

UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

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FALSE SPIRITS: Three Truths for Testing Them | *Rodgers Atwebembeire—ACFAR*

I. Introduction

- a. Christianity is under attack.
 - i. The Bible is filled with urgent warnings about opposition to the faith.
 1. Jesus and the apostles made it clear that we Christians would be *rejected*, be *persecuted*, be *opposed* and *suffer* for their faith.
 - ii. Who—or what—are these enemies of the faith and of Jesus' followers? How can we identify and answer them?
- b. Nine enemies of truth:
 - i. False gospels (2 Cor. 11:4; Gal. 1:6–9)
 - ii. False doctrines (Rom. 16:17; 1 Tim. 1:3)
 - iii. False miracles (Mt. 24:24; 2 Th. 2:9)
 - iv. False gods (Dt. 13:2; 2 Th. 2:4)
 - v. False christs (Mt. 24:24; 2 Cor. 11:4)
 - vi. False prophets (Mt. 24:24; 2 Pt. 2:1)
 - vii. False apostles (2 Cor. 11:13; Rev 2:2)
 - viii. False teachers (1 Tim. 1:7; 2 Pt. 2:1)
 - ix. **False spirits** (2 Cor. 11:4; 1 Jn. 4:1–2)
- c. **In summary the Apostles and other NT writers have this to say:**
 - i. Be “on guard” (Acts 20:28 NASB)
 - ii. Be discerning (Heb. 5:14)
 - iii. Be able to test (1 Thes. 5:19–22)

II. FOCUS: False Spirits—two key passages

- a. **2 Corinthians 11:4** (ESV)
 - v4 For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, *or if you receive a different spirit from the Spirit you received*, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.

b. **1 John 4:1–6** (ESV)

- v1 Beloved, **do not believe every spirit**, but **test the spirits** to see whether they are from God, for **many false prophets** have gone out into the world.
- v2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ **has come in the flesh** is from God,
- v3 and **every spirit that does not confess Jesus** is not from God. **This is the spirit of the antichrist**, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.
- v4 Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.
- v5 They are from the world; therefore, they speak from the world, and the world listens to them.
- v6 We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. **By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.**

1. *What can we learn from John today?*
2. *What is his call? What is the reason for this call?*
3. *How can we test the spirits in our day?*
4. *And what happens if we don't?*
5. *These questions demand attention if we are going to be effective Christians in our generation.*

So let's look at the passage again and find out what John is saying...

III. **John's Three Truths for Testing Spirits** (note—calls us “beloved,” “children”)

- a. **THE MANDATE TO TEST:** “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but **test the spirits** to see whether they are from God.” (v1)
- b. **THE MOTIVE FOR TESTING:** “Because **many false prophets** have gone out into the world.” (v1)
- c. **THE MEANS OF TESTING:**
 - i. **Believers have been spiritually regenerated and therefore don't gladly live like those in the world (vv. 4–5). Please note:**
 1. In regeneration, man becomes a partaker of the divine nature. Look at verse 4: “You are from God, little children, and have overcome them because greater is He that is in you than he who is in the world.”

Look and see the teacher's life:

1. Is there evidence of regeneration?
2. Have they become the children of God who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit?
3. Is the Holy Spirit manifesting the proof of His being there, which is love for the true Christ and love for the true Word? Or are they modeling their message on world and its ways?

(note the case of the hyper-grace movement becoming licentious)

ii. Teachers who are of God accept apostolic teaching and witness.

1. v. 6 tells us that this is how we can distinguish between “the spirit of truth” and “the spirit of error”
2. Those who truly know God listen to the biblical apostles.
3. Those who are not truly of God resist/reject the biblical apostles’ teaching.

Our standard: “Does their teaching agree with what the New Testament apostles teach?” (of course, to test them you must be a real student of Scripture!)

4. Jesus taught that to receive the apostles was to receive Him and God (Jn. 13:20)
5. Thus, the early church continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine (Acts 2:42)
6. The early church recognized the apostles’ instruction as the commands of the Lord (1 Cor. 14:37)
7. And even the apostles recognized their fellow-apostles’ writings as equivalent to inspired Scripture (e.g., 2 Pet. 3:15–16)
8. Therefore, those who are truly of God will gladly *agree* with the apostles and *heed* their teaching!

iii. The [Holy] Spirit of truth affirms *the incarnation*—that Jesus is both God and man (vv. 2–3)

1. Look and hear the **teacher's doctrine of Christ**. What do they say about the incarnation?
2. In the incarnation, God in Christ becomes a partaker of human nature. Let me say that again...
3. Jesus’ identity has been distorted and downplayed over the centuries.

- a. Doubters call Him a good man, a great teacher, or a wonder-worker—but less than God.
 - b. In later centuries the Gnostics even denied His true humanity.
4. John makes it clear that we obtain a true knowledge of God by the help of the Spirit of truth—and this knowledge is that Jesus is both *human* and *divine*.

Summary: What we must examine in *any* teacher is...

- Consistent evidence of his or her regeneration (salvation)
- Solid proof of his or her submission and commitment to Scripture
- Clear statements of his or her total view of the person & work of Christ

“By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.”

IV. Conclusion

“Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.”
(Jude 3–4)