

Review

John has been warning us against false teachers throughout his epistle. Today, we pick up with chapter four...

4:1 Every Spirit

This verse has confused many people. By misunderstanding John's meaning of the word "spirits," they have fallen into some eccentric practices.

So, let's get a biblical view of these "spirits." First of all, the word for "spirit" in Greek is "NYOO-mah." It means "wind, breath, mind, or spirit." And whenever it's not talking about literal wind, it's talking about one of three kinds of spirits: God's Holy Spirit, supernatural spirits (like unclean spirits and ministering spirits), or human spirits.

How can we tell the difference? We must read the word in context.

You can see the obvious differences between them by looking at a couple of different Bible writers. Take Matthew for example...

Matt. 4:1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Matt. 5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matt. 8:16 And when evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill

Obviously, the first verse spoke of the Holy Spirit, the second of man's spirit, and the third of evil spirits.

Now, let's look at Luke's writings in the book of Acts:

Acts 7:59 And they went on stoning Stephen as he called upon {the Lord} and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"

Acts 8:7 For {in the case of} many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out {of them} shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed.

Acts 8:15 who came down and prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

The first time NYOO-mah was used, it spoke of Stephen's spirit.

The second time was evil spirits, and the third time, Luke was speaking of the Holy Spirit.

So, although the word is the same, the context shows which kind of spirit is being spoken of. So, let's take a look at the context here...

1John 4:1-3 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...

So, these spirits speak, can be tested, can confess Jesus or deny Him to you, and - most obviously - are the spirits of the false prophets. Clearly, these are the spirits of men.

Knowing this, try looking at the context of the word "spirits" in places like 1Cor. 12:10; 1Cor. 14:29-33; Heb. 12:23; and Rev. 22:6.

Test The Spirits

So, we see that John is telling us that we need to have some discernment. Just because some teacher claims to be teaching truth doesn't mean they are. Jesus gave the church of Ephesus a verbal pat on the back when He said,

Rev. 2:2 "I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false"

There's a lot of false teachers, false prophets, and false apostles out there. And John's telling us that we need to put them to the test. Find them to be true or false. And if they're false, don't believe them, don't receive them, don't even listen to them!

4:2-3 Jesus Came In The Flesh

In John's day, the most prominent falsehood perpetrated by many of the false teachers was Gnosticism. We've covered Gnosticism in some detail in previous studies (see History & Future Of The World #22). But one of their big false doctrines was their belief that all matter is evil, in-

cluding the human body. Thus, Jesus - who they believed was the highest "emanation of God" - could not have had a physical body.

So, John gave the church a quick way to put people to the test: "Ask if Jesus Christ has come in the flesh." Today, false teachers have branched off into many different heresies, and it's become very difficult to know right off the bat whether someone is a false teacher.

Today, a good question to ask is, "Do you believe that Jesus Christ is God?" That will eliminate many of the cults right away. But beyond that, we need to find out where a teacher stands on things like inspiration of the Scriptures, whether they believe in sin (and if so, how they define it), and if there is only one way sin can be forgiven.

Of course, the list goes on and on - but you can see how important it is to really put a teacher to the test.

4:4-6 Greater Is He

As we had discussed in ch. 2, false teachers are of the antichrist spirit. They are trying to put other things or people in place of Christ, and are against Christ. They are being influenced by the devil. Paul said,

2Cor. 4:3-4 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

The devil is the god of this world. Fortunately for those who have received the gospel of Christ, the God of all creation has taken up residence in their hearts! God has given us...

2Cor. 1:22 ...the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.

Paul asked the Corinthians,

1Cor. 3:16 Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

So, the antichrist spirit is in the world, but the Holy Spirit is in us. The false teachers will continue to become more popular throughout the world, because they speak by the spirit that is in the world.

In clear contrast, John tells us, the people who are truly from God listen to the teachers of God presenting the Word of God.