

Introduction

In our day everyone seems to be talking about the Holy Spirit, and arguing over his work. Yet few people seem to know how to recognise when the Spirit is at work at all, how to tell the true from the false. This book is written to help.

No age has ever seen more of the power of the Holy Spirit than the days of the Apostles. His miraculous gifts were seen in great abundance; he was also at work convincing large numbers of men and women of sin and making them holy disciples of Christ.

At the same time, the devil was equally active producing false miracles and false gospels. The New Testament makes it clear again and again that there were imitators of God's work all around. For this reason it was absolutely necessary that Christ's church should be given rules and clear marks of God's work, so that Christians would be able to tell the true from the false and not be led astray. One chapter of the New Testament is particularly devoted to this issue, and that is 1 John chapter 4. More fully than any other chapter in the Bible this one tells us how to recognise when God really is at work. The apostle John gives us several ways of recognising the true work of the Spirit to make absolutely sure that no-one misunderstands him. He does so clearly enough to enable us to use his rules safely in our own churches. It is surprising therefore that people do not pay more attention to this chapter today; so many mistakes could have been avoided.

John begins by mentioning that we know we are Christ's when his Spirit dwells in us. 'Those who obey his commands live in him and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.' (3:23) From this we understand that the apostle does not just want us to know how to tell a true prophecy from a false prophecy, or a God-given miracle from a false one. He also wants us to recognise when the Spirit is at work in his people saving them and giving them greater maturity in Christ. This will be even more obvious to us when we look at the things he says.

First though, before John tells us how we may recognise the true from the false, he warns us about two things.

The first warning is this; we must not be too ready to believe anything that claims to be a true work of the Spirit. 'Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God.' (4:1) Not everything that *claims* to be God at work really *is* God at work; and it is important to understand this.

The second warning is that there are many false powers: 'because many false prophets have gone out into the world.' (4:1) These people not only pretend to have great revelations from God but also to be among heaven's favourite people, more holy than others! This verse commands us to examine both claims. Sadly, we cannot just believe what people say; nor can we assume that every power at work is God's power.

So, using this chapter, I want to show you what are reliable proofs that God is at work, so that we may correctly judge anything that happens to us or to others. We must realise that God has given the Bible to guide us in spiritual things; it infallibly tells us all we need to know. We need not be afraid to trust the rules God has given; the Holy Spirit inspired the Bible, and knows enough to recognise his own work! He has also given us enough guidance to help us

recognise his work too.

As I said earlier, the Spirit sets out to give us these rules in this chapter more completely than anywhere else. In this present book therefore I will not examine other Scriptures to see what rules they give us; I shall limit myself to this chapter. It is sufficient, and I think we will find it a great help.

But because this current revival has attracted much criticism, I cannot start with things that prove that God *is* at work. People point at some of the things that are happening and say ‘That proves that God is not at work; the revival is therefore false.’ That is a serious charge to make, and I must answer it. So first of all I will look at some of the things that have been quoted as proof that this revival is false, and show that they prove no such thing! In fact I will show that they prove nothing at all, good or bad. They do not prove that God *is* at work (though some are ready to claim that they do) and they do not prove that a work is false (though some claim that they do).

What are these things that prove nothing?