

TRYING THE SPIRITS

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Thursday evening, August 1, 1844

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God." 1 John 4:1

There are two evils in the human heart, which, when thoroughly ripened and brought to a head, become, the one, gross superstition, and the other open infidelity; superstition crediting everything, however false; infidelity believing nothing, however true. These two opposite evils, being closely bound up in the heart of every man by nature, assume various shapes and gradations in different persons; and do not, in every individual, reach the same height, or attain to the same development. And, indeed, one of these evils will be usually more marked in some individuals than the other; the bias of some being more to superstition, and the bias of others, more to infidelity. Generally speaking, the weaker the mind, the more superstition preponderates; and the stronger the mind, the more does infidelity prevail.

As, then, we watch our minds, **and if God the Spirit is at work upon our conscience, He will make us watch its internal movements,** we shall find these two evils, more or less, continually working. If we observe, also, the minds and movements of others, we shall find these two evils similarly developed in them. For instance, in every church there are members who would superstitiously receive, as a man of God, well nigh every minister who stands up in a pulpit; they are so overrun with natural superstition, that when a man stands up in the name of the Lord, a secret awe falls upon their mind, and they almost adore him as a servant of God, though he is perhaps the veriest hypocrite

that ever disgraced his profession. In other members of churches, the opposite feeling, a spirit of suspicion and incredulity, is found to work, so as scarcely to receive any one as a true gospel minister. Were the administration of the affairs of the church and the choice of ministers put solely into the hands of the former, the pulpit would be open well nigh to all; were it confined to the latter, it would be almost too narrow for anybody. Thus, between these two evils, our own minds, and the minds of others, are continually balancing; and only God the Spirit can give us a right judgment in all things, and keep us from being overcome by superstition on the one hand, or by infidelity on the other.

The Apostle John, in his day, saw both this superstitious and this infidel spirit working. There were some that "believed every spirit:" and there were others that "denied that Jesus Christ was come in the flesh." Just as there is a counterfeit to every coin of the realm, and the Government could not issue a new coin which would not immediately be imitated; so, in proportion to the power and depth which God displayed in the times of the apostles, did Satan put forth counterfeit power and counterfeit depth. Did the Lord, in those days, make bare His arm, and work more manifestly and conspicuously than at other times? Satan raised up his counterfeits, and brought powerful antagonists to oppose the wonderful work which God was carrying on. Thus, in the primitive churches, evil spirits were abroad, raising up erroneous opinions, entangling men's minds in delusion and error, and seducing them into doctrines of devils. And thus, as the Spirit of God worked powerfully in the members of God's family, the spirit of evil worked powerfully in the children of Satan.

The Apostle John living at a late period of the Apostolic age, and writing his Epistle, but a short time before his decease,

seeing how many of these seducing spirits then were abroad, warned the believers to whom he was writing against a superstitious reverence to all who stood up in the name of the Lord: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because," he adds, "many false spirits are gone out into the world."

The injunction, then, is **not** to believe every spirit, but to "try the spirits whether they are of God." You will observe, the Apostle does not enjoin his beloved brethren to try men's words, but to try their **spirits**. It is not **words**, so much as the **spirit** in which words are spoken, that really act upon the mind. **Words** come and go, according to the vulgar saying, "they come in at one ear, and go out at the other;" they leave no abiding impression; but the **spirit**, either for good or evil, that is, the working of God the Spirit on the heart, or the working of Satan, the evil spirit, in the carnal mind, leaves an abiding impression for good or evil. John, therefore, does not bid us watch men's **words**; for a man may say anything, and the baser and blacker a hypocrite he is, the more boldly and confidently can he speak. Nor does he bid us weigh **men's actions**, though actions are often great indications of men's minds; but he carries us beyond both words and actions, and, by bidding us watch men's **spirits**, takes us into the secret chambers from which words flow, and to the hidden springs by which actions are influenced.

"Try the spirits." Weigh and examine the spirit of a man, whether it be of God. Now, in doing this, a man taught of God will first **try his own spirit**; and when he has tried his own spirit, he will be in a proper situation, and not before, to try the spirits of others.

