

Test the Spirits

1 John 4:1-6

MPS Christ-followers live by Holy Spirit discernment to walk in the light of God's truth.

OBJ Every person can understand a strong framework for Holy Spirit-led discernment to walk in the light of God's truth by four exhortations.

READ 1 John 4:1-6

*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. ²By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³and 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. ⁴Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. ⁵They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶We 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 John 4:1-6***

Once John establishes what is true love, which we know by the gospel of Jesus Christ, and how it is that we know we are in God's love, that we believe in Jesus and obey His commands, he moves to provide a framework or filter for discernment as we walk with the Lord daily. John's aim in this whole letter is that every Christ-follower would be confident in their relationship with God, even and especially in hard times. And, that this confidence would be rightly sourced, not based in personal accomplishment but in Christ's work for you. But as we learned in chapter three, there are so many messages that confuse and create chaos. John wants us to know how it is that we navigate following the Lord in the midst of so many sources trying to distract and deter us from faithfulness. At some point in the life of following Jesus, every Christ-follower asks, "How do I know whether something is from the Lord Jesus or not?" This is one of the most important questions a Christ-follower can ask.

INTRO Do you have a framework for how you think about things? Sometimes we hear the word "worldview" used when speaking of the way that Christians view the world and all that is in it. A framework simply means what it says, that there are intentional things we include to think about all things in accordance with Jesus Christ. The "frame" through which you think about, view, and understand the world should be built by God's truth.

Christ-followers live by Holy Spirit discernment to walk in the light of God's truth.

OBJ Four Exhortations to build a framework for Holy Spirit-led discernment to walk in the light of God's truth.

1. Do NOT believe every spirit but test every spirit for its source. .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.

John launches into this section with a direct exhortation, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit,". Some people are given the spiritual gift of discernment to serve for the benefit and blessing of the body of Christ. And while this gift relates to our topic today, is it not identical. Exercising the gift of discernment is not the same as learning the practice of discernment. All Christians are called and equipped by the Holy Spirit for the practice of discernment. And to not practice discernment is not simply to be absent of a gift, but to live in denial of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual naivete is not a gift of the Spirit, willful ignorance is not a fruit of the Spirit, and an overall lack of concern or care is indicative of a rebellious spirit. The most unloving thing we can do is entertain and tolerate that which is sourced from the world. Love does not allow us to ignore but empowers us to discern what is from God and what is of the Evil One.

When we think of spirits, we often think of something mysterious, non-visible, how it makes you feel when it is present but not identifiable, and many other such descriptions. A spirit is what gives something the force of its words. We understand



this in communication, though we do not always immediately recognize it. But what we often do not think is what John says of spirits. A spirit, little “s”, is not determined by some mysterious sensation or feeling. We don’t need a spiritual ghostbusters to guide us. A spirit is discerned by one simple element, by the message they proclaim. Every spirit has a message, and every message a source.

Testing the spirits means we listen to the message to judge the spirit by what it is saying, regardless of who’s voice it comes from. Too often, we receive or reject a message based solely on the messenger through which it comes. We too easily accept because we are impressed by, we like, or everyone else likes, the messenger, therefore, we accept the message. And still at other times we are not impressed by, we do not like, or others do not like the messenger, so we reject the message. This is not discernment, but naïve gullibility, and it’s just wrong. This is not what John is telling us to do.

Allow me to provide a few general examples of the main elements that provide a Christian’s framework. A first element is what we believe about WHO our Triune God is and the Bible’s revelation that forms our understanding of God. Second, what we believe about WHAT God has done for us in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Third, what we believe God’s Word says about the topic or situation that we are considering. Fourth, what God has done by giving us His Holy Spirit to know and obey Him. And finally, what the Bible teaches about HOW we walk by faith in obedience to God’s Word. No matter what we face, God has provided all we need to walk faithfully with Him in every circumstance. [Amid the complexities and chaos of this world by the schemes and strategies of the Evil One to steal, kill, and destroy us, John shows us how to implement a Christian framework for navigating life so we walk with the One who is our life.](#)

John exhorts us to listen to the message to understand what it is saying or claiming, and to evaluate it in accordance with the Scriptures, so that by this to discern the spirit so we can know the source. We test by considering how it defines words, what it claims or promises, what it wants us to believe, where it wants to lead us, and how it directs us to live. All that John has taught us so far about God, who is light, life, and love, provide the parameters by which one can test the message to discern the spirit. We test the spirits to discern whether the message is from God, because there are many false prophets in the world. You may not know where a message came from, but you can know where a message leads. [Every message should be discerned to determine the spirit because not all messages should be believed.](#) Christians do NOT believe every spirit but test every message for its source.

