

Test The Spirits!

1 John 4:1-6

Study #13

(Not entirely original with me)

INTRODUCTION:

There are all sorts of beliefs around today as it has been through the ages and John warns believers to not believe and trust every thing they see or hear. He encourages Christians to "test" the spirit of what they see or hear concerning spiritual matters. Satan is a master in deception and what "sounds" good and true needs to be checked out before committing one's self to anything. This study is about "testing the spirits."

I. TEST THE SPIRITS! (1)

A. "DO NOT BELIEVE EVERY SPIRIT..."

1. I.e., don't believe everything you hear, or everyone who claims to be from God
2. How foolish it would be to do so should be obvious...
 - a. We would be in a constant state of confusion (believing one thing one moment, and another thing the next)
 - b. We would be easily misled by those teaching error

B. "TEST THE SPIRITS, WHETHER THEY ARE OF GOD..."

1. The word "test" ("try", KJV) means...
 - a. To examine, prove scrutinize (Thayer)
 - b. To see whether a thing is genuine or not
2. So don't just accept what some teacher or preacher is saying; examine what is being taught
3. Those who have this attitude are highly commended in the Scriptures
 - a. The Bereans - **Ac 17:11**
 - b. The Ephesians - **Re 2:2**

C. "BECAUSE MANY FALSE PROPHETS HAVE GONE OUT INTO THE WORLD..."

1. This is the reason we must "test the spirits"
2. Others have also warned us of this fact...
 - a. Jesus - **Mt 7:15**
 - b. Peter - **2 Pe 2:1-3**
 - c. Paul - **2 Co 11:13-15**
3. So we must examine, prove, and scrutinize those who would teach us!
 - a. Even though some teachers might consider it insubordinate
 - b. Even though some might not like the possible controversy it may cause

4. When one teaches in our classes, pulpits, radio, newspapers, etc., we must “test the spirits!”
[But **how** shall we test the spirits?]

II. THE TESTS (2-3, 6)

A. DO THEY CONFESS THAT JESUS CHRIST HAS COME IN THE FLESH...?

1. **Verses 2-3** are best understood in light of the Gnostic-like errors that were prevalent at that time...
 - a. In which some denied Jesus Christ actually came in the flesh - cf. **2 Jn 7**
 - b. Whose doctrine was leading many astray, possibly because the false teachers claimed inspiration by the Spirit
2. But those who would teach such falsehood are not led by the Spirit of God, but possess the spirit of the Antichrist! - again cf. **2 Jn 7**

B. DO THEY LISTEN TO THE APOSTLES OF CHRIST...?

1. **Verse 6** reveals how we can distinguish between “the spirit of truth” and “the spirit of error”
 - a. Those who truly know God listens to the apostles
 - b. Those who are not of God will reject them
2. I.e., does the teaching agree with what the apostles teach?
 - a. For Jesus taught that to receive them was to receive Him and God - **Jn 13:20**
 - b. Thus the early church continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine - **Ac 2:42**
 - c. For they recognized their words as the commands of the Lord - **1 Co 14:37**
 - d. And even the apostles recognized their fellow-apostles’ writings as equivalent to inspired scriptures - e.g., **2 Pe 3:15-16--**
- Therefore, those who are God will heed the apostles, and agree with their teaching!
3. This is a test that we can easily apply today on virtually every issue!
 - a. But it implies knowledge and understanding of the apostles’ doctrine on our part
 - b. Yet that should not be a problem if we follow the example of the first church in Jerusalem - cf. **Ac 2:42**

C. THOUGH NOT MENTIONED BY JOHN, HERE ARE TWO MORE “TESTS”...

1. The test of **Deu 18:21-22**
 - a. To be used when a person claims to be a prophet of God
 - b. If their prophecy fails, they are shown to be a false prophet
2. The test of **Deu 13:1-4**
 - a. To be used when wonders are performed, and prophecies seem to be fulfilled
 - b. If their doctrine contradicts what God has already revealed, they are to be rejected
(this is akin to what John wrote)

CONCLUSION:

1. In the midst of these warnings to “test the spirits”, John provides comforting words in **verses 4-5**
 - a. By being of God (because they have heeded the words of His apostles)...
 - 1) They can overcome the false prophets
 - 2) For the One in them is greater than he (Satan?) who is in the world
 - b. Don't be surprised to see the world following after the false prophets...
 - 1) For the false prophets are of the world and speak in a way as to appeal to the world
 - 2) Therefore don't be deterred by the “apparent success” of the false teachers (size and numbers is not a proper measure of truth!)
2. In view of the proliferation of religions and various doctrines bombarding us today, all in the name of Christ and the Spirit of God, the exhortation of John is very relevant and important for us:
“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God”
3. Christian, don't believe everything you see or hear that might look or sound right. Check it out using God's Word and especially what the Apostles have written. If not sure, then stay away!