With God's blessing, then, I shall endeavour this evening to show how a child of God is called upon not to believe even his own spirit, but to try it, whether it is of God; when he has done this, and come to some little decision in his own mind, how then he is to go forth with these scales that have been suspended in his own heart, and try the spirits of others; and by the same scales, and by the same influence, that he has come to some decision upon himself, to arrive at some decision upon them.

I.—When God the Spirit quickens a man's soul into spiritual life, He takes possession of him, makes his body His temple, dwells in him, lives, moves, breathes, and acts in him and upon him. This is the privilege of every living soul—that the Spirit of God is in him, making his body His temple. Now the Spirit of God in the soul cannot lie inactive; He cannot be inert in a man; He must work, and that powerfully and effectually. As, then, the Spirit of God sheds abroad light and life in the conscience, He communicates power, wisdom, and discernment to the soul wherein He dwells. In the light of His own shinings, in the life of His own quickenings, do we see and feel His operations in our heart and conscience. And when, as He gives us light to see and life to feel, we compare His dealings in the heart with what we read in the Scriptures, and thus bring the word of God to bear upon what the Spirit is doing in us, we have a twofold evidence on which to stand, and are not ashamed of our hope.

Now, just in proportion as the Spirit of God works feelingly and experimentally in a man's heart, will Satan, that evil spirit, work in his carnal mind, and by working on our depraved nature, bring forth those evil fruits which are so bitter and painful to every tender and exercised conscience.

Let us look, then, at what the Spirit of the Lord is and does in a man, and how we try our own spirit to see whether it is of God.

1. Wherever the Spirit dwells, He is the **Spirit of wisdom and understanding**. We find this spoken of the Spirit which rested on Jesus. "The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the **spirit of wisdom and understanding**, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord" **Isa 11:2,3**. The Spirit dwells in Christ without measure; but He dwells in measure in His members. His gifts and graces were given to Christ without measure, but they are given in measure to Christ's people. The Holy Ghost rested on the human nature of Christ as a Spirit of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding: and so in His members He is also a Spirit of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding; and He thus gives them a knowledge of the truth of God. So that the truth of God being seen in the light, and felt in the life of the Spirit of God, as our inward teacher, we are brought to see and feel what God has declared in the Scriptures to be eternal truth. Thus, His threatenings and warnings, His purity and holiness as declared in the Law, and what too in the gospel He has revealed concerning Himself, are known, felt, and believed to be true.

2. But the Spirit of the Lord in a believer's heart, is not merely the Spirit of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, but also a **Spirit of fear**; as we read of the Spirit that rested upon Christ, that it was "the spirit of knowledge and **of the fear of the Lord**." Not, indeed, of "the fear that hath torment," but of filial and godly fear, of that fear which is a "fountain of life to depart from the snares of death." So that, wherever the Spirit of God takes up His abode in a believer's heart, He is in that believer a fountain of life bubbling up in all the sensations and emotions of godly fear.

3. Again. The Spirit, in the heart of a child of God is a **Spirit of prayer**. The promise especially runs, "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications." **Zec 12:10** And the Apostle says, "We know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered." **Ro 8:26** The Spirit of prayer is given to the soul when God the Spirit first falls upon it; and the Spirit of prayer never ceases out of the heart till prayer is lost in eternal praise. It may indeed, like water in a well, sink so low as to be scarcely visible; and it is always subject to fluctuations. Sometimes it seems, like a river at low water, almost to have ebbed out; but then the tide rises, and the stream flows once more; so the Spirit of prayer once more flows forth into the ears of, and meets with an answer from God Himself.

