

“TEST THE SPIRITS.”

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Scripture Texts: I John 4:1-6

Introduction.

We are getting used to John’s way of writing. He makes constant use of contrasts to help us understand the truth.

If we say we have no sin, versus if we confess our sin.

I am not writing a new commandment, but an old commandment.

Darkness and light; hating our brother and loving our brother.

Love for the world, love for God.

False prophets and true prophets

The spirit of the antichrist and the Spirit of God.

In our text John says “from God” six times and “from the world” six times. John is very concerned about two spirits which lead to contradictory confessions concerning Christ.

Here is the problem. Those who are from the world and not from God are now in the church. Therefore, we must learn how to discern the spirits, how to eat the meat and spit out the bones.

If you don’t pray for and develop spiritual discernment you place yourself and your family in danger of being carried along by the popular winds of doctrine and making shipwreck of your faith. Countless millions have been led astray.

False Teachers: Discernment of False Spirits (4.1-6)

Notice again John starts with *beloved*. He loves his flock. These hard words are an expression of love. It is love to warn others of danger. This is the love of God for us and to us.

Objective Test: Doctrine (4.1-3)

Notice the negative and positive contrasts. Don’t believe every spirit, test the spirits.

John is using the word spirits as a catch all, not just for spirits, but for false prophets, preachers, and teachers. Basically anyone in spiritual authority who is leading and teaching.

John says don't believe every spirit, but test the spirits. ***How do you do that?*** What's the first step? The first step is you have to believe there are spirits to be tested. You must have a category in your head that there is such a thing as false teaching and false doctrine.

Some Christians believe that if a person says they are a Christian then they are, and whatever they say is trustworthy. Some people pull the judge not lest you be judged card. Some people think that questioning other people's beliefs is being unspiritual. Who are we to question, who are we to decide if something is true or not?

Why should we test the spirits?

Our text gives us two reasons for testing the spirits and questioning other's doctrine.

First, Scripture itself commands us to do so, and that should be reason enough.

Second, Scripture also tells us why we ought to, because ***not every spirit is from God*** and because ***there are many false prophets*** and preachers out there in the world. There are evil spirits, unholy spirits, and the enemy of truth himself, Satan.

All spirits, human or spiritual, fall into one of only two categories, Spirit of truth which is from God or spirit of error which is from the antichrist.

You must not be naïve, and think that all people who claim to be Christians really are Christians and that all people who act really nice and genuine and sincere are telling the truth.

There is fake news and there is fake doctrine and fake Christians. You cannot believe everything you hear, so don't believe everything you hear.

Just because something is spiritual or supernatural doesn't mean it is true. The supernatural is not always divine, it can also be demonic. There are two sources of power in the universe, one good and one evil. They are not equal, but they are powerful.

Who is supposed to do this testing? Pastors and professors of theology? Trained professionals? Elders? Who does John say? He says beloved. That means us, all of us. And average church member, all the saints. This is not just the job of the pastor or elders, but all of us.

It is the spiritual responsibility of all Christians to have both belief and unbelief and to judge, weigh, discern and examine both sides.

Do what the Bereans did to the Apostle Paul.

Acts 17:11 Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

You can test the spirits and test the prophets. If they are true they won't mind being tested, as Paul didn't mind, but actually commended them for doing so.

We need the spiritual gift of suspicion and skepticism. We need to be doctrinal detectives. If we love the truth then we will test it in order to protect it, guard it, defend it and stand up for it.

What is the test?

Let me mention some things that are not proofs of a true spirit. Being able to do great and miraculous signs and wonders are not proof. Tongues and healing are not necessarily proof. The devil can do them. Great passion and fervor and excitement are not proof, great energy is not proof. In other words, outward signs and phenomena and experiences are not proof.

If both sides look and sound and act genuine and both claim to have the Spirit of God and speak in the name of Jesus, then how can you really know the difference? Which one is a wolf in sheep's clothing?

John gives us the ultimate test first. ***It is the Jesus test***, what do they do with Jesus, what do they say about Jesus.

Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. Every spirit that doesn't confess that Jesus [has come in the flesh] is not from God.

The litmus test centers around the person and work of Jesus.

First, they must confess that Jesus is the Christ, the anointed Messiah from God. Second, they must confess that Jesus is the Incarnate One, God come in the flesh.

Jesus is not just a man who did some good things and said some good things. And Christ didn't just make an appearance on earth like in the OT visitations, but fully took on our humanity, our flesh. He is now fully God and fully human.

This is foundational doctrine. Get this wrong and you will go wrong on everything else. The supreme heresy is to deny the incarnation and deity of Jesus Christ and rob Him of His glory.

This is another way of saying the test is a Scripture test, because Scripture teaches us what to believe about Jesus. Does this person's teaching and preaching conform to Scripture?

