



“Test the Spirits”
Wk.10 of Light and Love - 1 John 4:1-6
By Pastor Jody May

1 John 4:1-6 ESV

Test the Spirits

4 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.

REVIEW:

LIGHT & LOVE

1st – Light – Truth that stems from Christ and is sustained in Fellowship with each other.

Introduction:

There has recently been a new show that my teenagers in my house got into over the summertime. It was a remake of an old show that came from a set of contemporary teen fiction that started in the 1930s, *The Nancy Drew Mysteries*. The peculiar thing about Nancy Drew is that character is resurrected every other generation for a book or tv series and it reflects the current trends of the day, she’s always a reflection of modern society.

The series my kids started watching was cross over between the Scooby Doo Gang and Buffy the Vampire Slayer. It showed the interest and fascination with paranormal activity. This Nancy Drew no longer set out to disprove Ghosts, but she was all about investigating and interacting with the paranormal. She was constantly testing the supernatural limits, discovering what were the intentions of the haunting in this town somewhere located in



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Maine. At the same time, she was always discovering new details about her hidden past.

While working out the mysteries she continually falls prey to manipulative ghosts, demon, etc. because she lacks a moral compass, she’s A-religious if you will, all religions are relevant and all reasoning for paranormal activity is valid. The show clarifies that, for the majority of modern people, there is no objective truth to understanding God, angels, and demons and therefore solving mysteries is luck. Nancy falls into trouble from the get-go because she lacks the proper wisdom nor device in which to test the Spirits that haunt her town.

While you and I don’t go around our community experiencing supernatural activity, and in case you do I don’t want to know about it you can see Bill for that, there is still an imperative command placed on us by this text here today. We are not to believe every spirit, from v.3 **“This is the spirit of the antichrist”** but we are called to test them. That alludes to the fact that we will be told, advised, pressured by voices and we will not always be sure if it is the right thing to do?

To give an example over the last year there have been more spats between Christians on whether to mask up, get a shot, keep the doors open, obey civil authorities, stay isolated, protest for what cause, open schools, open borders, etc. than I can count. The problem is there are different answers for different reasons in different seasons and everyone has an opinion. What happens in the church world is that people sometimes get lazy and either block it out or listen to the person that everyone seems to listen to, the one that seems the easiest to follow. **But sometimes the things that seem to make the most sense go directly against that which the Bible teaches.**

And just like Nancy Drew, if you are not informed by the objectivity of Biblical Truth, you can easily fall under the influence of the world instead of the influence of God, the HS.

Main Point:

We test the Spirits to steer clear of false doctrine.



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By Pastor Jody May

John today wants us to help us with our decision making especially when it comes to religious matters, people that want to influence our doctrinal beliefs, people that want to reinterpret scripture for us, people on the outside that want to tell us we are wrong. We are not to rush to believe the person that everyone goes to for spiritual advice (Oprah Winfrey, Ellen DeGeneres, Stephen Colbert, Joe Rogan, Tucker Carlson, Jen Psaki, Stephen Hawkins, Dr. Fauci, Ben Shapiro or even Jordan Peterson) but instead you are to make your own informed decision. To understand this better today we are going to look at the Reason to Test, the Ways in which we do it, and the Results from that.

Test the Spirits:

1. The Reason to Test.

**4 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.**

So, let's clarify this Spirit, or *pneuma*. Is John suggesting we have Ouija board conversations with dead ancestors? No, I believe he is making a clarifying statement on something he has already talked about:

I John 2:18-19 ESV

¹⁸Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.

¹⁹They went out from us, but they were not of us; ...

A. We test because there are unwanted opinions.

John is saying there are voices outside the church that are telling you how to live, that are cultural influencers, they are Antichrists, the opposite of what Jesus was, is, and is to come. The verse alludes to a very significant theological Truth, these people are not empowered by the Spirit of God, but they are influenced themselves by an **alternate Spirit**. Paul sheds light on the doctrine of this, someone that John worked closely with when he writes the church at Corinth.