What a mercy it is, what an inestimable blessing, to have something of the Spirit of prayer in the soul, to feel it working in us powerfully, working in us daily; to know what it is to go to a throne of grace, with pantings, longings, and breathings after God's manifested presence; and to feel springing up all those inward feelings by which the Spirit of supplication is ever attended. And thus, not to come before the Lord with dead formality or lip-service; but to go as Hannah went, and "pour out our hearts before the Lord." Sometimes when we go before the Lord, cold, dead, and lifeless, the Spirit of prayer powerfully springs up, and we are enabled to pour out our petitions before the throne. Sometimes we come burdened, and by pouring out the heart before the Lord, leave the burden at His feet. And sometimes, as the Spirit of prayer rises up in the heart, light is cast upon the path wherein we are walking, the temptation is broken wherein we are entangled, and the snare made

manifest to us; and light, life, and feeling are experienced in our soul.

4. Again. Wherever the Spirit of God dwells in a man's heart, He stamps upon him that mark which the Lord took notice of as so conspicuous in King Josiah. "Because **thine heart was tender.**" **2Ch 34:27** What a mercy, what an inestimable mercy to have bestowed upon us a tender heart; and to have that promise fulfilled in our experience! "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." **Eze 36:26** What a mercy to have a heart in any measure softened before God; to experience some dissolvings away under a sense of His goodness and mercy; to feel an inward yielding of our soul to the touch of God, as the wax yields to the seal, and the clay to the potter; to have a rebellious heart broken, so that we cannot any longer go on kicking against the pricks, nor run recklessly and heedlessly on; to find a measure of tenderness before the Lord, so as to mourn over sin as a bitter thing; and when the base backslidings of our heart are opened up, and the guilt of them lies upon our conscience, to fall beneath it, the sinews of self-righteousness being cut in twain, and to be melted down into godly sorrow and contrition at His feet! And what a curse a hard heart is that feels nothing, that submits to nothing, that falls down before nothing, but is armed, like leviathan, even against the terrors of the Almighty! What a mercy for you and me, if we have known and felt anything of a heart made tender before the Lord, so as to want nothing but to experience His heavenly fingers in our soul moulding us after His own blessed image, as the potter's hands mould the clay into the vessel he intends to make!

5. Wherever the Spirit of God dwells in a man's heart, He also dwells there as a **Spirit of faith.** As we read, "We

having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak." **2Co 4:13** Not but that a living soul feels, nay, deeply feels the opposite workings of the spirit of unbelief in him; not but that he is tried, and that at times powerfully, with the workings of atheism and infidelity; not but that at times it seems to him impossible to believe the simplest truths of God's word. But in spite of all these, there is such a thing as feeling in the conscience a spirit of faith; and that quite a different thing from the implicit confidence of superstition, whereby a man believes delusion and error. The spirit of faith does not believe anything; it believes only what the Spirit of God reveals to it. It is not a dead faith, that gives credence to Satan's lies: but being "a spirit of faith" in the soul, it receives only such truths as God the Spirit reveals to the conscience, brings with His own divine authority, and seals with His own heavenly witness on the heart. What a mercy it is sometimes to feel this spirit of faith within: to find that when the Lord brings the promise, there is a hand in the soul to receive it; when He applies His rebukes to the conscience, there is an inward submission to them; and when truth comes with power to the soul, there is an inward spirit felt, whereby that truth is received in love, tenderness, and affection, and there is an embracement of it in its beauty, glory, and power in the conscience! This is as different a thing from the superstitious credence of a Papist or a Puseyite, as light from darkness, or heaven from hell.

6. Again. Wherever the Spirit of the Lord is in the soul, He is there as the Spirit of a **sound mind**; as the Spirit speaks to Timothy **2Tim 1:7** "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." And it is a mercy, a great mercy, to have a sound mind. A sound mind is one not attracted by every passing novelty, that does not receive every wild doctrine, is not caught by every

rushing blast of enthusiasm, is not turned aside by the deceptive powers of Satan as an angel of light. The Spirit of the Lord being in the soul as a spirit of a sound mind, receives only sound truth, such truth only as is commended to the conscience, and such as only the spiritual understanding sees, spiritual faith embraces, spiritual hope anchors in, and spiritual love enjoys. What a mercy it is for people where the minister has the "spirit of a sound mind;" who is not caught by every doctrine that comes floating forth on the wings of novelty, not attracted by every false light that Satan may raise up, not deluded by delusive experiences, nor the blaze and glare of fleshly holiness; but in the "spirit of a sound mind," discovers the real from the counterfeit, and brings forth that which he has tasted, felt, and handled of the word of life. This spirit of a sound mind will keep him steady and upright amid all the delusions of the day, and preserve him single and sincere amidst all the tossings to and fro of the winds of error.

