

Test the Spirits, Part 2

1 John 4:1-6

A young mother who was part of a Christian music group told this story: One night as we were packing up after a concert, we sent a young woman to pick up our children from the home they were staying in. Since the children didn't know her, I told her to give our son, Trevor, our secret family code word so he would know she was authorized to pick them up.

A little later I received a phone call. Trevor refused to leave because the woman hadn't given the right word. The mix-up was on my part--I had said the code was "Dinosaur Monster," which my son informed me was incorrect. "It's Dinosaur!" he said.

"Are you sure? I was certain it was Dinosaur Monster," I replied.

"I'm sure," said Trevor confidently. He knew the right word, and even though he was given words that were very close to the real thing, they weren't true—and he knew the difference.

"Well, OK, son," I carried on. "You're probably right. But it's OK for you to come back to the church with this lady."

There was silence on the other end of the line. Then Trevor said, "Who is this?"

How do you know if someone is telling you the truth? Last week we began looking at 1 John 4. We saw that John tells us to "**test the spirits**" because there are spirits behind "**many false prophets**" who "**have gone out into the world.**" Before we trust any teacher, we must "**test the spirits.**" Behind every prophet, behind every teacher of scripture is a spirit. The great question is, "*Does the Spirit of God or an evil spirit lead this teacher?*"

We saw that the first of the criteria John gives for testing the spirits is: **How Do They View the Son of God?** (vv.2-3). We saw that what a teacher says about Jesus is all important. If someone is wrong about Jesus, he is wrong about God. To deny that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is to say that we have no Savior. Jesus can only be the Lord and Savior if He is both God and man. There is no Gospel, no good news, if Jesus, the Son of God, did not come in the flesh, live a perfect life, die a substitutionary death, rise from the dead on the third day, and ascend to the throne in heaven. This is the truth of the gospel that we must believe to be saved. That is the first test, "What do they believe about Jesus?"

This week we will look at the other two criteria that John gives for testing the spirits.

I. The Command to Test the Spirits (v.1).

- A. Why We Are to Test the Spirits.
- B. What it Means to Test the Spirits.
- C. Failing to Test the Spirits is Dangerous.

II. The Criteria for Testing the Spirits .

- A. How Do They View the Son of God? (vv.2-3).
- B. What is Their Relation to the Spirit of God? (v.4).

"You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."

1. In saying that believers "**have overcome them**" John is telling us that the false teachers have not succeeded in deceiving his readers. From chapter 2 we know that some of the false teachers and their followers had left the church. In 1 John

2:19 he writes, **“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.”**

2. Why had they **“overcome”** them? Not because they were smarter, stronger, or more intelligent than the false teachers, but because of the Holy Spirit who lives in them. **“He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”** Although, Satan is great and his spirits are many, the Holy Spirit is greater!

3. John had said that believers all have the Holy Spirit who teaches us. In 2:20 he says, **“But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things.”** And again in 2:27, **“But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.”**

We all have insulation in our houses. Insulation keeps the warm air in and the cold air out or visa versa. The Holy Spirit is the God-given insulation in the believer’s life who helps us keep out error. The Holy Spirit is our truth detector. Have you ever heard a sermon or listened to religious discussion and thought, **“Something doesn’t sound right?”** That is the Holy Spirit filtering out the error and leading you in truth.

At times like that we need to pray, to go to God and ask Him to teach us the truth by His Holy Spirit through His living word. We need to go back to the scripture and read it, study it, meditate on it, and pray over it. John assures us that by the Holy Spirit in us we will overcome the spirits of the false teachings. In the Gospel of John, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the **“Spirit of truth.”** He says in John 16:13, **“However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.”**

Aren’t you glad that Jesus did not just leave us alone to figure it all out by ourselves? He sent us help. He gave us the indwelling Holy Spirit of God, the Spirit of truth to guide us. And the Holy Spirit always guides into truth, never into a lie.

If I play a musical note with a frequency of 440 Hz, the note you will hear will be a perfect A above middle C. An A is 440 Hz today; it was the same a thousand years ago and will still be the same in the next millenium. It is absolute. Truth is absolute; it does not change with time. Jesus is absolute; His nature, character, and purposes do not change. Heb.13:8 says, **“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”**

Here is the third test:

C. Are They in Harmony with the Word of God? (vv.5-6).

5 “They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. 6 We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.”

