

Anchored In Discernment

Sunday, December 1, 2024

1 John 4:1-6

Big Idea: **Discernment defends our fellowship from spiritual deception.**

1. Anchored Christians obey the **command** to “test” the spirits (4:1) Testing the spirits ensures that we walk in truth and are not led astray by false teachings.
 - “Spirits” = evil spirits, fortresses of demonic thought, ideologies, that drive false teachers to promote error. (2 Cor. 10:3-5). John says this is serious stuff, driven by the spirit of anti-christ. And yet, the command to “test” flies in the face of our current culture’s worship of tolerance. (“Old” vs. “new” tolerance.)
 - Does John 4:1 conflict with Matthew 7:1? Jesus did not say that we shouldn’t judge, only that we should judge righteously rather than by appearance (John 7:24).
2. Anchored Christians test based on **doctrine** (4:1)
 - It is not based on feeling
 - It is not based cultural acceptance or personality
 - It is not based on apparent success of ministry

John’s **doctrinal** test: How can we know what spirits are from God?

- The acid test: Did Jesus have a **physical** body. (4: 2-3)
- Seems strange to us today. Why does John say this? Answer: Pre-Gnostic and Docetic heretics infiltrating the church.

Gnostic — All matter, including physical body is evil

Docetism — Jesus did not come to earth with physical body, he only appeared to have one.

3. Anchored Christians take seriously the **danger** of false teaching (4:3)

No laughing matter: Paul says that denial of Christ’s physical body is a denial of the Gospel (1 Corinthians 15). John calls it “the Spirit of the AntiChrist.”

The Apostles explicitly claimed that Christ rose bodily from the dead. Not only did He rise bodily, He rose with a radically transformed and perfected body, one no longer subject to weakness, aging or death. This was not an easy teaching for many. The pagan culture of the time rejected bodily resurrection outright while the Jewish one embraced it only in part.

All the cool kids of John's day, as in Paul's, denied bodily resurrection. It was unthinkable everywhere but the Christian community:

- Greek worldview allowed for the soul to survive the death of the body, but never bodily resurrection. Bodily resurrection was distasteful, absurd and completely unacceptable to the educated classes of the day (Acts 17 / Apollo vs. Zeus).
- While Jews generally accepted resurrection, they did not expect it to happen to any man in the middle of history, much less their Messiah. Instead, it would happen to all men at the end of history.

4. Anchored Christians **rest** in the confidence that Christ's Spirit will keep them from error (4: 4)

Confidence for the believer: If I know that God raised Jesus from the dead, I can trust him in the things I don't understand.

5. Anchored Christians test everything by **apostolic teaching (Scripture)** (4: 5-6)

Worldview questions to test for truth:

- Who is Jesus?
- How do we know things?
- What does it mean to be human?
- What is wrong with us and what is the fix?
- Where did we come from and where are we going?