

Remnant Life Church
August 27, 2023
The Holy Spirit
Pt 11
The Gift of Discernment - 2
I John 4:1-4

- The troubling question is, as deception is able to appear more and more like reality how can you tell the difference?
- Our world is filled with lies and deceptions and, like every other tactic of satan, it has been happening since the beginning in the Garden
- Are false teachers still present today?
 - Jim Jones
 - David Koresh
 - Charles Manson
 - L. Ron Hubbard
- What they present sounds good, is attractive, and is appealing to the eye
 - Just like the fruit presented to Eve in the Garden (**Gen 3:6a**)
 - IOW – it satisfied and appealed to the flesh not the spirit
 - False teachings and doctrines are always geared to satisfying the flesh

So how can you tell the difference?

- It is through one of the spiritual gifts given to us by the Holy Spirit - discernment
 - Defined as the quality of being able to accurately grasp or comprehend something – most often things not obvious

READ – I John 4:1-6

- John makes a very simple plea to the people in the very first verse
 - *Do not believe every spirit* – (**I John 4:1a**)
 - John is challenging the first century reader, as well as each of us today, not to be gullible
 - This same warning is just as valid today if not more so
 - We are being bombarded with more doctrine and philosophical thinking than ever
 - Much of it is anti-biblical and downright harmful
 - Society and culture of the 21st century have created and adopted their own set of rules.
 - Christians are now openly being challenged by many against a literal interpretation of Scripture.
 - Many argue the Bible doesn't hold the same weight today as when it was written.
 - They claim it was written for others in a different time, but no longer applies to the world today.
 - False prophets appear sincere and often very believable – which is what makes them so dangerously effective - but we must examine

every aspect of what they are saying against what the Scripture says.

- John instructs the reader to do this when he says, *...but test the spirits to see whether that are from God. (I John 4:1b)*
- The Bible is the only unshakable foundation on which we can or should stand
 - You may find yourself standing alone but that foundation will never be moved
 - Unlike what we are being force fed by the world where what is considered truth one day is replaced with something else completely the next
- John goes on to say, *“...because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” (I John 4:1c)*
 - John is writing only 40 or so years since Jesus’ ministry on earth
 - Since God first created humanity, satan has been working to defile and deceive us
 - The counterfeit gospels that were being preached back then, as well as today, are his attempt to bring confusion and lead us away from our loving Creator
 - The difference between then and now is the packaging
 - Today it is slick, appeals to the flesh, but is still of no lasting, eternal substance
 - Discernment is what alerts you to the falseness of its intent and nature
- What is the first way you can begin to separate the truth from the lies?
 - First, according to John, by what or who the focus of their teaching is (I John 4:2)
 - Do they acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God, lived among us, and is the risen Lord?
 - If they preach anything other than that, they are false teachers
 - Many times, the false doctrine is contained in the most beautiful thing the flesh responds to – prosperity and wealth
 - God does not “want” you to be rich
 - The Scripture shows us time and time again that Jesus warned against the pursuit and love of wealth
 - The love of money is the root of evil in man
 - God wants you to obey His Word, love Him with all heart, mind, strength and soul and to love one another

How do we utilize discernment in our lives?

By recognizing that there are three spirit natures that speak into our lives

- The first is the spirit of humanity
 - This is what we think or believe
 - Our five senses are what give us this information
 - But as we have already said, what is real and what is false is not easy to distinguish
 - The spirit of our humanity can as easily be wrong just as many times as it is right

- Consider these very learned people who were very sincere and convinced of their knowledge, experience, and understanding
 - In 1876, the President of Western Union, William Orton, dismissed and loudly proclaimed the newly invented telephone as a “toy” that would never catch on.
 - In 1903, the president of Michigan Savings Bank warned Henry Ford’s lawyer to protect Henry’s money. Because, he said with great conviction, “The horse is here to stay but the automobile is only a novelty—a fad.”
 - On January 1, 1962 an obscure British rock group played 5 songs for the executives at Decca Records in attempt to secure a record deal.
 - They were turned down with the following assessment of their music sent to their young manager
 - "Guitar groups are on the way out," they said and, "this band has no future in show business".
 - The name of the group? – The Beatles
 - And how about all of the computer geniuses around the world echoing the exact same danger warning that precisely at midnight on January 1, 2000, every computer would fail, unable to handle the date change from the 20th to the 21st century, would bring the world’s economy to a grinding halt and, among other things, send planes plummeting to earth.
 - And what happened midnight plus one second? Nothing – every one of these “wise” people were completely wrong
 - And so, many times, is the human spirit

The second spirit nature that we must contend with is the demonic

- This is a critical function of discernment
 - The demonic realm is comprised of the fallen angels who followed Lucifer in His attempt to be like God
 - They are real and they are active (at least for a time)
 - They are dangerous and they desire to lead you away from the truth of God
 - But they are not all powerful and must submit to the name of Jesus
- While the human spirit in error can lead you in a wrong direction, the demonic desires to injure you – spiritually, emotionally and even physically
 - The reason discernment is so important is the demonic attempts to copy the things of God but with a false motive
 - The motive is not to glorify God but to discourage, deceive, and lead the people of God astray
- Jesus demonstrated how important this was and revealed that we must always be on alert
 - In **Mark 1:23-25** He immediately recognized an “*unclean spirit*” speaking through a man in the synagogue
 - He saw the demonic physically hurting a man as a “*deaf and dumb*” spirit in **Mark 9:25**
 - He then exposed an evil spirit even in one of His own 12

