



## FBC Dickson

UNFAILING LOVE IN UNCERTAIN TIMES • STANDING FIRM IN THE TRUTH • 1 JOHN 4:1-6 •  
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### MAIN POINT

Realizing the reality of spiritual darkness and learning to stand firm on the truth of God's word.

### INTRODUCTION

Spiritual warfare and spiritual darkness were just as present in John's day as it is for us today. There were many false prophets in the world then, and there are many still today. It should be heart breaking to us as believers when people are given false hope by a false message.

**Have you ever experienced a spiritually dark time or know someone deceived by a message of false hope?**

**As a reminder from a previous lesson, what is the "spirit of antichrist" in the world?**

**How does this spirit of deception affect the church?**

### UNDERSTANDING

Use this section to read the Bible together and talk about it.

In this lesson we will examine 3 actions we must take in order to stand firm in the truth.

1. We Test Every Spirit (v.1)

**Read 1 John 4:1**

**By what means do we "test the spirits"?**

**What are some characteristics of "false prophets"?**

John spent a lot of time talking about the Holy Spirit in chapter three. But here he makes clear that there are other spirits at work as well. We are not to believe them all. Behind every prophetic word is a spirit. There is the Spirit of truth from God, and there is the spirit of deception from Satan. It is not only right, but biblical to have a healthy skepticism regarding anyone who claims to speak the truth of God.

Fortunately, God has not left it up to our intellect alone to determine what is from him and what is not. He gave us his word. John says to "test spirits to determine if they are from God". We are commanded, not recommended, to test every spirit, every teaching regarding God, his word, and his work. But How do we test spirits? I think a great example can be found in Acts 17.

### **Read Acts 17:10-15**

**How do these verses describe the Bereans?**

**How did they receive Paul's message?**

**What does this teach us about testing the spirits?**

Never take anyone for just their word. Compare what is being taught to what we know God has already revealed to us in his word. God would never send a message contrary to what he has already revealed in his word. Test everything! Along with this command comes another implied command. If we are supposed to test every spirit, then we must be deeply immersed in the truth of His word. So many are led astray because they lack an elementary understanding of the gospel. We must read God's word often and carefully and trust His Spirit to guide us and protect us from ungodly deception.

**What harm is caused to the church when we fail to "test the spirits" as we are commanded?**

**How do you maintain a discerning spirit in your own life?**

2. We Affirm A Better Confession (v.2-3)

**Read 1 John 4:2-3**

**According to John, how do we "know the Spirit of God"?**

**Why is confessing "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" so important to our faith?**

There are certain aspects of the person of Jesus that cannot be denied. One of those things is his incarnation. The Messiah, the Anointed One of God, came in the flesh and his name was Jesus.

The word “confesses” in verse 2 is the Greek word *homologeō*, which is a combination of the Greek words *homou*, meaning same or together, and *logos*, meaning of speech. So *homologeō* means to speak the same as another, or to assent or agree. It can also mean to profess or to declare openly, to speak freely. What John is saying here is that the way to know if a message or person is truly of God and from God is that that person confesses the same thing as the Spirit.

*Homologeō* is a Greek word used in other New Testament passages as well

**Read Romans 10:9; 1 Timothy 6:12; Hebrews 13:15 for examples of the uses of *homologeō*.**

In testing the spirits, we are only to give ear to the ones that make the true and right confession about the person of Christ. The early church did not have the totality of the New Testament to rely on like we now have. . What they did have were early church confessions and creeds that promoted and solidified right doctrine, particularly pertaining to the person and work of Jesus. Many of these creeds are actually recorded for us in the New Testament.

Examples:

*“He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory”- 1 Timothy 3:16*

*“...maranatha that is , Lord come” – 1 Corinthians 16:2*

*“Jesus is Lord”- recorded in Romans 10:9*

*“that Christ died for our sins according to Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” - 1 Corinthians 15:3-4*

I could also cite many other creeds and confessions such as the Apostle’s Creed of the early 3rd century or the Nicene Creed of the 4th century. The point is that the early church relied on confessions and creeds to judge truth. In order to be from God, you must confess the right things about Christ. It is the same for us. We must only accept right confessions about Jesus in our own lives and in the life of the church.

