

# UNDERSTANDING PROPHECY

## TESTING THE SPIRITS OF IN OUR DAY

### 1 JOHN 4:1-6

By Rodgers Atwebembeire

1. 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.
2. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit **that confesses that Jesus Christ** has come in the flesh is from God,
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them.
6. 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.**

## INTRODUCTION

There is an urgent need to test the Spirits in our day. We live in a day and age where religious groups are springing up from every corner. They all claim to have the authority of God and to proclaim Biblical truth. Quite often though is that they speak contradicting messages.

So which is which?

What can we believe and uphold as the true living word?

Jesus warned his disciples ahead of time saying,

1. "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves... Matt. 7:15"
2. In chapter 24, he even takes it much further to say that for false Christ's and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

3. The apostles sound the same warning to the churches to be on guard, to be discerning, to be able to test.
4. In the same manner John had just told the believers that they know Christ abides in them and they abide in Him because of the Spirit whom Christ has given them. Now, in our text, John exhorts the believers to "test the spirits to see whether they are from God." He not only exhorts them to test the spirits, but he also gives them the tests to apply...3:24

***What can we learn from John today? What is his call? What is the reason for this call? How can we test the spirits in our day? What happens if we don't?—all 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:***

1. It is important to note that John is addressing believers. Note how he addresses them as "beloved", and as "children".
2. He gives them a command to test, the reason for the testing, the how of testing, and what to look out for in testing—that is what we wish to occupy ourselves with tonight.
3. **THE COMMAND**, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God."
4. **THE REASON TO TEST**. And the reason is the end of verse 1, "Because many false prophets have gone out into the world."

**BUT HOW DOES ONE TEST the spirits?**

1. **First**, is that the Spirit of Truth affirms the incarnation—Jesus both God and man vv. 2-3
  - a. Look and hear their doctrine of Christ. What do they say about the incarnation?
  - b. Jesus' identity has been down played over the centuries. Either they call him a good man, a great teacher, a wonder-worker but less than God
  - c. In the first century the Gnostics had gone as far as denying his humanity.
  - d. John makes it clear that a true knowledge of God is arrived at by the help of the Spirit of Truth and this knowledge is that Jesus is both human and divine.
2. **Second**, is that Believers have been regenerated and therefore don't live like those in the world. vv.4-5 Please note:
  - a. In the incarnation God becomes a partaker of human nature. Let me say that again.
  - b. In regeneration, man is born of your spirit. 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."
  - c. John assumes that because of God's spirit in believers, they have overcome the spirit of error and live a different life from that of the non-believers. By looking

at the life of a teacher or pastor/preacher, you can easily tell whether their life reflects that they teach others.

- d. Look and see their life, is there demonstration of regeneration?
  - e. Have they become the children of God and are they indwelt by the Holy Spirit and is the Holy Spirit manifesting the evidence of His being there, which is love for the true Christ and love for the true Word?
  - f. Or are they in perfect harmony with the world and its ways—a case of the hyper grace movement who teach the grace of God while distorting it and its implications and using it as a license for sin.
3. **Third**, is that those who are of God accept apostolic teaching and witness. **Verse 6** tells us that this is how we can distinguish between "the spirit of truth" and "the spirit of error"
- a. Those who truly know God listen to the apostles
  - b. Those who are not of God will reject them.
  - c. So a good question to ask is, "does the teaching agree with what the apostles teach?"
    - i. For Jesus taught that to receive them was to receive Him and God - Jn 13:20
    - ii. Thus the early church continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine - Ac 2:42
    - iii. For they recognized their words as the commands of the Lord 1Co 14:37
    - iv. And even the apostles recognized their fellow-apostles' writings as equivalent to inspired scriptures - e.g., 2 Pet. 3:15-16
  - d. Therefore, those who are of God will heed the apostles, and agree with their teaching!

What you're looking for in teachers (whether of God or not) is the evidence of their

1. View of Christ
2. Regeneration/Salvation
3. Submission to biblical truth/Biblical truth

By this we know the Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of error.

## **CONCLUSION**

There is need to develop biblical discernment for all believers. That is, the ability to tell the difference between truth and error; right and wrong—using the word of God as a standard by which you measure truth. The Christians at Berea are a good example of this. See Acts 17:11

1. They received the word of God with all eagerness

2. They examined the scriptures daily
3. They compared what the apostle said with the already written word of God before they could believe them