7. Again. Wherever the Spirit dwells in a man's heart, He will be there a **Spirit of love**, for "the love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost." This will produce love to Jesus, as the only hope of salvation; love to the people of God, because the heart is united to them in the bonds of sympathy and affection; love to the truth, because it is brought with power into the conscience, and a sweetness found in it more than of honey and the honeycomb.

8. Again. Wherever the Spirit of truth dwells in a man, He is there a **spirit of uprightness and integrity**. Such a one will never call evil good, or good evil; will never put light for darkness, or darkness for light; will never mistake bitter for sweet, or sweet for bitter. But there will be in him a spirit of honesty, integrity, and godly simplicity, whereby, whether in himself or others, that which is right is known to be right,

and that which is wrong is known to be wrong. So that no artificial coverings, no false glossings, no hypocritical designs, no enthusiastic pretensions, can long hide from him what truth is and what error is, whether working in his own mind, or manifested in that of others. By this spirit of integrity, when he errs or falls, it is acknowledged; when he backslides, he deeply bewails it; and when he is entangled in Satan's snares, he mourns and sighs on account of it.

Now such and similar marks will there be in every one that has received the Spirit of God. And by these marks, so far as the Lord the Spirit shines upon them, we may try ourselves and try others. True religion, vital godliness, will always have a peculiar testimony in the conscience of its possessor; there is a power in it which may be counterfeited, but never can be mistaken by those who have felt it. And as a man lives under the testimony and shinings in of the Spirit, he will have I do not say an abiding witness, for he will have great conflicts, will be shot at by Satan's fiery darts, and harassed by the infidelity of his depraved nature; but he will, at times, have an inward witness that he is a partaker of the grace of God, by feeling the operation of the Spirit bringing forth these graces and fruits in his soul. Having this inward witness of the Spirit, he sees his experience contained in every page of the Scriptures: and having his understanding enlightened in the truth, he perceives how in the Psalms and in the Prophets, in the Old Testament and in the New, that the men of God were similarly taught and exercised. And thus finding his experience so powerfully confirmed by the testimony of God's saints in the word, he will go forth with his twofold witness, to put into practice John's injunction, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God." **That** is the great point he has to do—"try the spirits;" that is, to weigh, to examine, to bring to the touchstone, to discern, so far as the Lord shall give him

wisdom, the spirits, whether they are of God; not to take things for granted; not to receive everything from the pulpit with implicit submission; not to allow the extinguisher of priestcraft to be put over his judgment; but as far as God the Spirit enables and teaches him, to try the spirits that come before him whether they are of God.

Now this does not imply any great boasting or confidence on the part of him that tries; nay, rather, he cannot try the spirits himself until he is clothed with humility. It is only so far as he is possessed of a broken heart and contrite spirit that he is able to try them aright; for he has to try them not in the flesh, not as thinking himself a man of wondrous judgment, not with carnal ideas of his own discernment, to say, "I will try this man or that." But covered with humility, having godly fear powerfully at work, feeling the spirit of contrition in the soul, he goes forth tenderly, warily, and watchfully; and in that secret court of conscience where God has tried him, and in that heart where God the Spirit dwells, does he try the spirits whether they are of God. There is much harsh judgment, and hasty, rash cutting off in many persons that springs from bad temper, envy, jealousy, pride, suspicion, want of love, a morose and sullen disposition, vanity and self-conceit. A man may cut and slash on the right hand and the left, and call this "trying the spirits," when he is only giving vent to his own pride and self-importance, and is but an instrument in the hands of Satan to harass and distress God's people. This is not the "trying of the spirits" that John speaks of.

II.—But let us now look at some marks of that spirit which is not of God; and which God's people feel in a measure in themselves, and see more fully developed in others.

