



The Reflector

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True or False

Irven Lee

(Deceased)

This article is not a commentary on the merits and demerits of a certain type of test for pupils in a classroom, but it is intended to point out a need for the testing of spirits. 1 John 4:1 states our theme in a very impressive way. “Beloved, believe not every Spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.”

The aged apostle knew the two greatest commandments, and he emphasized them much in his life and in his teachings. He was not in love with worldliness, heresy, or with the hypocrisy that characterized some “false prophets.” He could sincerely call humble and faithful brethren, “beloved,” but his term for those who brought in damnable heresies was “false prophets.” This is an often repeated expression in our New Testament.

John asked the disciples in his day to “believe not every Spirit.” Has there ever been a day when the devil did not have counterfeit prophets working among the faithful? Peter was looking backward over the centuries before him when he said, “There were false prophets also among the people.” (2 Peter 2:1-3). He immediately pointed toward our day and even beyond, no doubt, when he added, “There shall be false teachers among you.”

It is impossible to agree with all the doctrines taught by the religious world around us. These doctrines are often contradictory. It is sad but true that it is impossible to agree with all who call

themselves gospel preachers. Twenty years ago the churches were confused over the theory of Premillennialism. The theory was right or it was wrong. It could not be both. Truth could free congregations of this disturbance if plainly taught and humbly accepted. The same could be said of the problems of the instrument in worship, the missionary society, and other problems that have disturbed the church in America.

There is a correct answer for every disturbing problem. Please believe this. (2 Tim. 8:16-17). Our grandchildren may see the answers to our problems better than we. We see the fruits of the digressive movement, but it is too late for the great minds of seventy-five or a hundred years ago to see the fruit of their big mistakes. Division came, truth suffered, and souls were lost because they did not see their errors then and correct them.

We cannot agree with every preacher now any more than one could honestly be on both side of the questions concerning the missionary societies, instruments of music, and Premillennialism. There is a correct answer to each disturbing question now as there was then. Seek the truth (buy it and sell it not) rather than halt between two very contradictory doctrines. The church may do its work through church supported hospitals, schools, camps, benevolent societies, and “sponsoring elders,” or it may not. To take both sides sincerely is an impossibility. The liberals and conservatives

now are as far apart as the liberals and conservatives were seventy-five years ago. Can any informed person deny this?

Our text suggests that we “try the spirits whether they are of God.” We cannot believe them all, but we can try them all. How are we to try them? One good answer comes through the centuries from another troubled age. “Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.” (Jer. 6:16). This just means that one should get off the fence of indifference and find the narrow way of truth and holiness. One must seek to find. One must knock if he would find an open door. Only those who study can “handle aright the word of truth.”

The old paths are much older than some practice of twenty-five or forty years. We are to look in the scriptures for commandment, example, or necessary inference since the Lord’s ways are as far above our ways as the heavens are above the earth. We are to “walk by the same rule.” (Phil. 3:16). We are to “speak as the oracles of God.” (1 Pet. 4:11).

The Bible was written for you if you are willing to obey. (John 7:17). Christ preached his sermons to the common people who could understand. The “doctors of the law” had closed their ears so they could not understand. Are you distressed? You are if you love the church. You are if you are aware of the powerful divisive forces abroad in the land. You surely “have great heaviness and continual sorrow” in your heart as you see the Israel of God scattered

as sheep having no shepherd. (Rom. 9:1-3). Are you confused and uncertain whom you should follow? Then remember the Lord’s invitation to follow him. No man goes to the Father except by him. Are you pinned to the coat tail of some “scholar” among us? No human ties should hinder your pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul called others “false prophets.” (2 Cor. 11:13). Evidently he had been accused of being a false apostle himself. The last few chapters of 2 Corinthians defend his apostleship. Christ was here to oppose Beelzebub, but some said he was Beelzebub. True prophets were called false prophets and were bitterly persecuted. Do you know an exception? That was Stephen’s question in Acts 7:52. Paul, in defending his apostleship for their sake, said, “Not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.”

Your senses must be “exercised to discern both good and evil.” Your decisions in the coming months will effect the church in your community, your children’s spiritual welfare, and your eternal destiny. If you rely on a man to point out the true servants and the true doctrine he may point to false teachers and damnable heresies. The man may be heretic himself. You could not tell by his power of oratory, his scholarship, or his personality. Let us turn to the law of Christ and to the testimony of our God. Let each of us study for himself and examine himself as we strive to “try the spirits”. (Preceptor, Volume 8, 1959)

Part-Time Christians

Stephen Russell

When seeking to find employment, most people look for a job that fits their needs. “I can only work twenty hours a week,” or “I need these days off.” In the world of employment this is to be advised; find a job that works for you. In the realm of serving God, this approach will not be tolerated.

Many take this angle with the assembly of the saints. “I want to attend on Sunday mornings,” or “I will attend so long as nothing else comes up.” Surely we can not hope to please God with such an attitude. Let’s put aside for a moment the fact that we ought not forsake the assembly (Heb. 10:25).

Consider the reason for the assembly; “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works” (Heb. 10:24). We are giving and receiving a stirring up of love and good works. We need the assembly. So when we approach it as a place where we clock in or out and “put in our hours” our perspective is off. We shouldn’t plan to miss any of the services. Rather it should be one of the things we look forward to on a weekly basis. Someone asks, “Will I go to hell if I don’t go to church?” I’ll answer in the words of a good friend, “You’ll come a lot closer by not wanting to!”

