**Discernment Is Not Optional**

\*Instruction: ***“Beloved, do not believe every spirit [persons] [speaking through a self-proclaimed prophet]; instead***

*Matthew Henry* – “…believe not, regard not, trust not, follow not, every pretender to the Spirit of God, or every professor of vision, or inspiration, or revelation from God. These deceivers set themselves up in the church; it was so in the apostle’s times. Fatal is the spirit of delusion.

\*Instruction: **test the spirits [discern/judge/inspect] to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets *and* teachers have gone out into the world.”**

**Guidelines for How to Test**

True Preachers and Proclaimers are characterized by:

Confession of the Divine Lord

Possession of the Divine Life

Profession of the Divine Law

**Confession of the Divine Lord**

\*Exhortation:**2*By this* you know *and* recognize [discern] the Spirit of God: every spirit [person] that acknowledges *and* confesses [the fact] that Jesus Christ has [actually] come in the flesh [as a man] is from God [God is its source]; 3and every spirit that does not confess Jesus [acknowledging that He has come in the flesh, but would deny any of the Son’s true nature] is not of God; this is the *spirit* of the antichrist, which *you have heard* is coming, and is now already in the world.**

This is a theological or Christological instruction – what do they believe about Jesus Christ – they must believe He is eternal deity, the second Person of the Godhead who became a man. Jesus Christ is to be confessed as the Son of God, the eternal life and Word, who came in human mortal flesh.

**Possession of the Divine Life**

\*Exhortation: **4Little children (believers, dear ones), you are *of* God [partakers of His divine nature] *and* you belong to Him and have [already] overcome them [the agents of the antichrist]; because He who is in you is greater than he (Satan) who is in the world [of sinful mankind]. 5They [who teach twisted and deceiving doctrines] are of the world *and* belong to it; therefore they speak from the [viewpoint of the] world [with its immoral freedom and baseless theories—demanding compliance with their opinions and ridiculing the values of the upright], and the [gullible one of the] world listens closely *and* pays attention to them.**

In incarnation, God became a partaker of human nature, and through regeneration human beings become partakers of the divine nature. *“You are from God,”* is an affirmation of their security against false teachers. All true Christians possess an incorruptible Seed of eternal life [1 Peter 1:23-25], meaning no deception can take them out of God’s saving hand [John 10:28-29].

**9 “No one who is born of God [deliberately, knowingly, and habitually] practices sin (live in/abide in false doctrine), because God’s seed [His principle of life, the essence of His righteous character] remains [permanently] in him [who is born again—who is reborn from above—spiritually transformed, renewed, and set apart for His purpose]; and he [who is born again] cannot *habitually* [live a life characterized by] sin (live in error), because he is born of God *and* longs to please Him.” 1 John 3:9**

*Matthew Henry* – “We are born of God, taught of God, anointed of God, and so secured against infectious fatal delusions. God has chosen who will not be seduced and has His Spirit has framed their mind for God and on things above; not on things of this world. False proclaimers engross themselves to the possessions and treasures of this world, forgetting that the Redeemer’s kingdom is not of this world. The more addicted persons are to this world and the things of it the more remote they are from the Spirit of Christianity.”

**Profession of the Divine Law**

**6We [who teach and speak of God’s word] are from God [energized by the Holy Spirit], and whoever knows God listens to us [and has a deeper understanding of Him]. Whoever *is not of God* [does not possess His divine nature] does not listen to us. *By this* we know [with complete certainty] the spirit of truth [motivated by God] and the spirit of error [motivated by Satan].**

*1 John 4:1-6*

Pronoun “we” primarily refers to John and the other writers of Scripture. Like them, all true teachers and exhorters accurately proclaim the Word of God, and the person who ***“knows God listens”*** to them.

*“Whoever is of God and belongs to Him hears [the truth of] God’s words; for this reason you do not hear them: because you are not of God and you are not in fellowship with Him.” John 8:47*

*“When he has brought all his own sheep outside, he walks on ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice and recognize his call.****5****They will never follow a stranger, but will run away from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.” John 10:4-5*

*\*John 10:16, 26-27; 14:26; 18:37*

**MANY FALSE PROPHETS AND TEACHERS**

**“Beware –** this one word instructs us to judge / discern. Danger ahead. The word **Beware** in Greek means ‘hold your mind back.’ Don’t expose your mind to the influence….

**of the false prophets, who [**the who lets you know these are real people operating from real attitudes and demonstrating observable actions. That’s their fruit. Their attitude and actions. Their attitude is ….

**inwardly are ravenous wolves. –** they are self-promoters. Self-seeking. Self-exalting. Out to fulfill their own self ambitions and self-appetites for power, position, prestige. They either know they are living a life of deception or they have been duped by the devil and living self-deceived. They are dangerous. What they say, regardless of how kind, gentle, Scripture quoting, and affirming they be portray themselves, they are evil.

Yet, they **come to you in sheep’s clothing.**

* **Prophets were known by what they wore –** Elijah wore very rough, hairy, rugged, burlap uncomfortable garment as a statement – foregoing comforts for the cause of God calling His people to obedience. – John the Baptist wore very rough uncomfortable camel’s goat hair for the cause of being set aside from the world system. The rough garments designated the prophets. Zechariah 13:4 says of the false prophets: “They wear a rough garment in order to deceive.”
* **Shepherds wore cloaks made of the wool of the sheep.** “Sheep’s clothing” is another term for ‘wool.’ John warns that these false prophets and teachers wear the cloak of a shepherd – a person assigned to the care of the sheep / the church of Jesus Christ.