1. One mark of the spirit which is not of God, is **a spirit of hardness**. I use the word "spirit," because the Scriptures speak in the same way of "the spirit of error," **1Jo 4:6**, "of antichrist," **1Jo 4:3**, "of whoredoms," **Ho 4:12**, and so on. We read that "the Lord hardened Pharoah's heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go." **Ex 10:20** And we read, "God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear." **Ro 11:8** A spirit of hardness, then, is an infallible mark of the spirit not being of God. By hardness, I mean the opposite of tenderness. Opposition to God's truth, an unwillingness, an inability to fall under the power of it; setting up our prejudice, our pride, our preconceived opinions against the solemn authority of God, and maintaining a rugged, unbending, unyielding temper.

Now this is a very different thing from firmness. Gospel firmness and judicial hardness are two very different things. A man cannot be too firm when God the Spirit has meekened his heart, and made the truth precious to him; but he will not have hardness of spirit; he will fall in a moment before truth. Let God only bring one of His people upon His heart; let Him only touch his conscience with His finger, and he is broken to pieces. But it is not so with the heart that is hard; neither law nor gospel has an effect there, but even a profession of religion is carried out in an unyielding spirit, a hard, self-opinionated perverseness.

Now we are called upon to "try the spirits." But wherever there is a spirit in man it will communicate itself to others. Spirit is of a diffusive nature. It is so naturally. The wind that blows in our face, and impels ships on the broad seas, spreads itself from place to place, and fills every corner; there is a certain impulse connected with the wind that makes it universally felt. So spirit is diffusive, whether the

Spirit of God for good, or the spirit of evil for evil. Now, do you try the spirits of men in this way. Try the spirits of the companions with whom you associate, that make a profession of religion; see whether there be any hardness in them, an unbending temper; see whether what is said to them on divine things make any impression; whether there be any softness, brokenness, tenderness, or any yielding of themselves to the truth of God. And if you sit under a sound ministry, watch whether the minister has a hard spirit. You will soon discover it, if God has made your conscience soft and tender, as Job said, "For God maketh my heart soft." **Job 23:16** Watch whether his words fall as if they came from a hard heart. If so, they will communicate a similar measure of hardness to you. You will find, instead of that tenderness, softness, and contrition that you felt in times past, there will be a creeping over you by gradual steps a numbness, a hardness, a searedness, whereby truth seems to have lost its power; it does not sink into the conscience, nor carry with it that humbling impression it formerly did. How much the beginnings of this fearful evil are like the letting out of water! When once a man's heart begins to be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, or whenever a hard spirit is communicated from the pulpit to the people, it is the beginning of a fearful evil; and, if God prevent not, it will lead to awful backsliding.

Sometimes we feel the spirit of deadness within, but that is a different thing from the spirit of hardness. People say, "How hard and dead they are." But they are two different things. A man may feel dead, and unable to move his soul Godward, and yet not be hard. For he feels if God put forth His power, his heart will become like wax to the seal. Deadness is the absence of good and right feeling; hardness, the presence of bad and wrong feeling; so that deadness and hardness are not the same thing. But sometimes there is in us a spirit of

hardness also, which steels our hearts against God's dealings with us in providence however kind, and mars that softness of conscience which we once had. But how a child of God dreads lest this hardness should grow upon him!

2. A spirit of **vain confidence** is from the devil; and you are to try whether the spirit that comes before you is of this kind. Sometimes we feel vain-confidence creeping upon us; a spirit of presumptuous assurance that does not spring from the Spirit's inward witness; a sort of fleshly confidence, that when it works brings death into the soul. I know the feeling well; a proud daring boldness, which is as different from God's teachings and leadings as hell is from heaven. Now, as we feel the workings of this vain-confidence in ourselves, it opens our eyes to see it in others; and as we detest the spirit in our own hearts, we cannot but abhor it in theirs. For myself I must say, of all persons, I would least choose for my companions those who have much of this vain-confidence; and of all preachers, those whom I would least wish to hear would be those in whom it is most manifested.