The Spirit of God will always honor and glorify the Son of God. That is how you will know if the spirit is from God.

John 16:14 He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

The greatest test of a true Spirit is that the true Spirit always glorifies Christ. He will always give Jesus the supreme place. That which doesn't glorify Jesus, is not from Jesus.

John was writing just 50 years after Jesus and already the world is full of antichrists and false spirits and false preachers. That should tell us something about how big a deal Jesus is, that there is so much negative press stirred up by Satan. He absolutely hates Jesus and will use every means possible to discredit him.

The world has never ceased to be without false prophets and preachers, those who deny some truth concerning Christ and the Gospel.

How important or serious is this today? Are there false preachers and teachers and authors?

Are there lots of Jesus' out there? The internet and local bookstore is full of them.

There are the "Jesus" authors: Marcus Borg, Dan Brown, Bishop Spong, Anne Rice, Rob Bell, all who reject some aspect of the Biblical Jesus.

There are the prosperity Jesus preachers and TBN preachers. Joel Osteen, Creflo Dollar, John Hagee, Kenneth Copeland, T.D. Jakes, Jesse Duplantis, Joyce Meyer, Paula White. You may be inviting them into your home you turn on TBN. Way too many of the preachers on there are financially motivated, are prosperity preachers, are charlatans. There is nothing about their lifestyle that looks like Jesus and His Gospel. Don't watch TBN without I John 4:1

There are the Jesus cults, JW, Joseph Smith (Mormonism), Mary Baker Eddy (Church of Christ, Scientist), Deepak Chopra (new age alternative medicine guru), Edgar Cayce (father of holistic medicine and into reincarnation).

Then there are the world religions with varying degrees of intersection with Jesus, Mohammad, Gandhi, and the Dalai Lama.

There is the Jesus of pop-culture and celebrity culture, Jesus is my boyfriend, Jesus is my co-pilot, Jesus is the big guy upstairs.

All cults, sects, false religions, have at their core a denial of Jesus as the Son of God. This is the point of departure. This is what makes them liars. This is the key mark of an antichrist.

Lots of Jesus' to choose from. Who will we listen to? Don't follow the popular Jesus, the cool Jesus, the social-activist Jesus, the pacifist Jesus, the rebel Jesus, the Republican Jesus, the vegan Jesus.

The Bible says Jesus is the Son of God and very God of very God.
They say he was a really good man.

The Bible says Jesus is the only Savior, the only way to be saved.
They say Jesus is a savior, one way among many.

The Bible says if you follow Jesus you will suffer and sacrifice and face trouble and persecution.
They say if you follow Jesus you will have health and wealth.

The Bible says Jesus died on the cross to appease the Father's wrath and save us from our sin.
They say penal substitutionary atonement is cosmic child abuse.

The Bible says Jesus rose bodily from the dead.
They say it was all in their imagination, a myth, a Passover Plot.

The Bible says Jesus ascended to heaven as Lord.
They say that's another myth.

The Bible says Jesus is coming again to bring judgment and divide the sheep from the goats.
They say God is love and "Love Wins" and all will be saved.

There are lots of counterfeits.

Our son, Zach, works in a coffee shop as a barista. He has a strange habit of scratching the lapel on Andrew Jackson's coat on twenty dollar bills. A few months ago for the first time when he did that it was smooth, it didn't scratch. It was a counterfeit.

You don't have to study heresies and delve into error. All you have to do is know the truth, know God's Word, love the real thing. They error will be plain to you.

Follow the Biblical, apostolic Jesus. The Jesus the apostles saw and heard and touched and wrote about.

The greater Spirit.

This is the reason why you are able to test the spirits, because the Spirit who is in you is greater than the evil spirits that are in the world.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. And one of the works of the Holy Spirit is to give wisdom and discernment. If you ask He will help you.

I Corinthians 2:12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.

What news, what welcome news. In this world filled with devils and evil, He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world.

“We can no more be conquered than God himself, who has armed us with his own power to the end of the world. ... Victory is certain” (John Calvin).

You are God's children, you are from God, and you have conquered, you have overcome, it is already true, a stated fact. How did you do it? The greater Spirit who is in you did it.

The world is strong, evil is strong, wickedness is strong. But God is not just stronger, God is infinitely strong.

Are the false prophets and preachers wise? Sure, but God is not just wiser, but infinitely wiser.

And the one who is infinitely stronger and wiser and greater is in you. Do you believe it? Do you live as though that is true? Do you preach this truth to yourself?

If you can confess with your lips and believe in your heart that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, then you can know that the Spirit of God is in you.

Test the spirits, confess Christ, trust in the Holy Spirit who is in you, know God's Word.