**What confessions or Scriptures did you memorize early in life that have helped you “test the spirits” later in life?**

**How can we promote right confessions in our homes? Our church?**

**Why have so many people strayed from the use of catechisms and confessions to teach children truth?**

### 3. We Trust a Greater Spirit (v.4-6).

#### **Read 1 John 4:4-6**

**Who have we conquered according to v.4?**

**How have we conquered them?**

**In what ways does the Holy Spirit aid us in "testing the spirits"?**

It is good and right to acknowledge the spirit of antichrist in this age. But there is no reason to fear it. Why is this? According to verse 4, we have conquered them. The Greek word translated as conquer here is used 28 times in the New Testament. It is translated primarily as overcome in many places. It means to carry off the victory, to win the case, and to maintain the cause. We as believers have rejected, and thus conquered, the false prophets and antichrists in the world. We have made the better confession, Jesus in Lord. But we haven't done this in our own power. John makes it clear that we have overcome because "the One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world". Who is this one? God's very Spirit that abides in you. He is greater. The Holy Spirit dwells in each believer and is a built-in alarm for false teaching.

John gives God's people a reminder in verse 5. Those who come bearing falsehoods about the person and work of Christ are from the world. When the messengers of the world speak, the people of the world listen. We shouldn't be surprised the world would listen to and embrace the message of false teachers. Lost people act lost and live lost. They don't know Christ. His word and His Spirit are not in them. This is a warning for all believers. Anytime someone claiming to come from God speaks a message that is wholeheartedly embraced by the world, that should alarm us. The church of the Lord Jesus ought not embrace a message that the world has no problem with. The cross and the gospel offend. The message of Jesus will always be at odds with the world.

**How can we daily conquer the false messages of the world?**

**In what ways are we already conquers? How does that truth help us combat false teaching?**

**What should we do if we see a brother or sister being led astray by a false message?**

## **APPLICATION**

Are you daily in God's word so that you might more accurately "test the spirits"?

What is one thing you can do this week to better prepare yourself against false messages?

How can you help promote healthy discernment in your home? the church?

## PRAYER

## COMMENTARY

### 1 John 4:1

"do not believe every spirit". The mention of the Holy Spirit in 3:24 prompts John to inform his readers that other spirits exist (i.e. demonic spirits) who produce false prophets and false teachers to propagate their false doctrine. Christians are to have a healthy skepticism regarding any teaching, unlike some among John's congregations who were too open-minded to anyone claiming a new teaching regarding the faith. Christians are to be like the Bereans who, as students of the Word, examined the Scriptures to determine truth and error. The word "test" is a metallurgist's term used for assaying metals to determine their purity and value. Christians must test any teaching with a view to approving or disapproving it, rigorously comparing any teaching to the Scripture. By juxtaposing "spirits" with "false prophets", John reminds his readers that behind human teachers who propagate false doctrine and error are demons inspired by Satan. Human false prophets and teachers are the physical expressions of demonic, spiritual sources. (Take from The MacArthur Bible Commentary)

Because the Gnostics and other heretics, in the first age, to gain the greater credit to their erroneous doctrines, assumed to themselves the character and authority of inspired teachers, John put his disciples in mind, (1 John 2:27,) that they had an unction from the Holy Spirit, by which they were enabled to judge with certainty, both of teachers and of their doctrine. He therefore, in this chapter, commands them not to believe rashly every teacher who pretended to be inspired, but to try the inspiration by which any preacher professed to speak, whether it was from God or from evil spirits; that after trial they might know whom it was their duty to attend to, and whom they ought to disregard and reject. And to secure them, as far as possible, from being deceived, he especially desires them to consider whether the teacher, who came to them, pretending to inspiration, held the great and fundamental doctrines of the gospel, which all the teachers, really inspired of God, regularly and uniformly maintained. His words may be

paraphrased as follows: Believe not every spirit — By which any teacher is, or professes to be, actuated: or, believe not every teacher who pretends to be inspired by the Spirit of God; but try the spirits — Namely, whether they are of God — By the rule which God hath given. We are to try all spirits by the written word: To the law and to the testimony! If any man speak not according to these, the spirit which actuates him is not of God. Because many false prophets — Or false teachers; are gone forth into the world — With an intention to draw disciples after them. (taken from the Benson Commentary)

