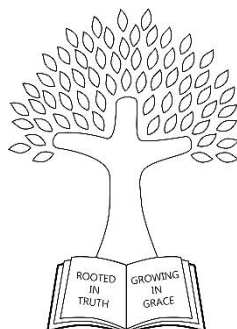


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Week Five

SALVATION - YOUR SPIRIT

(I John 4)

LESSON AIM - I want my students to:

Know: That false spirits are prevalent in this world.

Feel: A need to remove themselves from all ungodliness.

Do: To continuously love the things of God.

INTRODUCTION TO THE LESSON:

In the concluding verse of the previous chapter, John reminded the believers of the indwelling Holy Spirit, who provides assurance of salvation. This provides the necessary transition between sonship which can be tested and the testing of the spirits. In this chapter, it is unmistakably clear that a true believer has a spirit that can faithfully test everything professing to be spiritual (4:1-6). The believer also has a spirit of love for other Christians (4:7-21). It is this spirit or disposition within the professing believer that is testable. The indwelling Holy Spirit, who brings about a changed spirit within true believers, makes this testing possible and accurate.

LESSON OUTLINE AND COMMENTS:

I. Testing the spirits (I John 4:1-6)

In every period of church history, there have been those who have claimed to be Christians but are not. To rashly accept any teaching that appears to have Bible content has often been practiced by Christians. John commands believers to test every spirit.

A. The premise of the test (4:1)

Favorable words about God are presumed to come from godly people. John declares that this is not necessarily true. Since believers have the Holy Spirit dwelling within them, the Spirit can lead the believer to correctly identify those who speak in the name of God. This spirit-directed discernment provides assurance of salvation. The "spirit" that believers are not to believe but to test is the spirit of the person who claims to

speaking for God. Believers were already warned that men could be controlled by evil spirits and would set forth false doctrines (I Tim. 4:1-2). Consequently, John reminds his readers to examine those you hear before placing confidence in them. His exhortation to try means "to continually prove the genuineness of" (Matt. 7:15) the speaker. These spokesmen could be of God or false spirits. By demanding that the spokesman be examined, John implies that this is required of every Christian at all times.

B. The nature of the test (4:2-3)

By following John's instruction, "you are knowing the Spirit of God," Christians could discern whether the Holy Spirit was directing the speaker. The key was the speaker's acceptance of the incarnation of Christ. This was the doctrine often rejected even in N. T. times. The N. T. teaches that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. The gnostics (an early cult) believed He did not. It is commonly thought that they were the false teachers that John was speaking against (v. 2). All who are God's sons also possess God's Spirit. The Holy Spirit will never accept a false spirit because this is against Christ. Thus, no Christian will accept a false spirit.

Because the particular heresy of the gnostics concerned a wrong view of Christ, John makes this the test for the believer to apply. Such a heresy is characteristic of the coming antichrist. This false teaching and its teachers, being already present in John's day, must be rejected. The believers being indwelt by the Holy Spirit have the desire and the discernment to examine and reject all that is contrary to the Holy Spirit who is in them.

C. The conclusion from the test (4:4-6)

In the summation of this discussion, John addresses three parties, "you" (v. 4), "they" (v. 5), and "we" (v. 6). To the "you," the believers, John gives assurance that "they are of God." They are God's children. This is proven by a past battle against these heretics which was fought and won ("overcame them"). The reason for this victory is the indwelling Holy Spirit who provided spiritual insight to see the error of the false teachers. Every believer has the confidence that the Holy Spirit, who is indwelling them, can never be fooled by false teaching. In every way, He is greater than the false teachers. Believers have nothing to fear from false teachers when they live under the control of God's Spirit (v. 4).

False teachers, "they," are totally world oriented. They speak after the manner of the world and those belonging to the world's system listen to them. John asserts that the concepts of the gospel do not belong in the language of the world. When those of the world hear "spiritual" things and accept them as good, those "spiritual" things are not from God. A favorable response by the world is accurate evidence that the message and messenger are spiritually false (v. 5).

The apostles, "we," also are of God. Because the believers and the apostolic spokesmen share a common Holy Spirit, the believers listen to the message from the apostles. God's Word is recognized and known by God's children because of the indwelling Holy Spirit. God's Word is rejected by the unbelievers. Therefore, by one's response to the Word, truth and error can be discerned. In the days when Scripture was being first written, it was the Holy Spirit in the speaker and in the believer which provided a recognition of what was true and conversely what was from the false prophets (v. 6). Today, the same Holy Spirit in the believer produces a recognition of God's Word being truth and false teaching being the spirit of error (Satan). John leaves each believer with the obvious challenge to test his spirit to see what his response is to the Holy Spirit.