

When Unbelief Is Right

#10

1 John 4:1-6

I. INTROUDCTION

- A. A Christian must know how to believe and not believe at the same time; that is, he must believe truth and reject error. The Scriptures demand that Christians be unbelievers as well as believers. This may sound contradictory but it is like breathing. In breathing one must inhale as well as exhale. Both are absolutely necessary if life is to be maintained.
- B. So it is with belief and unbelief. You cannot believe truth without rejecting error. You cannot love righteousness unless you are ready to hate sin. You cannot accept Christ without rejecting self. You cannot follow good unless you are ready to flee from evil. This section in 1 John 4:1-6 tells us that it is impossible to believe truth without rejecting error.
- C. The key to understanding accepting of truth demands a repudiating of error is seen in the previous chapter. **1 John 3:24: “Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.”** The Christian has the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, dwelling in him. It is the working of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s life that assures him that he is of the truth. The Holy Spirit works through the human spirit or personality of a Christian and the life of Jesus Christ is manifested, giving proof of one’s salvation.

II. UNBELIEF IN FALSE TEACHERS 4:1-3

- A. **“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit,”** – Now the Apostle John emphasizes that there are false spirits that oppose the true Spirit of God. There are human beings whose spirits are influenced by demonic spirits. The true Christian is commanded not to believe every teacher or preacher they hear for they may be teaching heresy. **1 Tim. 4:1: “The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.”** A mark of Christian maturity is to be able to discern truth from error. An immature Christian is swept away by every new teaching that comes along. He childishly and gullibly swallows every slick line of the false teachers, not realizing the diabolic spirit of it all.
- B. **“But test the spirits to see whether they are from God,”** – Christians are to test all teachings they hear or read in order to approve of their content that it is from God. The test is not to condemn the teacher but to approve of him, providing he is teaching truth. A teacher is not to be treated as a heretic until he has shown himself to be one. The final test of all teaching or doctrine is the Bible itself. The

Christians' authority is not reason or experience but the infallible Word of God. One must know the Bible if he is going to be able to ferret out error.

- C. ***“Because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”*** – Notice the word “many,” for heresy was very widespread in the first century and is massive today. There are so many false prophets inside and outside the professing Christian church that it is difficult for people to understand the truth when it is told to them. The Bible warns us of false prophets so it should not surprise us. **Mk. 13:22:** ***“For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect-if that were possible.”*** Matt. 7:15: ***“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.”*** Acts 20-28-30: ***“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.”*** These false teachers seek only to wreck, ravish and bring ruin. These false teachers can be seen in our modern day liberalism in the churches, in the cults, in the tongues and healing movements and in the general attitude to accept almost anything but the inspired Word of God. These spirits are of demonic origin. This is a much more serious thing in the twentieth century than in the first century. In those days, there were just as many demons at work but people accepted the fact that superior beings influenced the thinking and attitudes of men everywhere. But today men pride themselves on their intellectual attainments and deny the existence of a Devil and his hosts of demons. As a result, modern man has exposed himself, without defense at all, to the control of these spirits. The Devil is having a “hey day.” Jesus Christ acknowledged the existence of demonic forces and gave this as an explanation for much of the evil in this present world. If we are going to be Christians, we must look at the world as Christ looked at it. Therefore, we must realize that men, even if they are professors in seminary or college or famous pastors behind pulpits, who are not preaching the truth of Scripture are themselves blinded by the forces of hell. Many of these men are loving, kind, gracious and sincere but they are sincerely wrong. These men are oftentimes unaware of the twist that is given to their thinking by the activity of evil spirits, spirits of error. The premises they adopt, which they never seem to examine, are often totally wrong, and in their blindness they base logical deductions upon illogical premises. ***Therefore, all teaching and preaching must be tested by the infallible Word of God.***

- D. ***“This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,”*** – The mark of orthodoxy is over the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus the Savior, is also the Christ, the Messiah of the Old Testament. According to the Old Testament the Messiah would be God come in the flesh. John says an indispensable fundamental of the Christian Faith is that God became incarnate in human flesh without sin. That the eternal Son of God, co-equal with Father, became a man. Thus Jesus Christ becomes the unique person of the universe. He becomes the

God-Man. He is truly God and truly man. He is perfect humanity and undiminished deity united in one person forever. This is a historical fact. To deny the full deity or humanity of Jesus Christ is to be a heretic and not a true Christian. A true teacher of Christianity will gladly acknowledge the entrance into history of the Son of God as Jesus of Nazareth, the God-Man who labored loved and died for sin and rose again from the dead and ascended to the right hand of the Father. The truth that Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, was with God and was God and became a man in incarnation is biblical and has been supported by true Christians all through the history of the Church. It is not just enough to acknowledge this as a historical fact. There are many who are orthodox in doctrine and say that they believe in the incarnation. They show it to you in their creeds and hymn books and repeat it every Sunday, "We believe in God the Father Almighty, and in Jesus Christ, His Son, our Lord." BUT they have never committed themselves to this truth in a personal way. The Apostle John says you must believe that Jesus Christ is the God-Man as a historical fact but you must also confess it before men. This is an open and bold confession that Christ is the God-Man, the only true Savior. Do not listen to any teacher who does not believe the historical fact of the incarnation and who is not committed to it personally.

