

Date: May 24, 2009

Title: Truth or Deception, the Choice Is Yours

---

Scripture:

**1 John 4:1-6 (NLT)** <sup>1</sup> Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world. <sup>2</sup> This is the way to find out if they have the Spirit of God: If a prophet acknowledges that Jesus Christ became a human being, that person has the Spirit of God. <sup>3</sup> If a prophet does not acknowledge Jesus, that person is not from God. Such a person has the spirit of the Antichrist. You have heard that he is going to come into the world, and he is already here. <sup>4</sup> But you belong to God, my dear children. You have already won your fight with these false prophets, because the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world. <sup>5</sup> These people belong to this world, so they speak from the world's viewpoint, and the world listens to them. <sup>6</sup> But we belong to God; that is why those who know God listen to us. If they do not belong to God, they do not listen to us. That is how we know if someone has the Spirit of truth or the spirit of deception.

---

Have you ever noticed how many choices we have to make in a day? I mean from the time we wake up in the morning to the time we go to bed at night we are making choices; choices about what to eat, what to wear, which rout to take to work. Some days we enter into a voting booth and choose who we want to support as elected officials. Some days we choose which career we will pursue. Some days we stand in the aisle of the supermarket and choose which toothpaste we will buy. Every day is a series of choices we make as to how we will spend the twenty four hours we are given each day. We choose what we will do with the time we have each day and, just as importantly, we choose how we will do what we do.

Life is all about choices, choices, and more choices!

And, of course we don't make these choices by ourselves either. There are people all around us offering to help us make our choices. There are people on the radio telling us which breakfast burrito we should buy. There are people on TV telling us which political candidate or party to support. There are billboards telling us which cell phone carrier to choose.

Life is all about choices, and the irony is that we even have to make choices about who we want to help us make choices.

Do you see what I mean here? We have more choices to make in a day than we can keep track of and frequently we even have to choose who we are going to listen to when it comes to people offering to help us make our choices.

So how do we choose? How do we decide who we are going to listen to and who we are going to ignore?

Our scripture for this morning means to give us some insight into this very important and difficult question. In this case our author is speaking about the necessity to be weary of false prophets. Now, these days, we tend to think of a prophet as someone who sits in an out of the way place somewhere conjuring up visions of future realities and predicting when they will occur. But biblically speaking, a prophet is not really someone who tells us the future, a prophet is someone who speaks the truth about what is happening in the world. A false prophet **claims** to know and speak the truth - a true prophet actually knows and speaks the truth.

Now, we tend to think of the prophets as living in ancient times, but do you think there are still prophets in this day and time? What if.....(now this is just speculation on my part) but what if every time you heard someone offer an opinion on a subject; any subject ranging from which breakfast cereal to eat to which position a person should have on abortion or homo-sexual marriage – what if that person was acting as prophet. I mean if someone expresses an opinion and you agree with that opinion, doesn't that make them at least a sort of mini-prophet for you. Do you think that is possible?

Could it be that every billboard, TV add, internet blogger or newspaper columnist could be seen as a potential prophet. That may seem like a strange idea but if we allow people to tell us what they believe is true, doesn't that make them a potential prophet. And then if we buy the product or vote their way or adapt our belief system to what they tell us, doesn't that make them a prophet in some way?

Is it possible that perhaps God is speaking through advertisements and TV programs and popular songs and movies and friends as well as pastors and Sunday school teachers? If this **is** possible, then doesn't it make sense that some of the very same sources of information might be working against God? I think this is what our scripture is warning us about when it says, "*Do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God.*"

Ok, the people who try to sell you a particular brand of car or a type of soda-pop are not claiming to speak by the Spirit, but if they suggest in their ad that you will be sexier or cooler or even safer if you use their brand, aren't they claiming to know a small piece of the truth, and isn't their add or their column or their comment an attempt to get you to agree with their truth? They may not be making a religious claim but they are attempting to influence the way you look at the world and what you perceive to be reality.

Folks, we are bombarded with claims all the time from TV, Billboards, Internet, Movies, Popular songs, News programs and the list goes on. We also hear from our friends, coworkers and family members and occasionally we might read the Bible or go to church or read a book by a Christian author. In all cases people are claiming to have knowledge of at least a small portion of the truth. Some of these claims are so subtle we hardly notice them. Some are so bold and obvious we can't ignore them, but in all cases they

are attempts to influence the way we think and if they can influence the way we think, they will influence the choices we make.

The point of all this, then, is that we must choose our prophets wisely? Our scripture says that we know that a prophet is telling the truth if they acknowledge that Jesus Christ became a human being. In other words if a prophet acknowledges Jesus then that person has the Spirit of God. If the prophet does not acknowledge Jesus, that person is not from God. In fact the scripture says that if a person does not acknowledge Jesus, that person is not from God and has the spirit of the Antichrist. That sounds pretty harsh, but I think that what we are to take from this is this: If what a person says lines up with the truth of Christ as best we can understand it, then we should listen to their opinion. If, however, the opinions expressed don't line up with Christ, they are most likely going to pull us in a direction that takes us away from Christ. What the author of our text is saying is that every choice we make should hinge on the Spirit of Christ.

In other words, is the underlying message one of hope and love and concern for others? Certainly, in most of our advertising these days the message is more like: "It's all about you dude. Make yourself happy and the Devil take the rest. You can be so much happier if you just buy our product." Unfortunately, even so-called Christian advertisers can give us that same message. The messages have become so subtle and sophisticated that it can be very difficult to tell where people are coming from.

People are constantly telling us how we should spend our time and our money and our energy and the question we must wrestle with is how we are going to respond. Are we going to choose to believe and pursue the Spirit of Christ with our lives, or are we going to pursue things that take us away from the Spirit of Christ; pursue the spirit of the Antichrist, if you will? It is so important for us to develop and strengthen our faith because the more we open ourselves up to the spirit of Christ, the easier it will be for us to discern the underlying spirit of the messages that come at us daily. Our scripture says it this way:

*You have already won your fight with these false prophets, because the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world.*

Of course, from time-to-time, we will be fooled. We will make errors in judgment and support something that sounds very good, but after a while we realize it's not so good. It's tough out there...and the spirit of the Antichrist is doing quite well. We need to do all we can to make sure we don't fall for the deception.

Ultimately, we know that Jesus Christ came to this world so that all could know the truth of God and live accordingly. Jesus left us with His spirit so that we would be able to make Godly choices. But we must invite this spirit to live in us and strengthen us.

So, let us constantly align our lives with the Holy Spirit of God:

by reading the word that instructs us;

by praying the prayers that connect us;

by serving and living the life that matures us in Christ

and by always trusting in the one who died to save us. Amen.