

# Spirit of Truth and Spirit of Error

## 1 John 4:1-6

### Introduction

John is a repetitive writer. He wants us to make sure that we understand what a Christian looks like, and he helps us to examine our hearts to make sure we are of the faith. In **chapter 2**, after he talks about being holy and loving our brothers, he talks about the false teachers. He said that they were antichrists and have left the church because they could not stand the truth. Fast forward to **chapter 3**, he repeats the theme of holiness and loving the brothers. Then we go back to the false teachers. John expounds further that we need to discern (test) every teaching (and John does this with much emphasis) and all teaching must be scrutinized by the Word of God.

John's message is timely as the Evangelical Christians are being deluged by books of severely limited value, such as The Shack, Heaven is For Real, Love Wins. Those books usually top the Christian bookselling lists. Not only those books are out, but we also have paintings of Jesus that people claim to have seen Him in visions. It goes on and on what the most popular books, arts, and movies for Christians, and Evangelicals seem to accept them without question. John would have been horrified to see this if he would have been alive today.

We as Christians are called to test every spirit. We are to discern whether the teaching is of God or of the devil. Luke said of the Bereans in **Acts 16** that they were nobler than the Thessalonians because they listened to Paul's preaching, but they didn't just take his word for it...remember this is Paul we're talking about! What made them noble was that they searched the Scriptures to make sure what Paul was teaching was correct. It is the same way when I preach or teach, I love it when you all read Scripture and compare what I am teaching is true and Scriptural. Search the Scriptures to see if my words match up with it.

John then follows with the command to test the spirits. He then gives us how to test the spirits through our confession of Christ Jesus. John then gives the reason we are able to overcome false teaching and know the true teaching is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

### I. Testing of the Spirits (v1)

- What testing the spirits is not
- The command to test
  - Do not believe every spirit

**Note:** In **1 John 3:23**, John wrote that we should believe in the name of Jesus Christ, yet he says here that we are not to believe every spirit. This is because we are contending with the spirit of the Antichrist, who is opposed to God and the truth. This is the same spirit that deceived Eve at the Garden by twisting God's words.

- Test the spirits
  - Spirits--teachings

**Note:** We see in verse 6 the phrase "spirit of error". Error here is in regards to philosophy and beliefs. We are to test every teachings of man.

- Test

**Note:** The word is a metallurgical term for testing metals. Example: Gold and Iron Pyrite (fool's gold). There are different tests to tell the difference between the two: hardness (gold is soft and pyrite is hard; striking a hammer on pyrite will give off sparks—gold only changes shape), color (gold is golden to silvery yellow; pyrite is more brassy in color).

**Note:** John is saying here that we are to test every beliefs, every doctrine as we test metals. We are to make sure that what we believe is consistent with Scripture and Apostolic teaching. In fact, this command is found throughout Scripture. What's more, it is expected that we analyze every teaching to make sure that it is true.

**Acts 17:11** *Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.*

**1 Thessalonians 5:21** *Test all things; hold fast what is good.*

**Matthew 7:16a, 20** You will know them by their fruits. (20) Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

**John 7:24** Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.

**Note:** Jesus does encourage us to judge the acts and teaching of the people. Here Jesus was accused of being demon-possessed because he healed a man on the Sabbath.

- The need for test
    - False prophets
- Note:** The reason we are to test everything is that the false teachers and prophets come only to destroy the truth of God.

**Matthew 7:15** Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.

**2 Peter 2:1** But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.

**Note:** Jesus said that false teachers are like wolves—who hunt and kill their prey. But more than that...they are ravenous and ferocious inside...in other words, they are aware of their own nature. Also, according to Peter, they have an agenda to teach false doctrines by denying what the Apostles taught.

**Transition:** When we test the teachings, the prime importance is that we check what anyone says about Christ Jesus, about who He is.

## II. Confession of Christ (v 2-3)

- True doctrines of Christ
  - Confession

**Matthew 16:16** Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

**Note:** Having the correct doctrine of Christ is essential to our salvation because if we do not affirm who Christ is (as fully God and fully man, the God-man), then His death on the cross has no meaning for us. We cannot claim Him as Lord if we do not believe His suffering and death.

**Note:** This is not about lip service where we could point our guns to their head and have people confess that Jesus is Lord because nothing has changed the heart. Nor is this about people praying the sinner's prayer.

- Source of our confession
  - Bible (v 6)
  - Holy Spirit (2a, 4-5) (**Note:** see 1 Corinthians 12:3 below)
- Jesus Christ come in the flesh

**John 1:14** And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, **Hebrews 2:9** But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.

**Romans 1:3** concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh,

**Philippians 2:7** but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

**Galatians 4:4** But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law,

**Colossians 2:9** For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,

- Doctrines of demons

**1 Timothy 4:1** Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,

**2 John 7** For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

**Note:** According to John, there are only two doctrines: the true doctrine of Christ and the false doctrine of demons. There is nothing in-between. For all the world's religion, cults, liberalism, they all have their origins in the devil. For all the world's philosophy and ideas, they all have their origins in the devil. The devil comes to steal, destroy, and kill.

**Transition:** The reason we hold fast to our confession in Christ is the indwelling Holy Spirit in our lives.

### III. Indwelling of the Holy Spirit (v 4-5)

- Overcoming error

**John 8:47** *He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God.*

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

**John 16:13-14** *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. (14) He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.*

**1 Corinthians 12:3** *Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.*

**Note:** Because we have the Holy Spirit, we are able to overcome the errors of the world. The Holy Spirit illumines us—teaches us all things that is revealed in Scripture because He is the author of Scripture. He brings light to what we read and apply the truth to our lives. Not only that, the Holy Spirit glorifies Christ. Any teaching that glorifies Christ is of the Holy Spirit.

- Embracing error

**John 6:60-66** *Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" (61) When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, "Does this offend you? (62) What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? (63) It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. (64) But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. (65) And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him My Father." (66) From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.*

**1 Corinthians 2:14** *But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

**Note:** The world loves their own because they are of darkness and hate Christ, the True Light of the world. They do not accept any teachings of Christ. We will always be few in number and the world numerous. Narrow gate vs the wide gate.

### Conclusion (v 6)

John then says "By this you know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error." The underlying attitude of those who embrace the spirit of truth are the ones who accept the Apostolic teaching...the Scriptures. John says that those who embrace the truth listen to the Apostles. Even Paul says the same thing.

**1 Corinthians 14:37** *If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.*

**Galatians 1:8** *But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.*

The Apostles never intended that our Christian walk be in darkness, not knowing what is true or is false. They intended that their words be obeyed because the Holy Spirit moved them all truth. Whenever we come across books, teachings, or anything, we must test it. We will know it by how it promotes or demotes Christ through the Holy Spirit in our life.