

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Fifth Sunday After Easter, May 9, 2021**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 210 (50:2) 334, 290, 283

Lessons: Psalm 23; Ephesians 2:4-10; John 14:1-6

Sermon Text: 1 John 4:1-6

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Fellow Redeemed:

This Sunday is traditionally the last Sunday in the Easter season. The Easter season sermon texts emphasize newness of life for sanctified believers in Christ. Even as Christ was raised from death to life, so we should walk in newness of life. Paul writes, ***“In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus”*** Romans 6:11. This newness, this renovation or sanctification, is a process that is to continue throughout our lifetime as Christians. It should always become more clearly evident from our way of life that we are no longer serving Satan, sin and our flesh.

We give evidence of such sanctification when we distinguish between true preachers and false prophets, and between true doctrine and false doctrine. God does not ever send out false prophets. That is Satan’s doing. God hates all false doctrine. Satan promotes false teaching because it helps to accomplish his evil work of misleading people and causing them to lose their soul’s salvation.

St. Paul tells regenerated Christians, ***“You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord,”*** Ephesians 5:8-10. The instruction in our text will help us to walk as children of light. So let us learn:

**THE CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE TOWARD FALSE PROPHETS AND FALSE DOCTRINE**

- 1. Test all preachers because there are many false prophets;**
- 2. Judge them according to their confession and examine their doctrine.**
- 3. Know for a certainty the difference between truth and error.**

***“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”*** You have probably heard about or read about the credibility gap. Something credible is something believable. Those who speak of the credibility gap are questioning the reliability of what some people, particularly leaders, say. In our text God makes it clear that there is definitely a credibility gap so far as preachers are concerned. God instructs us not to believe every preacher we hear. ***“Do not believe every spirit.”*** We should not believe every person who comes to us and claims to be bringing us God’s Word.

What are we to do then? Our text says, ***“test the spirits to see whether they are from God.”*** To ***“test the spirits”*** means simply to put the preachers to the test to see if they are really sent by God or whether they come in their own name and preach their own opinions instead of God’s Word.

It should be pointed out that this testing is to be done by all Christian hearers of the Word, not merely by pastors. We may ask the help of our pastor or anyone who has thoroughly studied the Scriptures. But the testing is our responsibility. God tells us to do it. God does not want us to think that this is a matter for someone else and none of our concern. And the language of our text indicates that we should always become more able and proficient in doing this as our knowledge of Scripture doctrine increases.

Why we must all keep on doing this is told us in our text, ***“because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”*** In the early days of the Church when John wrote the words of our text, there were already many false prophets. There were false apostles; false teachers called the Cerinthians and the Nicolaitans and others. Think of how many there are today! In our day we are especially concerned about the false teachings of many who claim to be Christians, even Lutherans, and of Mohammed and his Muslim followers. Peter warns us about these last evil days of the world, ***“There will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them – bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute,”*** 2 Pet. 2:1-2. Jesus warns that ***“many false prophets will appear and deceive many people,”*** Mat. 24:11.

Now, the question is how shall we do this testing? Our text teaches us to **judge preachers according to their confession and to examine their doctrine.**

2.

***“This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.”*** Our text says nothing about trying to judge preachers to see what is in their hearts. That is God’s business alone. Only he can examine a man’s heart. Our responsibility is to examine the confession and doctrine of the preachers. But how are we to do this if we do not know the doctrines in the Scriptures? It is self-evident that we must be instructed in doctrine and that we ourselves must study God’s Word. This is the main purpose of going to church and Bible Class. But, more than this is needed. At home too we are to study the Scriptures and learn from our Bible reading. If we do not do this, then our instruction and learning for the most part has been limited to the time when we were instructed before being confirmed. Then also we are not capable of doing what our text says every Christian should do.

What confession of faith are we to look for when testing the preachers? Our text speaks of acknowledging that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. It would be a serious mistake to think that this refers only to the Virgin Birth of Jesus or the doctrine of Jesus the Son of God taking on himself the human nature. To acknowledge that Jesus Christ came in the flesh includes every teaching about Jesus and what he came to do on this earth as our Savior. It includes the entire Gospel of Christ. Therefore any confession or any doctrine which denies any part of the Word of Christ is a false doctrine. He who makes such a false confession concerning Christ is a false prophet.

