

Walking in the Light – Part 9

Testing the Spirits: Discerning Truth in a World of Deception – 1 John 4:1-6

Crosspoint – Kee Thang – Nov. 3rd, 2024

1 John 4:1-6 NIV

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.

Introduction:

This morning, we are continuing our series in the book of 1st John. The main purpose why the letters of John were written is that we know we have eternal life, an assurance of salvation. Here is the purpose statement of the book:

1 John 5:13 NIV

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

In this letter, Pastor John carefully, lovingly, and powerfully weaves truth and introspection so that we can know if we have eternal life. In our passage this morning, John teaches us how we are to test the spirits so we are able to know and discern what is from God and what is not from God.

We live in a world saturated with information, opinions, and spiritual claims. There are voices everywhere competing for our attention—on social media, in the news, even within religious circles. With so many voices, how do we discern truth from deception? The Apostle John addresses this concern in 1 John 4:1-6. His message is timeless: we must test the spirits to discern what is from God and what is not.

I. The Call to Test the Spirits (v. 1) John begins with a simple but crucial instruction: "Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits." Just because something sounds spiritual or even biblical does not mean it's from God. In the first century, as now, false prophets infiltrated the church, claiming divine insight but leading people away from Christ.

- **Illustration:** Imagine a security checkpoint at an airport. The scanner detects what's inside each bag, allowing only what is safe to pass through. We, too, must have spiritual scanners in our hearts to filter out false teachings and embrace only what aligns with the truth of God's Word.

Testing the spirits means comparing what we hear and see with the core truth of the Gospel: Does it acknowledge that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, died, and rose again for our salvation? Any teaching that deviates from this central message is not from God.

II. The Spirit of Truth vs. the Spirit of Falsehood (vv. 2-3) John provides a litmus test: "Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God." The incarnation is the non-negotiable truth of Christianity. It affirms not only Jesus' divinity but His humanity—the Word became flesh and dwelled among us (John 1:14).

- **Illustration:** In a world of counterfeit products, there's always a way to distinguish the genuine from the fake. Sometimes it's in the details: the logo, the craftsmanship, or a certification of authenticity. Similarly, true teachings about Jesus will always hold to the foundational truth of His incarnation, death, and resurrection.

The spirit of the antichrist, John says, denies this truth. This spirit opposes Christ by distorting who He is. While the world offers alternative narratives, we must cling to the authentic truth of the Gospel.

III. Victory Through the Spirit of God (v. 4) John reassures us: "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." This is a powerful reminder that, as believers, we have the Holy Spirit within us, and He empowers us to stand firm against deception.

- **Illustration:** When I was younger, my dad used to tell me, "No matter what challenge you face, remember, you're not facing it alone." He wanted me to understand that I had the support of my family behind me. In a similar way, as believers, we face the world not on our own, but with God Himself living within us. The Holy Spirit equips us with discernment and power to overcome the lies of the enemy.

It's easy to feel overwhelmed by the false teachings and pressures around us, but we have the confidence that God's Spirit in us is far stronger than any deception the world throws our way.

IV. The World's Perspective vs. God's Perspective (vv. 5-6) John makes a distinction between the voices we hear from the world and the voice of God. False prophets speak from the world's viewpoint, and the world listens to them because they appeal to human desires and ambitions. However, those who are truly from God recognize His voice and follow it.

- **Illustration:** Have you ever noticed that children recognize their parents' voices in a crowd? Even in a noisy room, a child knows the sound of their parent calling their name. This is how we should be with God's voice—intimately familiar, so that even in the chaos of the world, we know when He is speaking.

As followers of Christ, we are called to listen to the Spirit of truth, to know God's voice through His Word, and to reject the spirit of falsehood that comes from the world.

Conclusion: John's message to the early church is just as relevant today. We live in a time where spiritual deception is rampant, and many voices claim to speak for God. But not every spirit is from God. As believers, we must test the spirits, stand firm in the truth of the Gospel, and rest in the confidence that the Spirit within us is greater than the spirit of deception in the world.

Let us commit ourselves to discerning truth, listening to the voice of God, and walking in the Spirit of truth each day. May we, like John's audience, overcome the world not by our strength, but by the power of the One who lives within us. Amen.

Closing Prayer: Father, we thank You for the truth of Your Word and the guidance of Your Spirit. Help us to be discerning, to recognize what is from You, and to reject what is false. Strengthen us to stand firm in the face of deception, knowing that Your Spirit within us is greater than any power in the world. We commit our lives to following Your voice and living out Your truth. In Jesus' name, Amen.