

Spirit of Truth and Error – Part 2

Tonight, we continue our study on the Spirit of Truth and the spirit of error. Once again, we return to our foundation in the First Epistle of John, chapter four. This time our focus is one key verse:

1 John 4:6

“We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the Spirit of Truth, and the spirit of error.”

This single verse draws a sharp line between truth and error. The Spirit of Truth is the Holy Ghost, the Comforter Jesus promised, who both reveals and confirms the truth of God’s Word. The spirit of error is the influence behind false teachings, distortions, and compromises that lead people away from that truth. Both are active today. Both shape churches, ministries, and believers.

The Condition of the Church

John’s words echo the warning Jesus gave to the church of Laodicea in Revelation 3. Jesus described the last-day church as **“wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.”** What makes that description striking is that the church itself does not recognize its own condition. It boasts, “I am rich, increased with goods, and have need of nothing.”

This is a picture of many ministries today. Their focus is on material gain, popularity, and numbers. Sermons are designed to attract crowds, to satisfy desires, and to secure money. Few messages today emphasize repentance, holiness, righteousness, heaven, or preparation for the coming of the Lord. Instead, the spirit of error has shifted the focus toward the temporary things of this life.

Jesus warned in Luke 12:15: **“Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.”** A ministry consumed with possessions and outward success is already blinded. The Spirit of Truth exposes such error, but too many refuse correction.

Remembering the Voices of the Fathers

Error always creeps in when the voices of the fathers are ignored. In Acts 13, Paul preached in the synagogue at Antioch. He reminded the people that though the prophets were read every Sabbath, the rulers in Jerusalem condemned Jesus because they did not truly receive the voices of the prophets (Acts 13:27).

The same danger exists now. The early fathers of the apostolic movement—men like Bishop G.T. Haywood—laid a foundation of truth. But when churches forget those voices, they open the door to the spirit of error. Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 2:15: **“Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.”** To abandon those foundations is to invite deception.

The Spirit of Error in Doctrine

The early church faced doctrinal battles, just as we do today. In Acts 15, certain men taught that Gentile believers must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses. Paul and Barnabas opposed them, and the apostles gathered in Jerusalem for the first doctrinal council. The conclusion was clear: those teachings did not come from the apostles, and they were not to be received.

Acts 15:24 records their judgment: **“Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment.”** That is the pattern of the spirit of error—troubling people with words, adding burdens God never gave.

The same thing happens today. Ministers bring in teachings they were raised with in nominal churches. Old doctrines linger, shaping their thinking even after they are baptized and Spirit-filled. Like Moses, who needed forty years in the wilderness to unlearn Egypt’s wisdom, many struggle to unlearn the errors of tradition. The wisdom of this world, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3, is foolishness with God.

A modern example is the common belief that a backslider who cries and speaks in tongues at the altar has been “reclaimed.” Yet the Bible never uses the term “reclaimed.” True repentance is not emotional display—it is proven by fruit. Paul listed the seven fruits of repentance in 2 Corinthians 7:11, showing that godly sorrow works real change. Without those fruits, repentance is incomplete, no matter how emotional the altar service may seem.

The Work of the Comforter

In John 16:7–15, Jesus explained why He had to depart and send the Comforter. As long as He remained in the role of the Son, confined to one body, the Spirit could not indwell every believer. By returning to the office of Father and sending the Holy Ghost, Jesus multiplied His presence. Now the church itself is the Son of God—the body of Christ in the world.

The Comforter, also called the Spirit of Truth, is Christ in us, the hope of glory. His ministry is threefold:

1. **To convict the world of sin** – Jesus said in John 16:9, **“Of sin, because they believe not on me.”** Unbelief is the root of all sin. Stealing, lying, immorality—all flow from a heart that does not truly believe God. Revelation 21:8 warns that the unbelieving will have their part in the lake of fire.
2. **To reveal true righteousness** – John 16:10 says, **“Of righteousness, because I go to my Father.”** The Pharisees boasted of righteousness, but Isaiah 64:6 declares that man’s righteousness is as filthy rags. True righteousness is found only in Jesus. The Spirit exposes man’s self-righteousness and reveals God’s righteousness.
3. **To declare judgment** – John 16:11 states, **“Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.”** At Calvary, Satan’s power was broken. The Spirit applies that victory in our lives, enabling us to live holy and overcome sin.

The Spirit of Truth at Work in Teaching

The Spirit of Truth does not work independently from the Word or from the ministry God has appointed. John 14:26 says the Comforter will bring all things to our remembrance—but only what we have first been taught. That is why God said in Jeremiah 3:15: **“I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.”**

The relationship between pastor, Word, and Spirit can be compared to a broadcast station and a receiver. The pastor delivers the Word as God has given it; the Holy Ghost in the believer receives it. Later, when needed, the Spirit brings that Word back to remembrance. If the Word is never received, there is nothing for the Spirit to bring back.

The Spirit of Truth never glorifies people or their talents. He always glorifies Jesus. He never contradicts Scripture. He never introduces doctrines that undermine what the apostles delivered. His voice is consistent, certain, and anchored in the written Word.

Conclusion

The Spirit of Truth is the baptism of the Holy Ghost and the revelation of God’s Word. The spirit of error is false teaching, worldly influence, and man’s self-righteousness. One leads to life, the other to deception.

The church of today stands at a crossroads. Many voices are speaking, but not every voice is of God. We must measure every teaching against the Word. We must remember the foundation laid by the apostles and the fathers of the faith. We must walk in the light of present truth, guided by the Spirit of Truth, so we will not be caught in the traps of error.

John said it clearly: **“Hereby know we the Spirit of Truth, and the spirit of error.”**