The religion of Islam is a good example of not acknowledging Christ. It teaches that Jesus is not the Son of God, just a great prophet. Let us also examine the confessions and teachings of the Roman Catholic Papacy. The Papacy does not deny that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who came into this world as a man born of the Virgin Mary. But the Papacy does deny that we should trust alone in Jesus for remission of sins. It teaches that in addition to faith in Jesus, good works are also necessary for salvation. The Papacy also teaches that we may come to God through Mary, that we should pray using the Rosary, using these words: “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.” The Bible teaches that Jesus is our only Mediator. ***“For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men,”*** 1Timothy 2:5-6. The Papacy teaches that the pope’s official pronouncements are to be regarded as infallible truth, and that those who deny this will be eternally damned. Luther wrote, “Obedience to the supreme pontiff is the highest form of worship,” (Luther’s Works, Vol. 30, p. 288). This shows that the pope ***“opposes and exalts himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, and even sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God,”*** 2 Thessalonians 2:4. The pope teaches that he is the Vicar of Christ on earth, taking Jesus’ place as Head of the Church. This and many more false teachings identify the Papacy as the antichrist.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, (ELCA), despite some good-sounding words on the home page of its official website, must also be regarded as a false-teaching church. That church body tolerates women pastors, homosexual pastors and recognizes denominations such as the Presbyterian Church (USA) (since 1997), The Episcopal Church (since 1999), and the United Methodist Church (since 2009) as “full communion partners”, meaning that “there is nothing that is church-dividing.” Orthodox Lutherans recognize the real

presence of the body and blood of Christ in, with, and under the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. Reformed churches such as the Presbyterian Church and the United Methodist Church claim that the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper merely represent the body and blood of Christ. Such unscriptural doctrine and practice identify the ELCA as a false-teaching church.

This is how we are to judge the confessions of any church body: We are to examine the doctrine the church publicly teaches to see if this is what is taught in the Holy Scriptures. This we are to do also with the doctrine and confession of any preacher who professes to be a Lutheran. This may sound strange to us because of all the propaganda spread by the false churches engaged in the false ecumenical movement. But remember this is not our idea. This is God's command. ***"Test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."*** We should not hesitate to do this judging, for God wants us to **know for a certainty the difference between truth and error.**

3.

John writes in our text, ***"You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world."*** This is said to comfort us. There are many false prophets. The devil has sent them and he is very powerful and also very sly in trying to deceive us. But the devil and all false prophets cannot overcome us because Christ is on our side. He dwells in us by faith. He says to us, ***"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom,"*** Luke 12:32. He also promises, ***"Whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God,"*** Luke 12:8.

We can know for a certainty who is a true prophet of God and who is a false prophet. John says, ***"They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us, but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood."*** False prophets are popular in the world. They speak of things that attract the majority of people. Prof. P. E. Kretzmann gives us a guide to go by in this respect. "If a certain preacher is widely advertised and acclaimed as a prophet for our times, he has probably managed to accommodate the old Scriptural language to some of his own philosophy in denying the fundamentals of the Bible." See how this is true, for example, with Billy Graham. He is very popular in the world. What he says about God's love and Jesus dying for our sins is true. But, his unscriptural teaching of conversion and the Means of Grace quickly identify him also as a false prophet. He teaches that people have to make the decision to accept Christ as their Savior and then they will be saved. But the Bible teaches, ***"No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit,"*** 1 Corinthians 12:3b. The Holy Spirit works only through the Means of Grace, the Gospel in Word and sacrament. He has to create the faith in man's heart. It's not man's decision to make.

Jesus told the Jews who did not believe in him, ***"He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God,"*** John 8:47. Jesus told Pilate, ***"Everyone on the side of truth listens to me,"*** John 18:37b. You and I can know for a certainty who is a true prophet and who is a false prophet by determining whether or not they bow in obedience to every word of Christ in the Bible. You and I can know for a certainty the difference between truth and error by judging all teaching according to the one infallible standard which is God's Holy Word.

May God give us the grace to cling to his Holy Word, to use it faithfully, and to regard it as our only guide and rule in all matters of doctrine. Doing this, we may also rejoice in Jesus' promise, ***"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free,"*** John 8:31-32. Amen.

(Adapted from a Ministry By Mail sermon for April 30, 2006.)