TRANS [But even if we test every message to discern the spirit, how do we know where to begin?](#)

2. [Knowing the Spirit of God first enables one to identify the spirit of the antichrist.](#) .2-3

*²By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³and 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. **1 John 4:2-3***

John provides the distinguishing message of truth. Christians have the Spirit of God that lives within us to guide and counsel us. The role and work of Holy Spirit will always point us to hope in Christ by counseling us according to His Word. That which faithfully points us to God is from God. The source of a message is determined by the glory it points and leads us to. And faithfulness is determined by holding to the gospel. But those who deny, disagree, or seek to cast suspicion or speculation on the gospel are not from God. They are the spirit of the antichrist that is already in the world. The source of every spirit is determined by this one facet; [“what does it claim about Jesus Christ?”](#)

As we mentioned a couple of weeks ago in studying chapter two, the antichrists who are already here will seldom come right out and deny a direct tenet of our faith. Instead, they cast speculation or suspicion on Jesus Christ in some way. They want us to ignore them by questioning Him, so they plant a seed of doubt or unbelief in our mind or heart. We may not believe their message immediately, but if we incubate their suspicion or speculation long enough, it will become full-blown unbelief. We don’t consider the messenger to determine whether we should initially receive or reject the message. We don’t consider how popular or prolific the message has become to determine whether we receive it. We give no consideration to any other initial personal reaction or response to the message. [Knowing the Spirit of God means that with every message received the first thing a Christian considers is, “does this agree with or contradict the person, work, and teachings of Jesus](#)



Christ as revealed in the Bible?"

Paul provides a helpful pattern when he teaches the Corinthians. **READ 2 Corinthians 10:3-5**

"For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. ⁴For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. ⁵We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, ⁶being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete." **2 Corinthians 10:3-5**

Christians do not entertain suspicions or speculations about that which God's Word speaks clearly on. This is reason #1 why you need to know your Bible and understand the foundational doctrines of your faith. You don't have to be a scholar, but you need a strong enough grasp in your understanding to hold your heart, mind, and soul to Christ. If we do not know, and very often we do not, then we seek the Lord, search His Word, and listen to Holy Spirit. But once it is discerned, we either receive it as from God or we destroy it so that it does not interfere with our obedience to Christ. [Knowing the Spirit of God first enables one to identify the spirit of the antichrist.](#)

3. Remember your source, to not fear but discern by truth for their origin. .4-5

⁴Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

*⁵They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. **1 John 4:4-5***

Christian, heed John's counsel here. Stop starting with the end and go to the source; *"you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."* Don't measure the messages of this world according to your understanding and don't assess the spirits of this age against your own wisdom. Take each and every one to the One in whom you have overcome and let the wisdom and insight of the Holy One be the light by which you walk, because He has already overcome. They want to trigger you to react without thinking. When you do that, you give them control over you. But when you stop to submit your spirit to Jesus Christ, to fill your mind with His truth, you unsheath the sword of the Spirit as your guard to fight your battle. No matter what the message may be and no matter how coded it may get delivered, there is no lie that escapes the illuminating power of Holy Spirit to expose its deception. [Do not forget who lives within you, and do not forsake Him: seek the Lord and the overcoming that is In Him.](#)

ILLUS Have you noticed these commercials of some serene photo, and below it states, "Enjoy the Zen. We'll be right back."? They are a lie. Zen may create a momentary feeling, but it is fake and does not last. No matter how balanced by Zen your universe may be, it can only deceive you to destroy you, for it is chaff in the wind of eternity. The truth of Jesus Christ doesn't give is a fleeting feeling for a moment but brings to life all the fullness of God within us.

ILLUS Have you seen the recent commercials calling for the inhumane slaughtering of innocent babies? You haven't? It's the commercial where a lady is seated in an obvious church sanctuary, with soft music underscoring, while they tell some life-threatening story for why they had to have a life-saving procedure. Then they conclude with, so you should support Amendment 3.

ILLUS Have you seen the banner at the intersection of Business 65 and South 17th St? It encourages women to vote for Amendment 3 and lie to their husbands, stating, "No one will ever know." It's a campaign led by famous women actors whose love life reads like a middle school yearbook, but "yeah, go ahead and take relationship advice from them." I love that someone recently placed a small black sign next to it with white letters that read, "God will know." [Do you know who else will know?](#) You will. You will know you are keeping secrets from your husband. The #1 way to destroy your marriage."

All these lies are fear-mongering to cause you to react without thinking! These messages do not align with God's Word, they are of the spirit of the antichrist and will destroy your life. [Christian, remember your source, to not fear but discern by truth for their origin.](#)

TRANS But there is a right source for us to listen to. The reason we remember our source is because of what He confirms.

4. God's Holy Spirit confirms who we are to listen to, to live and walk by in His truth. .6

⁶We 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 John 4:6

When we begin with our source, we are led by God's Holy Spirit to know who to listen to, and who to reject. Jesus said he would not leave us alone. He knew we would be too vulnerable a prey for the One who prowls around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. He promised to send us His Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth for life. Only the Spirit of truth can and will discern truth. You will know who to listen to by how closely you walk with God's Holy Spirit and by how closely others are walking with God's Holy Spirit. We know who to listen to by what they say and by WHO inhabits us and them, so we walk by the light of His truth. [God's Holy Spirit confirms who we are to listen to, to live and walk by in His truth.](#)

[Christ-followers live by Holy Spirit discernment to walk in the light of God's truth.](#)

