

Sermon Response Guide
January 7, 2024
1 John 1 “Telling the Truth about God” with Pastor Phil Rushton

Sermon Overview:

We are beginning a new series this week on the book of 1 John. I’ve titled this series “Lessons in Discernment.” This book has much to teach us about how we can discern what is true about God, ourselves, and how we ought to live. In the fourth chapter of the book we read: “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” The community that receives this letter is embroiled in some heated debates about what God is really like, and what it means to be a disciple. The writer points out that not everything that is ascribed to God is truly of God. We need to learn to test or discern what is right and true.

As we embark on a new year together, I wanted to begin by engaging this theme of discernment. The new year can be an ambitious season. We often see it as a fresh start and a time to set goals and make plans. At a corporate level, this is also a time where we are visioning and looking ahead together as a church. We are preparing for our annual meeting in February, building budgets, looking ahead to what God is asking of us. If we are not intentional we can easily run out ahead of God. Or, like this first disciples, we can ascribe to God that which is not really of God. This letter reminds us that we can easily run the risk of baptizing ideas and dreams that aren’t actually in line with the heart and mission of Jesus. There are other influences, other spirits, other theological assumptions at work that we need to be aware of.

The first lesson on discernment that comes to us in chapter one deals with a very foundational question. How do we discern what God is like? How do we tell the truth about God?

While this may not initially seem like a very practical question, I would argue to the contrary. A.W. Tozer once wrote, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” A dysfunctional image of God leads to a dysfunctional pattern of living. If we think, for example, that God is keeping score on our life, or is angry with us, we may end up living a life that is motivated by fear, anxiety, or striving.

In 1 John 1 we read this: “God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.” Unfortunately, many of us are working with pictures and images of God that are tinged with darkness. There are many things done in the name of Jesus, or said in the name of Jesus that are not good and not true.

In the sermon today, we explore how the truths spoken in 1 John 1 heal some common dysfunctional or limited images of God.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What stood out to you in the text / sermon today?
2. What comes to mind when you think about God?
3. How has your picture of God changed over the years?
4. How do we discern what God is really like?
5. What causes our picture of God to become distorted or dysfunctional?