

1 John 4:1 (PT) 70511

Bible Treasury: Volume N3, False Prophets

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1 John 4:1

This word is addressed to those who know Jesus as not only Savior but their Lord, to whom their allegiance and obedience is due. Happy those who look wholly to His good pleasure for their guidance. They ought also to know that this is a time when allegiance to Him is put to the test. It will be quite a different proof than heretofore, because Satan will deceive ever with more deceivableness of unrighteousness. The deception begins with unbelief in the Lordship of Jesus and by in subjection to it, and in speaking therefore as of the world, and not as of God for heaven, but often commending what is earthly religious and thus enhancing the deceit.

We are desired to "prove the spirits," to bring them to the proof by the work of the prophets who speak by these spirits. First, they must be proved by their work, which is not confessing Jesus come in flesh, and therefore Lord of all men. Secondly they speak as of (ἐκ) the world. These are two very plain things, so that there is no need that simple men should be deceived. Yet the want of holding fast Jesus as Lord may lead even the elect into danger. Obeying Jesus as Lord will disown what He disowns, will make a good confession of the hope He has left, and will worship in the power of the Spirit that is of Him and the Father.

We must not suppose that having "that of the antichrist" makes those, who by this spirit speak as of the world and its hopes, like men possessed so as to act violently and madly; they would in this case be quickly suspected or disregarded. They require to be tested in the knowledge of God and of Christ, because they soberly lead from God and His obedience. Persons would gain no credit, and this their master knows, if they were to proclaim principles that would shock mankind. In order to persuade men they must propose some advantage, something that does honor to mankind and not dishonor; and no one is taught in the honor and reward of obedience to Christ. A condition that would need forgiveness of God they repudiate. They say that man in his own honor and dignity, and educated therein, has a true nobility; that death is no judgment of God; and if they acknowledge a continued existence after death (not a restoration of the dead to life by the power of God), it is to their own honor, and the extension of the self-importance with which they have dignified themselves. With a future life, however, they trouble themselves but little.

The mark given, in addition to the denial of Christ come in flesh, is that they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. What is now more common than these two marks? God warns us now against them. Against the world He has already warned us (1 John 2). The world perishes, and its works. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, are of the world and not of the Father. The world will be judged, and the works thereof; but of this scoffers are willingly ignorant. They have known, or at least know, the testimony, and reject it. No one can get rid of the judgments God has appointed in His word. Disbelief alters the truth of not one thing. What is, is; and what shall be, shall be. Man does not make anything untrue by his disbelief. So nothing false can be made true, because I am deceived by it, even if it were to my ruin; nor do my convictions make any true, nor bind God in His judgments, or else my judgment would bind God. Men deceived by themselves are easily deceived by others who prophesy according to the blindness of the people. Who is so foolish as to infer that a man thinking he sees, or has a true mental apprehension of a thing, will make it certain?

God is never moved from His throne, and He will be justified in the day when all things will be judged; and if my affections are with God, I say, "Let God be true, but every man a liar." Now God has revealed the resurrection of all men; and they will stand just as they now are to be tried, in their present capacity of conscience, by His presence, and not by their own thoughts; and their judgment will be final, and righteously so, for God has not failed to make known His goodness and His word. A true prophet believes that Jesus appeared in flesh, and will come again to blessing or to judgment. Such a one therefore speaks of things to come; he speaks of the peace made by blood, and that God in love receives men for the sake of His Son Whom He has given.

Now false prophets are in this scripture portrayed. They prophesy false things; they reverse God's judgment of the world. They speak of its capacities and its greatness; of man's perfectibility, and of the world's institutions becoming his noble condition; and the world hears them. How quickly are men's ears caught by the false evangelist, by the pretenders to inspiration! How Christ's coming to judgment, how His Lordship over the world, is scorned, though the price was paid for man's deliverance from Satan, in spirit, soul and body!

It is quite true that at present some men have not gone as far as others in the denial of the Lordship of Jesus; but their words and position are in a strange contradiction one to the other. Religion is not always rejected by those who listen to the false prophets; but few would listen if any more than accidentally speak of it. Man is so formed of God, that some acknowledgment of Him is natural and necessary as a right condition of his existence: wholly to reject is to denaturalize himself. But they do not acknowledge Lordship in Jesus; and the world hears them. Politics, as we know them, are an unbelief of Him as Lord. Man is sufficient to himself, the ground of measure for his own country and with others; as the Egyptian said of the Nile, "The river is mine own, and I have made it for myself." It is a simple character to try them by, and it seems a sweeping judgment. But God judges all things in truth, and gives a simple rule to judge by; and all not in Christ will be found not of Him. A false prophet is one not confessing Jesus, and their word is as of the world, independently of God; and the world heeds them. These are they that speak by what is of antichrist. The apostle says "many false prophets are gone out into the world." If any one knows the true extent of the call God has thus made and by those that hear, he listens to none of that class.

