

Test the Spirits and

Overcome the World through Jesus Christ (1 John 4:1-6)

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.

I. My Life of Testing the Spirits

A. Conversion

B. Writing, teaching, preaching, evangelizing; need knowledge and spiritual power through the Holy Spirit, Spirit of truth

C. What of Christ? What is the test?

II. 1 John: Truth for Life: Review

A. Kindly assures readers of their relationship to Christ and how to maintain it; says, “dear friends” or “little children” repeatedly, representing the heart of God for them.

B. Gives tests for true believers

Whoever says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person (1 John 2:4)

C. Warn them about falsehood that might deceive them and hurt their relationship with God and others

D. Put in either/or terms often: one example

“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). Categorical.

E. A test given in either/or terms about what matters most: truth about God and our salvation

III. Our Society of Testing

A. What is your IQ, your GPA, your GRE, your LSAT, or your BMI?

B. We measure and test everything even what cannot be rightly measured in quantitative terms (like character)

C. To measure you need to test; tests require a standard—good or bad, true or false.

D. Test other religions, cults, and new religions, progressive Christianity by Scripture

E. We must measure spiritual maturity by testing the spirits. Biblical standard for judgment.

1. Supposed communications from the spiritual world; need to sort them into two broad categories: true and false

2. There are counterfeits, imposters, frauds, deceivers

a. False apostles

¹³ For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. ¹⁵ It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

b. False teachers (Matthew 7:15-16)

Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them.

c. False angels preaching false gospel (Galatians 1)

⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse!

IV. We Must Test the Spirits

A. 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 (4:1).

B. Don't be naïve or gullible—don't be a sucker

C. You must test, evaluation, because of counterfeits; counterfeit money; hacking, scammers, pretending to be my Aunt Jane

D. Many false prophets out in the world; not rare, but common

Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come (1 John 2:18).

V. The Standard for the Truth Test (v. 2-3)

A. 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 (4:2-3).

B. Test by the standard of Jesus Christ, who he is, what he taught

1. Either/or resulting in a pass/fail; no middle ground; no gray zone; no mist, haze, fog or bog. Not grading on a curve.

It is a categorical test; a universal test; and a necessary test

2. Test counterfeit money by knowing the real thing, the genuine—the genuine and authentic Jesus in the Bible
3. Consider Five 1 John's statements about Jesus
 1. He came as a flesh and blood man who was seen and touched (1 John 1:1-3)
 2. "Advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:1-2).
 3. He appeared to destroy the devil's work (1 John 3:8)
 4. To show what love is: "Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters" (1 John 3:16).
 5. "He is the true God and eternal life" (1 John 5:20).

C. This test is *sufficient* to identify spirit of error; there are other errors wrought by the spirit of error. Get this one wrong, everything else is wrong.

D. Two *test* cases

1. Islam: denies Jesus in God incarnate, died to atone for our sins
2. New Age: denies Jesus is the one incarnation, says he was one of many gurus, masters, swamis, yogis, mystics. Wrote two books about that.
3. Jesus is the ultimate issue in spiritual discernment for eternal life or missing out on it.

E. Two tips on testing from a veteran

1. Non-Christian groups may use our *vocabulary*, but not our *dictionary*. Know your Bible.
2. Texts out of context are a pretext for error. Satan tempting Jesus in the wilderness (Matthew 4; Luke 4). Know your Bible.

VI. Overcoming Error by the Spirit of Truth

A. Overcoming (v. 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 (4:4)

Three questions:

1. Overcome in what way? Vicarious victory through Christ, crucified and resurrected. Eastertide season. They have no authority over you. You are free from their lies.
2. Overcome who? Those “in the world,” fallen cultural, political, religious system. People: false prophets, false apostle, false teachers, demons, angels of light, the Devil, and the spirit of antichrist
3. Overcome how? Through faith in Christ, who is in you
 - a. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not *overcome* it (John 1:4-5).
 - b. “For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith” (I John 5:4)

VII. Speaking Truth and Listening for Truth (vs. 5-6)

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.

- A. Test by power within you and the knowledge within you: Confidence. Greater is the Spirit of God in you, Christ in you, than the spirits of error (4:4).
- B. Ultimate either/or; dichotomy of discourse; two tongues: Truth of Christ; lies of the spirit of error and its mouthpieces, megaphones, and media
- C. *Spirit* of truth and error; not just truth or error philosophically
 - 1. Spirits from the world: “doctrines of demons”

“The Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.” (1 Timothy 4:1)
 - 2. Spirit of God and the word of God: “Living and active” word of God (Hebrews 4:12)

- D. Origin of error “viewpoint of the world” (2:15-17); false assumptions lead to false conclusions; but Christians have the Spirit of truth within us, the risen Christ!

VIII. Testing the Spirits by the Spirit of Truth

- A. We cannot avoid testing in order to live wisely, especially in ultimate matters addressed by philosophy and religion
- B. We need the *proper standard* to test wisely by The Incarnation, God come in the flesh for our redemption, is that standard is the only way to overcome the falsehoods of the spiritual world.
- C. We need *the Spirit of truth*, of Christ within us for discernment

This is the only way to overcome the spirit of falsehood and escape the snares and lethal lies of the world. Thanks be to God!

PRAYER