

Speaking to the soul



False teachers

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. 1 John 4:1

There have always been false teachers, but they must have been particularly difficult to face in the early Church. Many Christians would have come from completely different religious and philosophical backgrounds, and few of the church leaders would have had much education. It would have been extremely easy for articulate people to creep into the Church and lead people astray. Anyone can claim to speak by the Spirit, and it is not surprising that many young impressionable Christians simply accepted what they were saying. What John wanted to do was to encourage every Christian to test what they heard.

Jesus himself was well aware of the challenge from false teachers. In the Sermon on the Mount, he said: “Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves. You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act” (Matthew 7:15-16). Jesus was saying that the lives of prophets must ring true. A prophet who is unkind, rude, bitter, unforgiving or unloving couldn’t possibly be a true prophet.

There were many different false teachings floating around in the early Church, but John was particularly concerned about those who were denying that Jesus was really human. He was very blunt: if someone did not acknowledge the truth about Jesus, he concluded that person did not come from God and had the spirit of the antichrist. False teaching wasn’t just unfortunate, but was to be avoided and resisted at all costs.

In a world that is teeming with false prophets, we all need to be on the alert. John declared that we can be confident as

we do so because the Holy Spirit is greater than the spirit who lives in the world, and he will lead us into all truth.

QUESTION

What are the false teachings which we need to be careful to avoid today?

PRAYER

Loving God, help me to listen to the voice of your Holy Spirit day by day. Amen

Photo - Church flowers