- **Matt 16:22-23** tells of an innocent statement of loyalty by Peter
- Peter proclaims to Jesus that He should not die
- Jesus responded with the words, *Get behind me, satan!* (**Matt 16:23**)
 - We see here that not every positive or encouraging word spoken to us is of God
 - Not even every apparent good act is of God
- In **Acts 5:1-9** Peter revealed the hearts of Ananias and Sapphira when they brought an offering to the Lord
 - Yes, they brought the offering, but they lied when asked if they had brought it all
 - Peter then says, *Why has satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?*
 - Peter discerned that satan was at work even though it would have appeared the couple was doing a good thing
- Peter, as well as Paul, actively discerned the work of evil spirits and called them to come out of them.
- Within the church today discernment is absolutely necessary especially if the speaking of prophetic words is being encouraged
 - Paul lists the discerning of spirits immediately after prophecy as if to say the one must follow the other
 - Again, words of a positive nature do not guarantee they are of God
 - Again, look at what Paul does
 - In **Acts 16:16-18** a slave girl possessed by an evil spirit was following Paul and Silas around calling out, These men are servants of the most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.
 - That's certainly not a bad thing to have said about you
 - But Paul knew that it was being done by an evil spirit and told it to come out of her
 - There are lying and deceiving preachers today who are focused solely on saying those things that make people feel good
 - Yes, God does bring comfort, but He does not promise that we will always be comfortable
 - Yes, God does bring peace but there will be times of conflict in this world
 - Yes, God is love and we should live that love, but Jesus tells us that we should be wary if everyone speaks well of us (**Luke 6:26**) meaning we must stand up to the things of this world that are not of God otherwise we are just like the false prophets
 - Receiving and embracing only positive words, which is generally what most people want to hear, can lead to very negative things happening in your life
 - In **1Kings 22:12** a group of false prophets told the king of Israel to go into battle because God was going to give him victory
 - The word was not from God, the king went and was killed in the battle

- The failure to discern an evil word can be tragic
 - It was in the Garden of Eden
 - The failure to know that the serpent was lying led to sin, death and separation from God for all of humanity to occur
- The greatest weapon you have to discern the true from evil is the presence of the Holy Spirit in your heart
 - He will speak to you!
 - He will guide you!
 - But it takes prayer and a wisdom on your part to not immediately act on every word you hear or are given

The third spirit nature that will speak to us is the angelic

- If human and evil spirits are detectable by a special gift given by the Holy Spirit then it would certainly follow that the good or angelic spirits would also be recognized by that same spirit
 - They were all created before God created this universe and they are a finite number
 - When someone dies here on earth they do not become an angel
 - They do no ‘get their wings’
 - I know, I love It’s a Wonderful Life too!
- The angelic host or angels are created beings that are the messengers of God and assigned to minister to His children
 - **Hebrews 1:14** says this, *Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?*
 - Angels have been turned and twisted, primarily by Hollywood, to be something they are not
 - But if angels have been sent to serve believers, should we not expect to have some experience to their activity and presence?
- In the OT we see are particularly powerful example
 - In **2 Kings 6** the prophet Elisha and his servant are in the city of Dothan which has been surrounded by a hostile army of horses and chariots
 - Elisha said to the servant that those who were with them were greater than those who were against them
 - This made no sense because they were surrounded with no defenses or army
 - But Elisha asked God to open the servants eyes – activate his discernment
 - In verse **17** we read, *Then the Lord opened the servant’s eyes and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.*
 - Angels were often recognized in the NT as well
 - Those who saw them included Joseph, Mary, Zechariah, the shepherds on the hillside, Mary Magdalene, Peter, Paul and John
 - We also read in **Matt 4:11** that after Jesus had completed His time in the desert and his time to temptation that, angels came and ministered to Him.
 - While the vast majority of the time angels remain invisible to our natural eyes, we can often discern their presence

- It may be in a time of great trial that you are at peace and your soul is quieted
- It may be a time when you need great strength of will or spirit
- Or it may be in a time of quiet when you need rest for your heart and mind
- But that does not mean that they may never appear
- Just remember this about angels
 - They are created beings just like you and me
 - They are not to be prayed to worshipped
 - Only God is worthy of those things
 - Should an angel ever appear to you, regardless of its appearance, the fastest way to tell if it is of God or of satan is get down on your knees before it in a posture of worship
 - If it is an angel of satan – a demon – it will allow you to worship it
 - An angel of God would never permit you to do that!

Discernment is about protecting yourself from the lies of satan and the flesh

- Ask for God to increase your discernment
- Use the word of God as the measure of all words you are given
- Go to those you trust who you know are mature in the things of God and only want God wants for you
- Pray!