- E. ***"But every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world."*** - As the world moves towards the last days when the Antichrist, the world dictator, who will be an incarnation of the Devil shall appear, there will be an ever increasing spirit of anti-Christ which will prepare the world for his coming. *Never has there been such denial of Christ, then in our present generation!*

All heresy can be tested by one's belief in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

1. **Christian Science:** *They say that Jesus was a mere man upon whom the Spirit of Christ came. The Spirit of Christ is the eternal One and he came upon Jesus at his baptism and left him again before he died upon the cross. Thus Jesus was born a mere man and died a mere man. Thus the only thing of real value is the moral teachings of Christ.*
2. **Jehovah Witnesses:** *They believe that Jesus Christ was the first created being from Jehovah and then everything after that was created through Christ. They deny the deity of Christ.*
3. **Mormons:** *They say that Jesus never was the eternal, unchangeable God, but he was a man who became God and came to show us how we might become God's someday. They deny Christ's eternity as the Son of God.*
4. **Modern Day Liberals In The Professing Church:** *They say that the Jesus of history is not important to us; that His virgin birth, His miracles, His resurrection, and even His crucifixion are but myths, legends gathered about the figure of the man, Jesus highly exaggerated ideas that the early church added to the facts. The facts*

of the historical Jesus are not important. The important thing is his moral teachings. Liberals deny the deity of Christ.

5. *The Psychedelic Cult: Dr. Timothy Leary, the high priest of the psychedelic cult, the father of the New Age movement, is constantly urging young people to try LSD. He calls his organization, using the letters "LSD", "League of Spiritual Discovery". He claims that LSD can open your eyes to the world of reality about God and life. And what does this apostle of pot have to say about the Lord Jesus? Why, that he was a man who was "turned on" by psychedelic drugs, and that is why he spoke in such an amazing way. He, too, was a user of LSD, in some form or another.*
6. *The Outsider: "The Anglican clergy who belong to the Modern Churchmen's Conference are pledged 'to proclaim the Christian Gospel in the light of modern knowledge and in the idiom of today.' Last week, the idiom was at least controversial as Canon Hugh Montefiore, a respected theologian, calmly told a conference meeting at Oxford University that Jesus might have been a homosexual. After all, the graying New Testament scholar argued, 'Women were his friends, but it is men he is said to have loved. The homosexual explanation is one we cannot ignore.'*

One modern churchman who thought it should be ignored was Dr. Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury, who promptly issued a statement affirming that 'Christ's dealing with both men and women were those of a perfect man.' The canon was also accused by a conference delegate of words that 'smear our Lord.' But Montefiore, author of such books as 'Awkward Questions on Christian Love,' defended his suggestion as 'serious and reverent.' In fact, he believes his theory helps to explain God's efforts, through Jesus, to identify with society's outcasts. 'Jesus was identified from conception to death with the outsider. Whether or not we accept the so-called virgin birth, no one can deny that he was born out of wedlock.'

III. UNBELIEF IN THE AUDIENCE THAT FOLLOWS FALSE TEACHERS 4:4-6

- A. **"You, dear children, are from God and have overcome the,"** – Now the Apostle John tells us that the true children of God overcame (were victorious) over the false teachers. This was an intellectual victory, for the false teachers were not successful in deceiving them.
- B. **"Because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world."** – Now we are told why these Christians were victorious over false teachers – because God was greater than the false teachers. It was not because they had superior intelligence, nor was it because they were aware of all the cults, nor was it that they had clever arguments, nor was it a superior theological training – it was the one who dwelt in them that delivered them. It was the greatness of God that kept them straight. It was the fact that God was greater than the diabolical

spirit that was at work behind the teachers of error. This is what will keep true Christians straight today.

- C. ***“They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them.”*** – False teachers say the things the world wants to hear; therefore the false teachers are popular with the world. The world’s philosophy is anti-Christ and anti-Bible and anti-supernatural, so anything that would destroy man’s faith in Christianity is welcomed by the world system. Heretics become popular overnight. Let one of these liberal theologians come out with some startling statement that denies some basic fundamental Christian truth and it is spread across the papers immediately. Soon they form a “school of thought” and this begins to spread and others jump on the bandwagon. The world listens to them. Why? They are saying what the world wants to hear.
- D. ***“We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.”*** – The “we” refers to the Apostles and the Apostolic Office. Those that are truly of God believe the teaching of the Apostles. Thus those that believe the teachings of the Apostles that Jesus Christ is the God-Man are saved but those that don’t are lost. What a person believes is important. In fact, his whole eternal destiny rests upon the fact that Jesus is the God-Man, the Savior.

IV. CONCLUSION

- A. It requires faith in Christ to be a Christian. Faith is not a way of convincing yourself that something is true when you know it is not, but faith is believing something that is true.
- B. The truth is that Jesus Christ is a historical person. He is the God-Man, the second person of the Trinity, who died for sin and was resurrected from the dead on the third day. These are historical facts.
- C. But the question is, “Are you personally committed to these facts and do you know this Jesus as Lord and Savior in a personal way?” You are not a Christian until you have received Christ personally and seek to follow him in daily life. Are you a true Christian?