

Daily Devotions from Lutheran Hour Ministries *-used with permission*

"Testing the Spirits" October 17, 2015

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. 1 John 4:1

There may be preachers out there who have the gift of healing. I'm not one of them.

That being said, I have to confess I am always amazed to see crowds rush to a service where the man up front says, "I've been told by God there is someone here in the audience who has an illness, an illness of the stomach. They have had that illness for over six years, and that illness is being healed right now."

Understand, I'm not saying it can't happen, but I wonder why, if God is really telling the preacher about this individual, why doesn't the good Lord also share the man's name and address or, at the very least, point out the section, row, and chair where the man being healed is sitting.

I think that kind of questioning is part of what John was saying when he wrote, "Test the spirits to see whether they are from God."

But there's more to testing the spirits than asking questions about faith-healers. We also would do well to test the spirits of those who feel the Lord has directed them to point out what they consider to be the flaws, failings and foibles of Christianity.

A good example of that came to light years ago when a woman wrote to the Presbyterian radio minister J. Vernon McGee. In her letter the lady shared, "Last Sunday, our preacher said that on Good Friday Jesus just swooned on the cross and that the disciples nursed him back to health. What do you think?"

McGee replied, "Dear Sister, in answer to your question, what I would suggest you do is this: beat your preacher with a leather whip for 39 heavy strokes. Nail him to a cross. Hang him in the sun for six hours. Run a spear through his heart. Embalm him. Put him in an airless tomb for three days. Then see what happens."

McGee was right in testing the spirits to see if they had come from the Lord.

But there's one more area, a most important area, where these spirits need to be tested. Many pulpits today are working very hard at being meaningful, pertinent, interesting and innovative. That's all fine and well, but sometimes the single-minded pursuit of such things can take preachers away from the Word of God.



That is why every message a listener hears ought to be tested to see if it comes from the Lord. Does that message point with crystal clarity to the Christ and how He lived, died and rose so sinners might be forgiven and saved?

Or does it point somewhere else?

Of course, many people would say, "I don't know enough about the Bible to test a sermon."

If so, that's a shame, but might I suggest a simple plan. When I was little, about nine or ten, I snuck into the pulpit at my home congregation in Chicago. I only remember one thing from that venture. Carved into the stand that held the pastor's Bible and notes were the words, "Sir, we would see Jesus."

That's how you test the spirit of a sermon to see if it has come from the Lord. *Has it shown you Jesus?* Has that message pointed to the sacrifice of the Savior, which forgives our sins and saves our souls?

THE PRAYER: Dear Lord, give me eyes that can't be distracted, bamboozled or confused by the devil's work. Grant that I may test the spirits and follow only the directions set by the Holy Spirit. In Jesus' Name I ask it. Amen.