For the spirits and the prophets speaking by them are portrayed; and because they do the reverse of what true prophets do, they are false. And they are spoken of as to appear in this "last time," when all things hasten to the day of God's interference in the world by His judgments

against the rebellion; and the spirit is called "that of antichrist," because it is set against the Lordship of Jesus over the world (to which must be added denying the Father and the Son), and will fully exist in the antichrist when he is manifested. Those who are of God overcome the seduction and turn away, because they have the Spirit in them that is greater than the spirit in the false prophets.

But let us not conceal from ourselves how plain the distinction is made by the word of God between one spirit and the other. Nor let us think less of the grace of God in Christ to man, or to ourselves who believe; for "of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who was made to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption." We are possessors of Christ, and own the Lord of Whose glory we are partakers, but separate by a clear undeniable separateness from all that the false prophets speak of. "Come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be to you a Father, and ye shall be to me sons and daughters, saith the Lord God Almighty." Doing good to all men, and loving one another for God and our hope's sake, our works shall be owned of Him when He shall come; and they shall be judged for "all the hard speeches they have spoken against Him."

It is unbelief in us to have anything to say to any of these matters. We return as the dog to his vomit when we do so. We must not be deceived by words of honor and of noble sentiments. When men do well to themselves, men will speak well of them, as is said in Psa. 49. Our rule is, "Whom the Lord commendeth." But for us they are condemned, though we confess ourselves always sinners saved by grace.

But if the spirit of antichrist is at work, the same will produce a false prophet far above the rest. How wise is the arch-enemy! Will he let the world see this all at once? None was ever wicked at once. No man ever gained his fellowmen by proposing a thing as evil but as good. But you have here, in the description of the false prophets and their works, the sure marks of the beginning; and they lead surely to the end. Those spoken of speak as of the world, and the world hears them. Men again now perhaps dispute about religion, and about this or that being the right one. God says, "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, to keep oneself unspotted from the world." His commandments are to believe on the Son of God, and to love one another in this faith.

Everything is now slipping from its place. Everything not founded on Christ and His word, and to the exclusion of everything else, will soon be in the enemy's camp. Take with you a single eye, and your whole body shall be full of light: otherwise you will slip away into the dominion of evil, and at last of Satan. Do not be deceived by the name of religion. The crucified One is God's power unto salvation. It is a matter of faith and of holding fast. Disbelieve the false prophets. Believe God, and the devil will flee, and yourself be left to rejoicing of hope, and rest (with those that from the first declared God's salvation) when the Lord shall be revealed from heaven with His Mighty angels, and those who troubled you righteously receive tribulation, being punished with everlasting destruction from His presence, which will then have become yours in joy evermore. Let us now be fain to pluck out of destruction those in whom we discover that God keeps a conscience to the Lord alive in their breasts.

This then is the present state and one we shall see more and more accomplished. But there will be a great false prophet (Dan. 11:36, &c., 2 Thess. 2, Rev. 13:11, &c., 19). The power he will receive of Satan will be very great. His business will be to commend the Beast to whom Satan gives his power and throne and great authority; him the false prophet, or Beast from the earth, will commend to mankind by signs, wonders, and miracles, even fire from heaven in men's sight, to cause them to obey the Beast from the sea whom Satan has set up imperially as man's glory and boast.

It is one fashion of present unbelief to deny the existence of Satan, the adversary. There can be no greater cause of any falling into his toils; because when miracles and wonders are done, they will be ascribed to God, and thus men will give credit to Satan and be deceived. But scripture (and a sad and woeful sign of Satan's power is it when scripture is kept from people's hands) is express on the subject, that as miracles were wrought at the beginning of Christianity, so miracles at the close of the age will be from the evil one, not from God. Men then will have no eyes to discover the deceit, but will wonder and worship. The false prophet will without doubt find his representatives, who by the same deceit will commend the same lie to those subject to them, not to God; indeed of all whose names are not written in the slain Lamb's book of life. It is a sure word that Christianity falls not into forgetfulness or ignorance like heathenism, but into apostasy, and in the fullness of human intelligence and hatred of Christ.

The false prophet will receive his doom with the head of the Roman Empire, which is yet to rise from the abyss, as we learn from Rev. 17 and other places of scripture in the N. & O. T. Testaments. Comparing this with chap. 8:11, we have his miracles to deceive. But he has also the character of a worldly power, as in Dan. 11:36, &c.

It is not said that the prophets mentioned in 1 John 4 do any miracles. Their task is more ordinary; their primary character is, that they do not confess Christ come in flesh. They say as it were "Who is Lord over us?" They speak as of the world, and of its religion. But the time comes when the world, through hearing of them, is ripe in the deceivableness of unrighteousness to fall into the last snare of the enemy. At length the great false prophet, and those connected with him, will bring men into the last measure of deception and rebellion against the Lord. The time is not far off. It is written that in the last time false prophets shall come on the earth and speak by the power of antichrist. And this is written to warn and quicken those who confess the Lord, that they also be not deceived. P. T.

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