

Sunday Morning
November 17, 1985

"How to Discern the Spirits"

Introduction

Throughout scripture we are alerted to the fact that not all "spiritual" teaching or activity necessarily originates from the Lord. There are and will be false teachers who--either from their own confusion or as purposeful emissaries from the enemy--will attempt to introduce falsehood into the believer's heart and mind.

While we are not to become alarmed or paranoid about false speakers (Phil. 1:28), we are warned to avoid them and oppose their falsehoods. The Bible outlines several ways to "test the spirits" (I John 4:1); that is, to determine the origin of words, actions or events in life with which we come into contact.

The admonition is clear: don't believe everything you hear, just because it claims to "be from God."

Biblical Guidelines for "Testing The Spirits"

1. By the Word (Psalm 119; Acts 17; Hebrews 4:12-13)
2. By their Confession (I John 4:2-3, 15)
3. By their Message (II John 9-11; Galatians 1:6-12)
4. By their Love (I John 4:8, 16; John 13:34-35)
5. By their Conversation (Ephesians 4:17-24; I John 5:4; I Timothy 4:12; James 3:12)

6. By their Fulfillment (Deuteronomy 18: 21 & 22)
7. Through Counsel (Proverbs 11:14; 12:15; 24:6)
8. Through Discernment (Hebrews 5:14; I Corinthians 12:10; 14:29; I Kings 3:3-14)

Some "Extra-Biblical" Guidelines

1. Never trust someone who does not enjoy life and have a sense of humor.
2. Go with your "spiritual guts"; don't always assume that what you sense is "your problem."
3. Do not accept initial statements as the whole story; most cults save their "deep truths" for "proven disciples."
4. Beware of those who always seem to hide the answers, those who are possessive with the truth they want to disciple you into.
5. Watch to see their response to spiritual authority--those you know God has placed over you to care for you (not to dominate you.)
6. Be careful of those who think their life or particulars of their life are the "exception" to what God says to the Body.
7. Watch out for people who claim their private revelation or understanding sets them above all others--that they do not need anyone else to discover truth.
8. Beware of any person or teaching which draws you away from "normal" fellowship into exclusive, special groups.
9. Beware of people who monopolize your time, energy or resources and who insist that your spiritual well-being depends on them or their counsel.
10. Beware of anyone who wants to "hang on to you" rather than to encourage you to grow up and out into your own ministry. How willingly will they let you go?
11. Be alert to any shift in focus from Jesus and "us" to "I." Pride and conceit always accompany deception.