

December 10, 2017 -

I John 4: 1-6 - "Discerning Wolves"

### Introduction:

A few years ago a letter from a Watchtower Society member concerning money laundering was published. I will read it this morning as a point of illustrating the truth of this passage. "I thought I'd tell you of an experience I had when I served as an elder in Jersey City, during the first month of the change from selling books to the "Voluntary Donation" system of the Watch Tower Society. It seemed everyone and their mothers decided that now was a good time to stock up their libraries. Witnesses who rarely bought anything, were now ordering, the New World Translation on Tapes for a \$100.00. Everything was being ordered. I was in charge of the literature counter. The invoices included from the orders were now dollar-less. However, not long after this, the elders received a letter from the Society. It stated that they [the Society] noticed an enormous increase in literature orders. The congregation had made purchases of more than \$3,000.00 and the donations were only around \$500.00.

They told us we [the congregation] owed the Society \$2,500.00. I'm thinking to myself...wait the literature is supposed to be "FREE" or voluntary donations?" Obviously it was not! The Society had it all planned out. The Society asked the congregation to fund the World Wide Work for \$2,500.00.

How can they sleep at nights? It was situations like this that opened my mind to the true nature of the Society. They are a publishing house...we are their salesmen...the congregations are the patrons based on the convictions or better yet lies. This truth was confirmed on the John Ankerberg Show by Lorri Macgregor a former J.W.

We discover there are two kinds of spirits in the world: the spirit of truth and the spirit of error (4:6b), revealing that beyond the world we can perceive with our physical senses is a real, unseen spirit world. Paul in Ephesians 6:12 described this fact and refers to the spirit world where there is a battle going on between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. Jesus Himself warned us to beware of false prophets or teachers. His words have certainly proved correct over the years. And because they are true, we must develop a capacity to discern the true from the false prophet. In Matthew 7:15 Jesus warn them then and us now...so there are faults.

**Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.**

It is to this issue that the Scripture speaks today. John tells us: **Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. How do we try the spirits to determine if they are of God?**

### I. Test #1: Check out the Content (4:2)

1. A true teacher of God will teach that Jesus Christ is God come to earth in flesh and blood. You may recall, Philip asks Jesus to show him the Father. In response, Jesus asks Philip if he has been with Him so long and still doesn't know who He is. Let's check out what Jesus say to Philip in John 14:9b? Jesus is not a creation of God, as some teach. Jesus is not just a great moral teacher or prophet. He is God come to earth.

The Bible says: (1 Jn 2:22). **Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the son.**

2. God warned His people of the danger of false prophets since OT times. --- **Deut.13:1-4**  
We are called upon today, more than ever, to be discerning of religious teachers and their teaching. Demonic forces are very clever-sometimes they don't deny who Jesus is; they just pervert His teaching. In John's day there was no television for a preacher to get on the air and rake in millions of dollars preaching a perverted gospel but they still deceived for money.

The Bible tells us: **the time will come when people will not want to hear sound doctrine but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;** (2 Tim. 4:3). This is why so many "prosperity" preachers are getting rich. People want to hear, "God wants you to be rich. God wants you to enjoy perfect health. Just have faith, quote the right Bible promise, and you will have wealth and health."

3. Much false teaching about Jesus is motivated by greed and self-indulgence. That's why John writes: believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God (4:1). How do we know whom to believe? How do we try the spirits to determine if what they teach is of the Holy Spirit or of an evil spirit?

When Paul was preaching to the Bereans (Acts 17:11), they tested his teaching by searching the Scriptures. They did their homework to see if what was being taught corresponded with God's Word. We try the spirits with the Word of God, the Bible. We filter all through the Biblical grid. 1 Thessalonians 5:21 tell us to... **Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.** Therefore we are to prove all preaching and teachings to see if it is of God. ... This is the only time the Greek word for "try" (dok-e-ma zo) occurs in John's writings meaning to test or examine.

## II Test #2: Check out their Motivation (4:3).

1. Another way to try the spirits is to examine the preacher or teacher to see why they proclaim Jesus as the Son of God. Many false teachers use the name of Jesus for fund-raising, not for winning the lost. They even tell lies to raise money. Peter warned of them in **2 Peter 2:1-3** and we would do well to heed it ourselves.--- **1 Peter 5:2** Money, power and influence are strong deterrent to the truth.

3. The antichrist is not just a man; it is a system opposed to Christ and the truth about Him. There is an Antichrist who is also called the man of sin (2 Thess. 2:3). Second John 1:7 tells us, **"Many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.** John tells us anyone who distorts the truth about Jesus Christ is influenced by the spirit of antichrist.

At a national meeting, one major denomination elected a committee to study whether or not Jesus is the only way to heaven. It doesn't matter what they decide, just electing the committee says it all. That is the spirit of antichrist at work. To detect a false teacher, check the content, check out their Motivation, and ...

### III Test #3: Check out their Converts (4:4-6).

1. True believers have spiritual protection against false teaching. That's why John writes- **Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.** God has given us the Holy Spirit, who is our Resident Protector against false teaching. The Holy Spirit who indwells us is greater than the spirit of antichrist in the world. False preachers can fill conference centers that seat tens of thousands and can win many converts all over the country. Jesus said: **They are of the world. Therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, [that] shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. John 16:13a**

2. What is the characteristic of wolves? They are a menace to the sheep farmer. The wolf has the ability to lurk near a sheepfold and gain the trust of the sheep. He moves ever so subtly and then he will strike. The natural tendency of a wolf is to feed on sheep. As "ravening wolves" these false prophets also have a very vicious nature about them and feed on the sheep of God's church.

3. The world wants to hear about success, how to be healthy and wealthy, and prosperity in the Christian life without sacrifice. In Matthew chapter seven, Jesus tells us we will know them by their fruits because good trees bear good fruit and bad trees evil fruit. If we are mature and constantly partake of solid food, which is deep biblical truths, we can easily identify false prophet. Because Hebrew 5:14 say, **But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, [even] those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.**

4. False teachers call evil good by spiritualizing selfishness and greed. Therefore, they are very popular today and draw crowds by the thousands who don't want to hear about sacrifice and unselfishness. Prosperity preachers don't want to teach about a Jesus who says you can't be His disciple unless you take up your cross and follow Him (Lk 9:23).

These religious hucksters take advantage of the problems people have, and promise them quick and easy solutions. They sneak in and soon control people's lives. They have been duped and before long, these leaders have grabbed their followers' loyalty, money, and service. And their "converts" are worse off than they were before.

5. God's people always want to hear the truth of God's Word, even when it points out sin in their own lives. So, another way to detect a false teacher is to see the type of people who hear his or her message. John says, **Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error (1 Jn 4:6b).** You can tell whether a preacher is preaching by the spirit of truth or the spirit of error by the kinds of people who receive his or her message. There are all kinds of false prophets in the world today - true believers need not be deceived.

#### Conclusion:

To detect a false teacher, check the content, check the motivation and check the converts.