints faith, the truth."

Now already in this epistle John has written about this conflict. Go back for a minute to chapter 2 verse 18. "Children, it is the last hour and just as you heard that Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen," this is another way to view the battle. Christ represents the truth incarnate, right? Antichrist is the opposition to Christ, that's another way to view the battle. It's Christ who is truth incarnate against Antichrist. Then in verse 19, "They went out from us but they were not really of us. If they had been of us they would have remained with us. But they went out in order that it might be shown that they are not all of us." What was happening in the church was people were bailing because the false teachers had come in and were successful, people were in doubt, distortion, deception, deceit and they left. And John says, "Look, when people do that, they went out because they never were of us to start with." Okay? When somebody abandons the truth for error, they were never real. And I'll show you that in verse 20. "You have an anointing from the Holy One and you all know....verse 21...I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie is of the truth."

Listen, if you truly belong to God, you have an anointing, namely the Holy Spirit given you by the Holy One Himself and you know the truth and you know a lie when you hear it. So anybody who departs was never of us. If they could be so easily led to doubt, distortion, denial, deceit, they never were of us. But that doesn't mean we can be comfortable with that. We have to hold on to the truth for its faithful propagation that the gospel may do its mighty work. So there John has already addressed this very important issue. He also says down in verse 27, "As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you but as His anointing teaches you about all things and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him." You remain. Others leave. They go, they go. The false teachers come in. They propagate their lies. These people fall into doubt and distortion and deceit and they go, they deny the truth, they walk away. Remember this, they never were of us.

On the other hand, you who have an anointing, the Holy Spirit, given from the Father, you know all things. You don't have to listen and depend upon some human teacher because you have the anointing, the Spirit that teaches you all things, and it's true and it is not a lie and you know it so you remain. You abide. Boy, that's just really powerful truth. You stay.

The true church then is made up of people who believe the true gospel, right? The truth of God. It seems like every era of history there's a battle for this. The battle has just gotten inside what we know as quote "evangelicalism," although I don't think that definition means much anymore.

So John here, back to chapter 4, is going to give us some criteria by which we can discern the spirit of truth from the spirit of error. Now first we begin with a command to test, and then we look at the need to test, and then we look at how to test.

The command, verse 1, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit." That's a command. Don't be gullible. Now this was sort of on his mind. John makes really interesting transitions. At the end of chapter 3 he's talking about the Holy Spirit. And he's saying we know, at the end of verse 24, by this that He abides in us by the Spirit whom He's given us. Beloved, don't believe every spirit is the Holy Spirit. You hear these people say today, "Oh, I'm listening for the Spirit of God to speak to me," very dangerous stuff. If you want to hear the Spirit of God speak, open the Bible, that's where He spoke.

And so, the thought at the end of chapter 3 verse 24 is about the Holy Spirit. And then John immediately thinks about the unholy spirits and says, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit." Folks, can I tell you that? Don't be gullible. Don't buy into everything you hear that is offered as if it were the truth of God. Be skeptical is what he's calling for, really. It actually, literally could be translated, "Stop believing every spirit. This can't go on." You can't just buy into all of it. Actually the form of the Greek verb here indicates the forbidding of an action already going on. Stop it. I want to tell people that all the time. Don't believe everything you hear on Christian radio, Christian television, in this and that and the other church. Don't believe everything you read that purports to be from God. Be skeptical. Be like the noble Bereans and search the Scripture to see if it's so. You know, false teachers don't like that, they don't want to be scrutinized. They don't want you to treat them with skepticism.

I remember years ago when Benny Hinn had a comment on me. He said, "If I had my way, I'd take my Holy Ghost machine gun and blow his brains out." Well that's a nice response. My attitude is, "You're free to examine every single thing I teach and compare it with Scripture, every word I've said, every book I've written, take it to the test of Scripture. You have my blessing to do that." I'm not going to get a gun and blow your brains out. What kind of a statement is that? It's a statement of somebody who doesn't want to be scrutinized, who doesn't want to be tested, who doesn't want to be held to account. We're commanded...do not believe every spirit, stop that.

Then he says, "Test the spirits to see whether they are from God." The word test here is *dokimazo*, a wonderful New Testament word. Really a word taken out of metallurgy where metal was assayed as to its value, silver and gold, or metal was tested as to its strength, put through fire for such evaluation.

Put everything through the fire...put everything to the test. Don't be gullible, be skeptical. I appreciate skepticism. I don't run from skepticism, I'm never defensive, I hope, with regard to those who are skeptical or question the accuracy of anything I say. It's very much like 1 Corinthians 12:1, "Concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I don't want you to be unaware. You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to the dumb idols however you were led." Before you became a Christian you had a ring in your nose and you were just led around all over everywhere. Why? Because you had no substance of truth by which to evaluate anything. And so you were virtually a victim of everything. I don't want you to be like that anymore, he says. When it comes to matters of spiritual gifts...you remember in the Corinthian church people were speaking in tongues and people were prophesying and giving words of wisdom and words of knowledge and interpretations and it was all chaotic? People were even standing up and cursing Jesus and calling it a spiritual gift. Paul says you used to be led around like this, accepting anything and everything. You can't be that way anymore. You absolutely cannot be that way anymore. You've got to be discerning. You've got to make sure that everything stands the accurate test. Test it...present tense...go on testing the spirits whether they're from God. And what that basically means is not chasing a demon and trying to figure out where he is. What that means is to test what you're hearing to determine whether it comes from the Spirit of God or other spirits.