There is such a thing as true confidence given and maintained by the Spirit. Every grace and fruit of the Spirit will attend this; and its companions will be humility, godly fear, contrition, tenderness of conscience, deadness to the world, prayerfulness, and heavenly-mindedness. But the confidence that rests upon the doctrines of grace in the letter only, is a confidence that God never gave. It is usually little else but health, strength and good spirits carried into religion; and its general companions are pride, worldliness, covetousness, frivolity, levity, self-indulgence, and carnality. Depend upon it, this vain confidence in minister or people is death to all that is good. When once a vain-confident spirit takes hold of them, and they can rest in a dead assurance, and believe and talk as though they were going to heaven, whilst they know nothing of the Spirit's inward teachings and

testimony, and are not broken down in godly fear, it will be the death of everything good and spiritual in that people and congregation. When ministers get possessed of this vain-confident spirit, it will be sure to spread itself. Spirit, as I before said, is of a diffusive nature; it will communicate itself. And if a man stand up in vain-confidence, and you give him your ears and heart, if God the Spirit do not mercifully break the snare, depend upon it, that vain-confidence will soon spread and grow upon you.

Look, and see whether you are now standing in this vain-confidence. Perhaps, some years ago you had more doubts, fears, and exercises than at present; but you say, "Now I have lost them all; and can talk more confidently of going to heaven!" But what has been the cause of the removal of these doubts and fears? What has made them take flight, and brought you out of them into this confidence wherein you now stand? Has it been by the liftings up of the light of God's countenance upon you? Has the Lord Himself raised you out of the dust, given you the inward witness of the Holy Ghost, and softened, melted, and humbled you by His teaching? In a word, is your confidence felt in a broken heart and a contrite spirit? Is your soul dissolved at times in godly sorrow, and brought into sweet communion with a broken-hearted Jesus? Or does it rest merely in the doctrines of the Bible? Have you borrowed it from some minister? Do you speak confidently because the members of your church do so; and because doubts and fears are generally scouted and ridiculed where you attend? Does your assurance rest upon the letter of the word without the inward witness and sealings of the Spirit? Depend upon it, if it stand not in the inward witness and testimony of the Spirit, it is a spirit of vain-confidence, however subtle and refined. And you had better be harassed with doubts and fears all your life than get out of them in any other way than God's way.

3. A spirit of **presumption** and **irreverence** in divine things is a sure mark that the spirit is not of God. I think of all painful things to a living soul, one of the most is to see a spirit of irreverence in the things of God. Lightness, frivolity, irreverence in the pulpit; a talking to God as an equal, instead of lying at His feet as a suppliant—how painful a spectacle to the soul that has been taught to tremble at His word! I do not say a man of God may not be entangled in this snare; but where can his conscience be, not to see the awfulness of approaching a holy God without reverence of His dread majesty? What says the Scripture? "Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire." **Heb 12:28,29** How the Lord has visited with the hottest tokens of his displeasure those who dared to rush irreverently before Him! How Nadab and Abihu were consumed because they offered strange fire! **Le 10:1,2** How Uzzah, because he touched the ark, not being a Levite, was smitten by the immediate judgment of God! How more than fifty thousand of the men of Bethshemesh were smitten with a "great slaughter," because they dared irreverently to look into the ark of God! **1Sa 6:19** Is He not the same holy, jealous Jehovah now? And will He suffer any man to rush into His presence with irreverence, and talk to Him as though he were His fellow? O where can a man's conscience be, who can go before the Lord without some reverence and godly fear in exercise?

Now this spirit is diffusive, like every other spirit, for good or bad. Tender, reverent feelings soon get damped; and if we do not take an early alarm, and heed the first admonitions of the Spirit, we know not how soon the same irreverence may creep upon us. A man may as well think he can expose his face to the wind, and not feel it blow upon him, as expose his conscience to an irreverent spirit, and think it will produce no

injurious effect. "Try the spirits," then, and see whether they be of God: see whether this familiarity of approach to the throne of grace in yourself or others be the spirit of irreverence and presumption, or whether it be the inward teachings of the Holy Ghost in a tender conscience.