### **1 John 4:2-3**

John establishes a doctrinal standard, specifically a Christological one, for testing spirits. If a spirit (or a person moved to speak by such a spirit) does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, that spirit or person is misleading God's people. Apparently many false teachers were saying that Jesus only "appeared" to be human. This was probably based on a false idea that the material creation was inherently evil and therefore physical bodies were evil.

Whoever refuses to acknowledge that Jesus is God the Son, "who has come in the flesh" is not of God. Anyone can talk about Jesus and even believe that he lived on earth, as other religions, cults, and philosophies often affirm. But unless such people affirm both the full deity and fully humanity of Jesus, they are not truly "confessing Jesus" but, as John states in unequivocal terms, they are under the influence of the spirit of the antichrist. (take from ESV Study Bible)

But try the spirits whether they are of God - There were those in the early Christian church who had the gift of "discerning spirits," (see the notes at 1 Corinthians 12:10), but it is not certain that the apostle refers here to any such supernatural power. It is more probable, as he addresses this command to Christians in general, that he refers to the ability of doing this by a comparison of the doctrines which they professed to hold with what was revealed, and by the fruits of their doctrines in their lives. If they taught what God had taught in his word, and if their lives corresponded with his requirements, and if their doctrines agreed with what had been inculcated by those who were admitted to be true apostles, 1 John 4:6, they were to receive them as what they professed to be. If not, they were to reject them, and hold them to be impostors. It may be remarked, that it is just as proper and as important now to examine the claims of all who profess to be teachers of religion, as it was then. In a matter so momentous as religion, and where there is so much at stake, it is important that all pretensions of this kind should be subjected to a rigid examination. No one should be received as a religious teacher without the clearest evidence that he has come in accordance with the will of God, nor unless he inculcates the very truth which God has revealed. See the Isaiah 8:20 note, and Acts 17:11 note.

Because many false prophets are gone out into the world - The word prophet is often used in the New Testament to denote religious instructors or preachers. See the notes at Romans 12:6. Compare the notes at 2 Peter 2:1. Such false teachers evidently abounded in the times here referred to. See the notes at 1 John 2:18. The meaning is, that many had gone out into the world pretending to be true teachers of religion, but who inculcated most dangerous doctrines; and it was their duty to be on their guard against them, for they had the very spirit of antichrist, 1 John 4:3. (Taken from Barnes Notes on the Bible)

### **1 John 4:4-6**

"have overcome [conquered] them". means they have rejected the heretical teaching of the antichrists (i.e. the secessionists). "the one who is in you" refers to the Holy Spirit. "the one who is in the world" is the spirit of antichrist, the devil, who is active in the inhabited earth. The spiritual security of believers rests ultimately upon the Spirit's work within them, and there is no power greater than the Spirit of God that can destroy his work. This is a firm basis of Christian assurance.

"they are from the world" refers to the secessionists who by rejecting the gospel have thrown their lot in with the world. "Speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them" is referring to the heretical teaching, shaped by worldly categories, which is more plausible to many unbelievers than the truth of the gospel. (Taken from Zondervan NIV Study Bible)

The sum of revealed religion is in the doctrine concerning Christ, his person and office. The false teachers spake of the world according to its maxims and tastes, so as not to offend carnal men. The world approved them, they made rapid progress, and had many followers such as themselves; the world will love its own, and its own will love it. The true doctrine as to the Saviour's person, as leading men from the world to God, is a mark of the spirit of truth in opposition to the spirit of error. The more pure and holy any doctrine is, the more likely to be of God; nor can we by any other rules try the spirits whether they are of God or not. And what wonder is it, that people of a worldly spirit should cleave to those who are like themselves, and suit their schemes and discourses to their corrupt taste? (taken from Matthew Henry's Concise Bible Commentary)