

BIBLE BAPTIST CHURCH OF ERIE

James M. Duncan, Pastor

MAY 22, 2022

SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT OR KNOWING RIGHT FROM WRONG

Series from 1 John on Genuine Christianity

1 John 4:1-6

P. T. Barnum made a fortune on the theory that *“a sucker is born every minute,”* and he has many disciples today. I have read that the second most lucrative industry in **Nigeria** is scamming foolish Americans out of their money by promising to give them millions of dollars.

But we also see great deception in the church today. *There was The DaVinci Code phenomenon.* Even among those claiming to be evangelicals, who say that they believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, false teaching abounds. The **“New Perspective on Paul,”** which has captured many evangelical scholars and pastors, undermines justification by faith alone. **The Emergent Church** movement embraces much of the postmodern philosophy that there is no absolute truth. Then we have the **SEEKER church** movement which has subtly redefined the gospel, so that the issue is no longer that we are sinners who need reconciliation to a holy God. Rather, we are religious consumers with needs that God is willing and ready to meet if we will just give Him a try. After telling us (3:23) that God’s commandment is *“that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another,”* John now (4:1) tells us **not to believe everything.**

◆ BELIEVER S MUST BE DISCERNING IN SPIRITUAL MATTERS

Our text falls into three parts: John gives us the reason for discernment (4:1); the basis for discernment (4:2-3); and, the evidence of discernment (4:4-6).

I. THE REASON FOR DISCERNMENT: Discernment is essential because Satan and his forces are at work in the world (4:1).

A familiar falsehood goes, *“It doesn’t matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere and believe in something.”* John says **“Test”**: this word means to try or prove. True faith is not a blind leap into the dark. It examines its object carefully before putting trust in it.

II. THE BASIS FOR DISCERNMENT: Discernment is based on the confession concerning Jesus Christ (4:2-3).

John’s test requires believing in the true deity and humanity of Jesus. **“Has come”** implies His preexistence as the eternal Son of God. When John states (1 John 4:2) that *“Jesus Christ has come in the flesh,”* he is referring not only to His true deity, but also to His true humanity.

Pastor Jerry Vines wrote, *“False preachers will be in error concerning His birth, His blood, the Bible, and the blessed hope of His coming again.”* We are to agree with the Word of God about Jesus.

III. THE EVIDENCE OF DISCERNMENT: Discernment is evidenced in the response to the apostolic witness (4:4-6).

Most English translations reflect the Greek text, which begins **verses 4, 5, and 6** with **emphatic pronouns: You, they, and we.** The first two pronouns portray two very different responses, that of true believers (John’s “little children”) and that of the false teachers and those who follow them. The **“we”** of **verse 6** sets forth the standard by which to measure others or your own response, namely, how does a person respond to the apostolic witness?

A. Response 1: Those who by the Spirit overcome false teaching are from God (4:4). When John says, *“You are of or from God, little children,”* he is pointing again to the new birth. Christianity is not just a matter of subscribing to certain creeds or correct doctrines, although that is essential.

B. Response 2: Those who teach error and those who follow their teaching are from the world (4:5).) As we have seen (2:15), the world is that evil system under Satan’s dominion that is opposed to God and His kingdom. Any teaching that detracts from God’s glory and sovereignty and exalts man by feeding his pride is satanic at the core. **Verse 5** may imply that these false teachers were drawing a big crowd. The world was listening to them

C. The standard by which to measure discernment: a person’s response to the apostolic witness (4:6). Some understand the **“we”** of **verse 6** to refer to all believers. But it stands in contrast to the **“they”** of **verse 5**, and so it is better to interpret it as referring to the apostles. **“We [apostles] are from God; the one who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us.”**

Listen my Beloved, “God help us to be unbelievers in error as well as believers in truth.” God is telling us to use discernment and stay away from the devil and his doctrine. He wants us to study the Word of God and be submissive to the Spirit of God. Are we testing those who teach us? Are we using spiritual discernment? Are you living in the power of the resurrected Son of God?

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