4. Thinking lightly of sin; talking about it as though it need never grieve or trouble a living soul; peaking of it in a reckless manner, as though it did not matter whether we lived to God's glory, or to our own worldly ease and advancement; in a word, making sin appear anything but that horrible thing which God hates—that abominable thing which caused the Son of God to agonize, bleed, and die; is a spirit which is not of God. The Holy Spirit of God will never lead a man to think lightly of sin; nay, He will make his very heart at times almost bleed under it. There are some who deny that a believer can backslide. If they had ever felt what has passed through my soul, they would almost weep tears of blood, if blood could flow down their cheeks, that they have such base adultery and such vile idolatry striving for dominion in their carnal mind. It is greatly to be feared that an Antinomian spirit widely prevails in the Calvinistic churches, and is, for the most part, propagated from the pulpit to the pew. An unexercised minister, with a sound creed, soon drops into carnality and self-indulgence; sin becomes packed on the old man and the devil; and the doctrine of grace is easily substituted for the power of grace. But any preaching that allows or encourages a hearer to walk in forbidden paths, to indulge his flesh, to live prayerlessly and carelessly, to slight the precepts of the word, and scorn all reproof and rebuke, and all the time maintain a towering profession, is not from the Spirit of God, but a spirit from the devil—a spirit fraught with the most pernicious consequences.

Now we are to **"try the spirits."** We are not to submit implicitly to what every man who stands up in a pulpit may choose to say. We are not to receive, as written by the Spirit, every book put into our hands that is called a religious work. We are not to believe every word that is spoke by persons professing a sound creed. We are commanded, God the Spirit calls upon us, to "try the spirits" by our own experience, and by the doctrine, experience, and precept recorded in the book of God. Now, do so, my friends. I would charge it upon your conscience. Do see what impression the things connected with religion have upon your minds. Look at the religious books you read: see what impressions they leave upon your heart. Look at the persons professing godliness that you associate with; see what effects attend their conversation. Above all, look at the ministers you hear; and see what impressions they leave by their ministry on your conscience.

O, if I were to come to this chapel, as I do once a year, and go away feeling that I had left the people more hardened, more presumptuous, more trifling, more vain-confident, more reckless by my ministry, I should never desire to enter this pulpit again. My desire is, God knows, that something spiritual, something profitable, something abiding, some permanent fruit may come out of my labours; that the spirit communicated from my lips may be a spirit for good, a spirit of humility, a spirit of brokenness, a spirit of contrition, a spirit of godly fear, a spirit of separation from, and deadness to, the world and all its pleasures, a spirit of love, a spirit of communion with the Lord of life and glory, a spirit which shall bear some feeble resemblance, some faint likeness, to a sorrowing, suffering, broken-hearted Jesus. And if a man has any other object in view, except to be an instrument in God's hand, to communicate a blessing to God's people, whereby some may be called, others comforted, and all the Lord's

people have the work of grace more deepened in their conscience, and the word of God more powerfully felt in their hearts, and more powerfully brought forth in their lives,—if a man has any other motive, and stand up in any other spirit, he is a disgrace to the name of a minister of the gospel. Now do you try what effect the ministers whom you hear have upon you. When you hear preaching, you that have consciences, secretly examine what impression has been left upon your heart. As you pass through the streets on leaving the chapel, do you find that some rain and dew have distilled in your consciences? Does the spirit of prayer seem more increased—the evils of your vile heart more opened up—your refuges of life more discovered—the Lord Jesus more endeared—the power of eternal things made more manifest to your soul? Is there in your heart a desire to be alone, that you may secretly pour out your soul before the Lord, and look up to Him that He would come down manifestly and bless you?