1. Notice three pronouns in vv.4-6. In v.4 John speaks of **“you”**, the Christians to whom he is writing. In v.5 he speaks of **“they”**, the false teachers. In v.6, he speaks of **“we”**, the God-ordained apostles, like John.

2. Now in v.5 we see that **“they”**, the false teachers, are heard by **“the world.”** When John writes about **“the world”** here he is writing about the same ungodly system that he spoke about in 2:15-17. There he said, **“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is**

not in him. For all that is in the world; the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life; is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever." This is the same "world" of which he said in 3:1, **"Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him."** And in 3:13, **"Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you."** Already in chapter 4 we have seen that this is the same world into which the false prophets have gone out (4:1); and into which the spirit of the antichrist has come (4:3).

The world recognizes its own and listens to their message. One of the easiest ways to recognize a false teacher is by whether the world readily accepts him and his teaching. If our teaching does not bring even a little bit of opposition and hatred from the world, then maybe we need to test whether or not we are really teaching the truth.

3. When you are at your job and you speak about the truth of Jesus, chances are someone will say, **"I don't want to hear that!"** Why? Truth divides. People want to feel good about themselves. Truth always makes them take a hard look at themselves.

4. When I prepare a sermon, I don't ever ask, "Will they enjoy this message?" or "Will it make people feel good?" My goal is not your entertainment but your edification. Truth may not always be comfortable, but it will always be helpful.

5. In this church we wear the name Baptist but our allegiance is not to the "Baptist Faith and Message," (as much as we may agree wholeheartedly with it) or any other confession, but to the Lord Jesus Christ and to the truth in the Bible. Just because it is a Baptist teaching does not necessarily mean it is a biblical teaching. We **"test the spirits"** and the chief measuring stick is the Scripture!

6. Look at verse 6. John says, **"He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us."** Now, if I said something like that about myself it would sound extremely arrogant. I would never say that. It would be prideful and presumptuous for me to say, **"Whoever knows God agrees with me and only those who don't know God disagree with me."** Maybe you've know a few preachers have that attitude, but I hope I am never that full of myself.

7. John is different. John is an apostle; I am a pastor. John was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write the words of Scripture. To agree with the apostles is to agree with Scripture. Eph.2:20 says the church is **"built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets."**

8. Turn the page in your Bible to **2 John 9-11**. There John writes, **"Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds."**

Churches met in houses in those days. And traveling prophets often stayed in those houses and church members provided for them. John was saying don't let them in the church, and don't help them by putting them up. The church must test doctrine by the teaching of Christ and His apostles that we have in the Bible. John says, **"By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error."** In this church we discriminate doctrinally.

In order to survive under the water, you need special equipment. Scuba gear enables a diver to

live and function in a hostile environment. In the same way, the Spirit of God and the Word of God enable us to function in the hostile environment of the world.

"If you are unaware of what God has written in the Bible, you will likely listen to what Satan whispers in your ear." - Bill Gordon

But the Bible will not do you any good unless you read it often, read it prayerfully, and read it obediently.

"Side By Side"

They lie on the table side by side
The Holy Bible and the T.V. Guide.
One is well worn and cherished with pride.
Not the Bible, but the T.V. Guide.
One is used daily to help folks decide.
No, not the Bible, but the T.V. Guide.

As the pages are turned, what shall they see?
Oh, what does it matter, turn on the T.V.
So they open the book in which they confide.
No, not the Bible, but the T.V. Guide.

The Word of God is seldom read.
Maybe a verse before they fall into bed.
Exhausted and sleepy and tired as can be.
Not from reading the Bible, from watching T.V.

So then back to the table side by side,
Lie the Holy Bible and the T.V. Guide.
No time for prayer, no time for the Word,
The plan of Salvation is seldom heard.
But forgiveness of sin, so full and free,
Is found in the Bible, not on T.V.

We can navigate a course by the use of a compass. A compass points to the north because of the magnetic field. Christians can navigate life by responding to the "true north" of the Word of God. We have the Son of God over us, Word of God before us, and the Spirit of God within us. Let us **"test the spirits"** and the teaching of anyone who claims to speak for God.