

1 John 4:1-6

When God's Word is your final authority, you'll know God more and love Him more.

3 ½ years ago, when I applied to USF, I got this letter in the mail (the denial letter). I was crushed. I was devastated. I had only applied to one school (yeah it's a little reckless). But I panicked. I was calling family and friends asking for advice. It was already March and all the other school's application deadlines had passed.

Now my uncle, being wiser than me, investigated. He looked at my GPA, my test scores, my Dual Enrollment credits, and USF requirements. Then he compared them to the letter and saw that there is no way the letter could be right.

I took the letter at face value. It said I was denied and I accepted that. I let it rob me of my joy and it took over my emotions.

But my uncle was discerning, and tested the letter. He was right, USF had made a mistake in their system and I should have been accepted.

And John, in this passage tells us that we are to conduct a similar test when it comes to what people say about God. We shouldn't take what anybody says at face value regarding truth. We are to *investigate* it. And *test* it by *comparing* it to this book.

Throughout this book, John's teaching has been directly influenced by what false teachers were saying. All the way up to these verses and through the end of this letter.

In a quick summary, they figured, "we're called to be holy and perfect, and there's no way we can do that, so that must only be referring only to the spiritual." They taught, and it sounds convincing, that it's impossible to not sin in this physical body, therefore all these commands must refer only to the spirit. So now you could be holy spiritually regardless of what you did in your body. There was a separation of Spirit and Body and they were in no way connected. So in their thinking, a bodily Jesus couldn't exist.

Now here in chapter 4, he addressed false teaching directly. Here we go!

Verse 1

"Beloved"

He is saying "I love you, and this is why I'm going to tell you what I'm about to tell you." This is good for you, and you need to hear this: "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."

Don't believe everything you hear. He says, "test the spirits." Then he says, "because many false prophets have gone out into the world. So now we see the connection between these "spirits" and prophets or teachers or people claiming to know truth.

Why Test The Spirits?

False teaching is damaging! False teaching hinders your joy!

"And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete." - 1 John 1:4

False teaching will kill your spiritual life!

"My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin." - 1 John 2:1

False teaching hinders your assurance!

"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life." - 1 John 5:13

So we have a lot of reasons for *why to test the spirits*. Now how do we do that?

Verse 2

How to Test the Spirits "By this you know the Spirit of God:"

So here's how we're going to test them. "every spirit that confesses that Jesus has come in the flesh is from God,"

"Has Come" vs Came

Notice the use of "*has come*", that's important. John doesn't say, "every spirit that confesses that Jesus came...."

"Came" would imply a season. Jesus came, then he left, it's over.

No, He HAS COME! He came, and He's still here. He ascended into Heaven, but He is still alive and well and will NEVER die again. And everything He ever taught is STILL VALID. Jesus Christ has come.

So let's keep going with that in mind.

Verses 2-3a

"every spirit that confesses that Jesus has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God."

What does he mean by "confesses?" You could pay someone to do that, but that doesn't hold any weight. I could punch Rudy in the face and say "I'm sorry", but we all know I don't mean it!

John uses the same word (both in Greek and English) in chapter 1 verse 9 when he says, "*If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us...*" When he says "confess" there surely he means not merely saying a specific phrase, but rather confessing with weight to it. Actually meaning it in your heart to the point where it changes you. There are huge implications in this.

Is God's Word Your Final Authority?

These verses say that Jesus Christ coming in the flesh is *crucially important to the Christian faith*. That means everything Jesus did and said is very important. We need to compare a person's teaching with Jesus' Even Jesus uses God's Word to combat Satan (Luke 4). Therefore, it also means God's Word has to be our final authority. When you hear someone teach something, you must ask if it goes along with what Jesus taught.

A couple popular examples of combatting false teaching with God's Word:

1.) Universalism, the belief that all religions are valid ways to get to heaven.

Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." - John 14:6

2.) Prosperity, the belief that God wants you to be healthy and rich.

"Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" –

2 Timothy 3:12

"Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for He has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." - Hebrews 13:5

It all comes down to this: Is God's Word your final authority?

Do you study what Jesus taught and *bank* on it? When you hear something new, do you take it and run with it? Or do you act like the people in Act 17:11 who “received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.”

I don't care who said it, if it was me, Rahul, David Platt, (for me) John Piper, or even *if it's your own thought!* If it doesn't line up with what this book says, it's not from God.

If you believe whatever you hear or even think, you become ignorant, you won't have a backbone in your faith because you'll be getting tossed all over the place because you don't have a foundation or a standard of truth. If you want to be getting tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine and never have a foundation, don't read the Bible. But, if you want to have and know *rock solid truth*, if you want to have a firm foundation where you're not going to get knocked over, but you will stand firm, *then trust and treasure Jesus and study the Bible.* Is God's Word your final authority? So, if a spirit isn't from God, what is it?

Verse 3b,

“This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.” Satan wants to destroy the church. Satan is way smarter than most of us take him for. 2 Corinthians 11:14 talks about how Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

False teaching usually sounds good or convincing. You better be on guard, because right now there's a spiritual war going on over what is truth. According to Ephesians 6, what's the one offensive weapon? It's not something that looks like the sword. It's the sword (correct doctrine). That's a tall order for a bunch of college students. How are we *able* to do that? “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world”

Verse 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.”

The reason you are able to test the spirits with accuracy is because “*He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.*”

You think you can beat this world and all of its lies on your own? You can't. You want to try intellectualism? You want to be the smartest person in the room? I got news for you, Satan isn't afraid of you. “You can have perfect doctrine and go to hell.” - John Piper You can't win; and God and the writer of this book both know that. *IT'S GOD!*

You have God's Holy Spirit living inside of you. This verse is at the center of this passage and is the ground for the rest of it. You are able to detect false teaching because you have the Holy Spirit

The problem is we miraculously forget it. One of the reasons the Bible talks about “Beware of false teaching” so much is because we're prone in our sinful nature to walk away from truth. You have to actively test the spirits and walk with Jesus.

An illustration:

Say I'm hanging out with Mark and Rudy one day. And they say, “Hey! Zaph had this great idea! We're going to go to the top of the 8 story parking garage and throw a TV off the top of it!” I'm sitting there thinking that's a great idea too. But right off the bat, a red flag goes up in my mind. I think, “I know Zaph pretty well, and I don't think Zaph would have said that that's a good idea.” I might have seen Zaph birth certificate. I could know facts about Zaph. But that's not enough. I need to *know* Zaph.

And it's the same way with God. The more you know God, the better you're going to know what He would do or what He would say.

Verses 5 and 6,

“They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. 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.”

The world listens to false teaching. Christians don't because we have the Spirit of God. Do you *listen* to this book?

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” – John 10:27

A red flag should off in your head when you hear something that just doesn't sound quite true. You might not even be able to point out what is wrong with it, but because the Holy Spirit is living inside of you, and you study His word, it's almost like a radar for false teaching. So when that radar starts going off, you test what was said! You go to the Bible and “see if these things are so”

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

When you test the sprits, and test what people are teaching to see if it aligns with this book, you will *know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.*

2 More Reasons Why This Matters

1.) Buying into false teaching is unloving. One example, some people say “God won't really send them to hell.” But the Bible teaches otherwise. And when you don't know which one to believe, you're probably not going to warn others because you yourself don't know. Do you believe the Bible when it says that there is an eternal lake of fire that people will go to? Believing these things changes the way you act.

2.) And I'm going to argue, more than all of these things, that main reason this is important is this:

The more you know God, The more you will love Him. “Your steadfast love is better than life” - Psalm 63:3

When you see God for who He is, you'll fall more madly in love with Him. That's why you need to test the spirits.