If you go away from this chapel, from hearing any one that preaches in this place, with your heart moistened refreshed, softened, the love of the world mortified, sin crucified, your soul cast more into the mould of Christ's likeness, your affections drawn heavenward, you have received good; and the Spirit, which is of God, has been in a measure communicated. But if you go away from this chapel, or any other, and feel hardened, careless, vain-confident, puffed up with I know not what notions; and the next day can rush into the world with redoubled ardour, and take what the minister says for a fresh motive to plunge more eagerly into business and the things of time and sense, O beware of the snare that this may be made to you. Let the deacons and members take care to have "men of God" to stand up here, and to flee from all other ministers as they would from a pestilence. And so far as the deacons are men of discernment, they will "try the

spirits:" they will not be seeking merely for men who shall draw great congregations, obtain the largest collections, bring most persons into the church, or most advance the temporal prosperity of Zoar. Let all such carnal motives fall. If they are men who fear God, and have the Lord the Spirit as their teacher, this will be their prevailing motive—to obtain such ministers as shall profit the souls of the people most, and who have the most evident traces of the Lord being present to bless their word. They will, when the ministers have left, watch the effect of their ministry; what crops of fruitfulness spring up to God's glory: what godly sorrow, brokenness of heart, love to God, love to the brethren, spirit of prayer, deadness to the world, appear as its fruits: and their desire will be, that every good word and work should abound in the church to the glory of God.

Thus, as far as the Spirit of God is your teacher, you are called upon to "try the spirits whether they are of God." And thus, a child of God will have, more or less, perpetual cause for inward trial. Sometimes he will be trying his own heart, to see how God is dealing with him: and it will be his happiness if he can find some sweet testimony that the Lord is dealing with him in mercy. Sometimes he will try the books that come before him, (for, "the ear trieth words, as the mouth tasteth meat,)" **Job 34:3**: and he will cast aside every book, however sound in doctrine, that does not communicate grace to his soul. Those works, written by gracious men, which have power and feeling, such as Hart's Hymns, Bunyan's Grace Abounding and Pilgrim, and Huntington's Works, will be his chiefly prized books, that his soul, under the Spirit's teaching, may be imbued with some of the rain and dew that fell upon those blessed men.

And, as he tries the spirits, he will get more weaned from a name to live, with a few doctrines floating in the brain; and

he will see men and women in different colours from what he did in times past. Those will be his chief religious associates who are most humble and tender-hearted, and most free from gossiping and religious newsmongering; whose conversation is most seasoned with salt, whose conduct is most consistent and self-denying, who walk most solitary and alone, and whose religion generally is most of inward life and feeling—to such he will feel a close union, and of such he will say, "With these do I wish to live and die." And as the Holy Spirit leads him more and more into vital godliness, he will be more thoroughly weaned from the flesh in all its forms, will desire to live more under the bedewings and droppings of God the Spirit, and will come to this solemn conclusion in his mind, that five minutes communion with the Lord of life and glory, and to live under His teachings and anointings, is far better than all the intercourse he can have with the world, or all the conversation he can have with the people of God. Thus his religion will be narrowed up into a smaller compass, so as to consist more simply and singly in the inward dealings of God with his soul. And as he is brought more and more into the furnace, the dross and tin of his false religion will be more taken away, and he will come forth a vessel meet for the Master's use, more purged and refined, with more of the image, mind, and likeness of Christ stamped upon him.

Now, it may take us many years spiritually to see these things, and more to feel their power. We may know them in early days, but not very deeply. I can, I hope, say for myself, that ever since I felt the power of eternal things, I have contended for the life and power of vital godliness. Thus, when I was in the Church of England, buried under a whole dust-heap of formality, I used to preach the same things I do now, so far as I was led into them, though I did not then know there were such persons as experimental preachers, or

such works as experimental books. But, as the Lord taught me, I spoke as I felt, feebly indeed, I confess, and in much ignorance and darkness, but simply and sincerely. And now, it is the desire of my soul, to cleave to and contend more singly and simply, not for notions and forms, but for the inward teachings, guidings, and leadings of God the Spirit in the conscience; to know nothing, but by His teaching; to be nothing, but by His making; and to have nothing, but by His bestowing. And thus, if the Lord be our Teacher, we shall desire to live more to the Son of God, and less to ourselves, to cease from the creature, to be like clay in the hands of the Potter, and the desire of our souls will increasingly be, that He would work in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure, and make us what He would have us to be.