**Easy to spot – non-disguised**

* Heretics – “I don’t believe the Bible when it says…”
* Apostates – denies the faith, departs from Christianity, falls away from sound doctrine

**Not easy to spot – disguised – deceivers – blend in**

* This is not the cultist or the Mormon or the Jehovah Witness or the Scientologists. These are the New Apostolic Reformers, the Universalists, the postmodern emerging church charismatics who are teaching or influencing every so subtly the ideologies of pragmatism, panentheism, paganism, hedoism, Roman Catholicism, and they are among the Southern Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Assemblies of God, Pentecostals, Church of Christ, Lutheran, Episcopalian, Calvinists, Armenians, Wesleyans, who talk about Jesus, the cross, God, the Bible, church, prayer, the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts, giving, missions, being loving and forgiving, and they hang around people who are true Christians and mingles in the framework of evangelism. He isn’t warning us against heretics or apostates, but against those who sound like and look like Christians who use the speech of the Bible. They are all over the place!!! They do not talk about hell or Lordship, but instead how to be happy, healed, enjoying the blessings of God, and how to be this and that. They are pleasant, nice, seem thoroughly Christian – they say many of the right things and their lives appear to be clean. They blend in.

***Christemporos* –** Greek meaning **‘Christ merchants’ or Christ swindlers’ –** they use Christ, they trade Christ, the ‘sell’ Christ for personal gain, they pad their pockets and build their empires. They are happy holy spirit healers, positive thinkers, charismatic, and love to blend in with the world, be popular, and attach themselves with celebrities.

**16By their fruit you will recognize them [that is, by their man-made doctrines and self-focus]. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? 17Even so, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the unhealthy tree bears bad fruit. 18A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. 19Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20Therefore, by their fruit you will recognize them [as ravenous wolves disguised in the cloak of a Shepherd].** *Matthew 7:15-20*

*Test the Spirits* – **How To Be Spiritually Discerning / Spiritually Wise**

**Definition: Wise** – ability to make good use of knowledge; ability to DISCERN right from wrong

1. **Desire Discernment** – Discernment is the USE OF KNOWLEDGE = WISDOM

*“Make your ear attentive to wisdom; Incline your heart to understanding. For if you cry out for insight, and raise your voice for understanding; If you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures; Then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and discover the knowledge of God.”*

*Proverbs 2:2-5*

Psalm 37:4 – one of the most misused and abused verses in Scripture.

1. **Grow in Discernment / Wisdom**

*“And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and people.” Luke 2:52*

1. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Proverbs 9:10, Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 15:33; Job 28:28

*“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”*

In this context fear refers to reverence.

Reverence – an awareness of God’s holiness.

We have to become humble and teachable.

Proverbs 11:2 *– “with the lowly is wisdom.”*

We do this by literally standing in awe of God’s holiness and sovereign greatness.

*“the great and awesome God”* – Nehemiah 1:5, 4:14, 9:32; Deuteronomy 7:21, 10:17; Psalm 99:3; Jeremiah 20:11

*“The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him – the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of strength, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.” Isaiah 11:2*

This 7-fold Spirit will be manifest in the preaching of true Shepherds of Christ’s church..

1. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ James 1:5 *“If any of you lacks wisdom/discernment he should ASK HIM, who gives generously [richly] to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.”*

**God is very generous** – “*He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”*

*Titus 3:5-7*

1. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Colossians 2:2-3 *“My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have (\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_) the full riches [assurance / certainty] of complete understanding (discernment/wisdom) in order that they may truly know [more intimately] the mystery of God, that is, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and knowledge [regarding the Word and purposes of God].”*

*“My purpose is that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to receive all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” Colossians 2:2-3*

*“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom…” Colossians 3:16*

*“And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,” 1 Cor. 1:30.*

1. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Daniel 12:3 *“Those who are wise will \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ like the brightness of the expanse of heaven and those who those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.”*

There will be obvious and outward signs of one who is wise and discerning.

*“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s Glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” 2 Cor. 3:18*

*“He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.” Psalm 37:6*

1. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ *“Be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil.” Ephesians 5:15-16*

*“Be careful”* – to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ things out; to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ things through; to look at things from every angle

*How* do you do this?

You pray for it, you call on and depend on the Holy Spirit, and you study God’s Word, digging deeply into God’s Word applying effort.

* Romans 12:12 and 1 Thess. 5:17
* John 16:13 and 1 Corinthians 2:11-16
* Acts 20:32 and 2 Timothy 2:15;3:16-17

*“how you walk”* – in every facet of life, how you live *as you progress* in Christlikeness

**The Fruit of Wisdom / Discernment**

* Fruit of Wisdom / Discernment - \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in attitude and action

*“But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure [attitude]; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.” James 3:17*

* Root of Wisdom / Discernment - \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

“*and how from infancy you have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” 2 Timothy 3:15*

**How to Live with Spiritual Discernment / Wisdom**

1. Desire discernment / wisdom
2. Grow in discernment / wisdom
   * Fear
   * Ask
   * Receive
   * Walk
     + Pray without ceasing
     + Depend on the Holy Spirit
     + Study God’s Word
   * Shine … displaying His glory *Unto the Lord for the glory of God!*