Then there are those who consider their time assembled as “church-time”. When the last prayer is said “church-time” is over. Now it is time to go back to the daily walk of life (whatever that may be). These are those for whom “church” is something that is done. It is little more than an item placed on one’s agenda. There may be various reasons for their attendance. Perhaps they grew up going to church and figure that it is something that ought to be done. Could be they are trying to make their spouse happy or want their children to have good influences. Some even attend simply to make social contacts with the community. Whatever their reason, they are done with God when the closing prayer is said. For the Christian, our service to God is not measured by our time spent in a pew. We must be continuously serving God (cf. Rom. 12:1-2).

Finally, there are those who do attend faithfully. They do participate in the worship services as well as in the work of the church. Yet still, they hold back from God. They are willing to show service to God only up to a point. Perhaps even sacrifices are made for the cause of serving Him. Schedules are set aside or money is spent to render due service to the Creator. However, there comes a point where the line is drawn. These are those who are willing to serve God until it gets too hard or to “unreasonable”. Unfortunately for these, God is not satisfied with such wavering devotion. Paul says that we ought to be living sacrifices, and that

this is our “reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1). So then, after we have offered our lives totally over to God, we have merely done what was reasonable.

How then should we deal with such actions as these? The answer is, of course, found in the word. First of all, part-time Christians are seeing God in the wrong way. We must not draw near to God and say, “What are you going to do for me?” The fact is that He has already and continues to do for us. He gives us the breath of life to get out of bed in the morning (Acts 17:28). He blesses us with rain and sunshine whether we deserve it or not (Matt. 5:45). He gave the most precious gift He could give when Christ was crucified (Rom. 5:8). To all this, what can we offer in return? Only our complete and total devotion. We offer Him our service every waking moment of our lives. No matter where we are who we are around or what the consequences may be, we serve God. That is what it means to be a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1-2). When it comes to this service, there are no days off. In fact, there are no moments off: it is a “full-time” position in the truest sense. We cannot put Christianity into a compartment of our lives. It is reasonable that we act somewhat differently at different times during the course of the day. When we are at work we behave in the manner befitting our profession. When we are at home we behave as a spouse or parent ought to. Surely there are some differences. But here we cannot insert being a Christian. Christianity must span every aspect. There can be no occasion or situation in which we say, “Now is not the time to behave like a Christian.” We must always behave like Christ (1 John. 2:6).

So then we offer this service to God. We devote every waking moment to walking in the light of God’s word. Now what? The answer is don’t stop! If we ever do reach a pinnacle of service to God where we believe that we have done all that is commanded us we must know that we have gained God nothing. We are “unprofitable servants” says Luke’s account (Luke 17:10). We must recognize that our service to God is not for His profit but

rather for our own. Herein lies a fundamental difference from our illustration at the beginning of this article. When one is searching for employment, it is likely that he has something to offer the employer. When we come to God we have nothing

that he needs (Acts 17:25). He has everything we need. Let us then come to Him willing to put our whole lives to His service and hold nothing back from the one who is the source of all blessings.

A Word or Two about Congregational Singing

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

“Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,” (Ephesians 5:19 NKJV)

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” (Colossians 3:16 NKJV)

I am hearing and reading a lot about how Christians need to improve their congregational singing. It only takes a casual observer to see that most congregations could improve. While we are improving we need to keep in mind that scriptural congregational singing has both a vertical and horizontal purpose, neither of which is entertainment.

The vertical purpose is directed to the Lord from a grateful heart (the word translated “grace” has an element of gratitude in it). The “grace” and “melody” in our hearts is directed “to the Lord.” Songs of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord are in order. But there is the horizontal purpose of “Speaking to one another” or “Teaching and admonishing on another.” The purpose is not to “entertain one another” nor “hyper-emotionalize one another.” Teaching is directed to the intellect of man. It requires learning and reflecting on the “message” of the songs. Little learning can take place when the song service is turned into a highly charged songfest geared to sweep the worshipers up into an emotionally fueled state of mind. We should always be suspicious of any song service that appeals more to the feet and bodily joints than it does to the head. Also, songs should

be avoided that are either written or modified to jazz them up to the point that the worshiper cannot concentrate on the message of the songs because it takes all his concentration power to keep in step with the complicated arrangement of the song.

Should not our singing be an emotional as well as an intellectual experience? Of course, it should, as should all other acts of worship to God. But, in no act of worship can we allow our natural emotions to flow unfettered. As always, our emotions should be subservient to our intellect (thinking) rather than allowing our thinking to become subservient to our emotions. Even in the highly charged atmosphere of exercising spiritual gifts at Corinth, Paul had to remind the brethren that “the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.” (1 Corinthians 14:32-33 NKJV) They could not just let themselves “go with flow,” they had to control their “spirits” so as to keep things decently and orderly (v. 40).

Until people understand that the public worship experience is primarily an intellectual exercise designed to praise God and edify (build up) the worshipers and not to satisfy the emotional desire of worshipers to satisfy their “felt needs,” they will not truly worship God “in spirit and in truth.” Are we saying that worship should be emotionless? It should be offered with all the feelings of love and gratitude that we can muster in our hearts. But we should control our emotions in worship as we do in all aspects of our lives, rather than letting our lives and worship be controlled by our emotions.