By the way, the word *dokimazo*was also used in a metaphoric sense for testing people before they were assigned to very prominent tasks or put in positions of rulership and responsible leadership. It should be a continuing practice then of every believer to put everything to the test.

And there's only one way to test everything. It's tested against...what?...the Bible, which is the standard. This has nothing to do with talking to the demon. This has to do with measuring whatever is being purported to being the truth from God against what we know God has said.

Why do we have to do this? Here we come to the need. First I said we're going to talk about the command, and then the need. Here's the reason. "Test the spirits to see whether they're from God because...here's the need...many false prophets have gone out into the world." It is a big problem. It is a big problem. And listen to this, folks, in our society Satan does not want to be the opposition to the Christian church, he wants to be confused with the Christian church, right? He doesn't want to come out as anti-Christian, he wants to come out as pro-Christ. And so, unlike in some parts of the world where Satan is very anti-Christian in the propagation and exaltation, for example, of Islam, in many Muslim countries Christians are imprisoned and even killed as an activity of Satan. But in America, up to this point anyway, Satan has found his way into the church. He's taken over the Christian media in many places and this is not a small problem. John says, "Because many false prophets have gone out into the world."

A false prophet is a mouthpiece for seducing spirits, a purveyor of doctrines of demons. It's the origin that concerns us. That's why we have to be so discerning. Do you remember how this is addressed at the end of the fifth chapter of Thessalonians? It says here, "Do not despise prophetic utterances." In other words, when somebody preaches or somebody speaks, don't despise that, "But examine everything carefully." What is good, cling to. What is evil, push away. Examine everything. We are called to discernment. I did a series on this, I even wrote a book on it. I remember the sub-title, "When the church loses the will to discern." And we're there in this day. People don't want to discern today because they don't want to say anybody's wrong. It makes people feel bad. This is the residual effect of the psychological movement in the church. This is a big, big problem and we must be discerning.

In Matthew chapter 7, just kind of filling in this thought for a minute, in the Sermon on the Mount, listen to what Jesus said, verse 15, "Beware of the false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing." Sheep's clothing is wool, they come dressed in a wool garment, that was the garment of a prophet. False prophets are dressed like prophets. "But inwardly they are ravenous wolves, ravenous wolves." Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount says you've got to beware of them. They're everywhere, subtle, clever, deceptive, the enemies of the truth, supernatural. In Mark 13 verse 22 and 23 Jesus says, "False Christs, false prophets will arise showing signs, wonders, in order if possible to lead the elect astray, but take heed, behold, I've told you everything in advance." You have enough information to know them when they show up. This is a big problem. So many voices clamoring for attention, powerful voices. So many Christians can be gullible, so many can show a naive readiness to credit everything to God, every teaching to God so as to undermine and distort the truth.

So John says, "Look, you have to be able to test this." The command to test, the reason to test because false teachers are many and they are everywhere. And then John gives us three tests...three tests. This is how you can determine. Number one, the confession of the divine Lord, do they confess Jesus? Number two, possession of the divine life, do they manifest what Jesus said in Matthew 7, the fruit of righteousness? And thirdly, profession of the divine law. Do they have the right relationship to the divine Lord? Do they manifest the evidence of divine life? And are they committed to the divine law? It really boils down to three things. Do they believe in the incarnation? Do they give evidence of regeneration? And do they submit to divine revelation?

Now we don't have time to go over these three, so that's the outline for next Sunday night. And now you're going to come back ready to fill in all that John says in verses 2 through 6. You know, beloved, this...this is so very important and I'm very much aware of the fact that churches everywhere are filled with people who are virtually unable to engage in this spiritual battle. They might as well be put on the shelf, taken with the injured and the wounded into some hospital for all the good they are in the

war in the fight. The premium is on the people who know the truth and who are discerning, and that puts the premium on us and churches like us which seem to be more rare maybe than in the past. And that means that you stand in a very important place within the Kingdom of God today, you who know the truth, you become the soldiers on the front line for the truth. What a glorious privilege this is.

Father, as we contemplate this engagement in fighting for the truth, we know we cannot stand in our own strength, we stand in the strength of the anointing from the Holy One, the Holy Spirit. We stand in the strength of the knowledge of the truth which is given to us through Scripture. We stand in the strength of the church, those of like precious faith who also know the truth and stand with us shoulder to shoulder. We thank You for loyal fellow soldiers throughout the Kingdom who desire to be in the battle, to engage in the war for the triumph of the truth. Thank You for this calling and may we with great spiritual backbone be faithful to the task, whatever hostility it may generate, understanding that the protection and the proclamation of the truth is absolutely essential to the salvation of each generation, for how shall they know if they haven't heard, and how shall they hear without one who faithfully preaches the truth? May we engage then faithfully in this battle, discerning for our own selves then for the sake of others that we might be useful as Your servants in the great battle for the truth. We thank You in Your Son's name. Amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).