

# TESTING THE SPIRITS

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## 1 John 4:1-6

**2**Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

**1**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. **2**This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, **3**but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

**4**You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. **5**They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. **6**We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

We have been going through the book of 1 John for several months now. As you hopefully will remember, the Apostle John is encouraging his audience in how we are to recognize authentic Christianity – not only to assure ourselves but also in order to be aware of the false teaching that we encounter. John was writing to local Churches who were being bombarded by false teaching and specifically with the Gnosticism which was prevalent at that time. The Gnostics didn't believe that Jesus really came in the flesh – because they believe that all flesh is evil. They also believed that they and they alone had a secret knowledge. This false teaching created many doubts among believers – am I really saved? – as well as was leading many astray to follow these false teachers. As we have studied earlier in chapter 2, John wants his audience to be able to recognize the false teaching so it doesn't create these doubts but he also wants us to be confident and assured of our position as Saved followers of Jesus Christ.

Today, let us look at 3 principles that John discusses in these verses and how they relate to our need to 'test the spirits'. As we enter into Chapter 4, let us remember how we ended chapter 3 where John tells us that the mark of our salvation is the Spirit which God gave us – remember the indwelling and sealing Spirit of God. But then as we begin chapter 4, we are told how we can recognize the Spirit of God – as if John is telling us, 'just because someone says they have the Spirit of God or the Spirit told them such and such – we don't just take it as truth but here is a litmus test to use. First, as we look at these verses, notice that John first gives us a command to test the spirits.

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

- a. **“why a command – aren't we told not to judge others?”**
  - i. Remember that John is writing to fellow believers and wants us to have this assurance, this confidence – as we discussed two weeks ago, not assurance

based on feeling but on fact, so we test ourselves and protect ourselves by testing the teaching of others so we are not led astray.

- ii. Throughout 1 John, the apostle gives us 3 tests to use to strengthen our assurance and to help us recognize false teaching:
  - 1. RIGHTEOUSNESS Test - Who do you obey – God or Devil? (1:6,7; 2:3-6; 2:28,29; 3:4-10)
  - 2. DOCTRINAL Test – In whom do you believe –the Deity and humanity of Christ – 100% God and 100% Man (2:18-27; 3:23; 4:1-6)
  - 3. SOCIAL Test – How do you show it? - Loving others (2:7-11; 3:11-18, 23)
- iii. These tests have nothing to do with judging the hearts of others (Matthew 7) but rather are simply about protecting ourselves. Just as we are told in Ephesians 6 by the Apostle Paul, when we are told to put on the spiritual armor for our protection from the enemy, the Apostle John speaks to us here and tells us to test the spirits so we are taken into captivity by the enemy.

## **II. The Criteria for Testing the Spirits. (v. 2, 3)**

- a. In these verses, we are told to use the Doctrinal Test to recognize false or errant spirits.
  - i. IN Whom do you believe?
    - 1. Jesus is God – remember that back in chapter 2 (v. 22) that John told us that we must believe in the Deity of Christ and not to trust or listen to someone who doesn't believe that Jesus is God,
    - 2. Jesus is Man - but here in these verses, we are told that it is essential to believe that He came in the flesh as man.
      - a. Colossians 2:9 – “In Christ the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form”.
      - b. 2 Corinthians 5:21 – He was completely 100% human but ‘without sin’.
      - c. Hebrews 4:15 – tempted in every way just we are ‘yet was without sin’.
  - ii. Again, remember that John wants his readers to be confident in their position – do you believe that Jesus is God and that he was also human.
    - 1. Romans 10:9
      - a. Jesus is Lord – He is deity, He is God.
      - b. He was raised from the dead – only a human could die.
  - iii. God wants us to be protected and not fooled by false teachers – if other teachers do not believe these doctrinal truths – steer clear of them. Do not entertain them, do not listen to them. Do not ‘touch the hot stove’.
    - 1. 1 Corinthians 6:18 – flee from Sexual Immorality
    - 2. 1 Corinthians 10:14 – flee from Idolatry
    - 3. 1 Timothy 6:11 – flee from love of money and things of this world
    - 4. 2 Timothy 2:22 – flee from the evil desires of youth

5. Notice a pattern here – God doesn't want us to put ourselves in positions to be tempted by evil. So why would we hang around false teaching? Flee from it – run from it – don't try to be macho man and argue with a false teacher – simply leave or ask them to leave. Do not entertain them (

### **III. The Character of Testing the Spirits (v. 4-6)**

- a. Our confidence in God and not fear of evil is the quality or characteristic that should be evident in our testing of the spirits.
  - i. Greater is He – It's all about HIM. Not how we feel, not what we believe it right or just, but it's all about HIM.
  - ii. Look at these instances where false teaching was rampant but God reigned victoriously.
    1. 2 Kings 6:8-23
    2. 2 Chronicles 32:1-23
    3. 1 Kings 18
    4. Daniel 6
    5. Daniel 3
  - iii. We must choose sides – right or wrong! Choose God – Choose Truth – no matter what the cost to us – God Reigns!!!
    1. Romans 8:28

Test the spirits – when someone tells you something, don't just take it at face value. Don't take what I say at face value – test the spirits. You are commanded to do so. Use the truths that God has set forth. And don't follow untruth because it is easier to do so. God reigns and remember:"

Romans 14:11, Isaiah 45:23

**It is written:**

**" 'As surely as I live,' says the Lord,  
'every knee will bow before me;  
every tongue will confess to God.'**

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