1 Cor. 2:12 ESV



“Test the Spirits”
Wk.10 of Light and Love - 1 John 4:1-6
By Pastor Jody May

12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.

Paul recognizes two opposing Spirits in this world, the Spirit or essence of the world, and the Holy Spirit. As well we get a clue to remember for later and that is only when we have received the HS can we understand the things of God.

The Spirit of the World can be seen in a couple of different ways of which overlap:

1st the Spirit world does have a leader, a demonic deity, even perhaps Satan himself as Jesus points out:

John 14:30 ESV

I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, (see also Jn. 12:31 & 16:11)

And Paul continues with this line of reasoning

2 Corinthians 4:4 ESV

4In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

So, we see the idea the idea of a person(s) behind an organized front known as the World.

2nd Another view is that the spirit of the world is human wisdom in general or the basic human process of understanding, as expressed in secular philosophy and worldly wisdom.¹ Jesus alluded to this as well as to the impossibility of being able to serve two alternate views, or Spirits as John would call it, as He comments in Mat. On one of those so called philosophies:

Matthew 6:24 ESV

“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve

¹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/spirit-of-the-world.html>



“Test the Spirits”
Wk.10 of Light and Love - 1 John 4:1-6
By Pastor Jody May

God and money.” (Jesus is talking about the love of money, the philosophy that with it you can buy all the happiness you need)

We put together what the Bible is teaching us in context of opposing Spirits (a humanistic philosophy being fueled and influenced by a person(s)) and we see that John is commanding us not to listen to those that teach an alternate teaching contrary to God but to test them. Then at the end of vs. 1 there’s an additional quantifier: **for many false prophets have gone out into the world.**

These people have at one time been a part of the true church, but now they are under the influence of the Spirit of this World that is ultimately under the control of demonic forces. They are familiar to you, because they still sound like you, and they know what you know.

If anything, be careful, for there will be people that claim to speak for God, that claim to care about God’s people, and you are I are not to trust them, and the way we are called to discern this is to test them. The only way around this command folks, if you are up for dodging what God says to do, is stop listening to all the voices outside of the church, BUT you can’t do that, because you are called to live in the world. So, we must figure out how do we discern what to listen to, when is it ok to listen to people outside the church, and when it is not.

B. We test because there are foolish opinions.

I will also add here another reason why we need to learn to test:

1 Corinthians 1:20-21 ESV

20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? **(those of the world) Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?** **21** For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

v. 20 It’s **NOT the smart thing to do to listen** to the Spirit of the World because of their **FOOLISH ADVICE!** This passage also points out for the Christian that the path to Salvation through the working of evangelism is not always debating with these folks or wasting a lot of time on apologetics. (V.



“Test the Spirits”
Wk.10 of Light and Love - 1 John 4:1-6
By Pastor Jody May

21) The simple message of the Gospel is foolishness to the world it will not make sense to them. Not only that, but the advice they give to us, on how to live, will be foolish especially when it comes to Christian living.

For the Christian *the Chief aim of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever* (Westminster Shorter Catechism question #1)². The chief end of the world is to glorify and pleasure self for this life only. Two totally opposite goals and that’s why it is foolish to listen to them and why we need to test outside voices that want to tell us how to live. **We test the Spirits to steer clear of false doctrines, for their teachings are foolishness.**

That brings us to our second truth about testing the Spirits and that’s the How?

2. The Way to Test.

² **By this** you know the Spirit of God: (BTW this is the fourth time John uses this phrase to keep us in the TRUTH)

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.

A. Confession that Jesus is Divine.

This test is built into the confession of who someone thinks Jesus is. Not only that, but according to John it cannot be someone who differs than what the Apostles believed about Jesus. If you go back ten weeks ago you will see how John set up this whole letter to handle this problem with antichrists:

1 John 1:1-2 ESV

1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— **2** the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us.

² http://www.shortercatechism.com/resources/wsc/wsc_001.html



“Test the Spirits”
Wk.10 of Light and Love - 1 John 4:1-6
By Pastor Jody May

1st John says we heard, we saw, we touched, and we experienced this man named Jesus for we believed He was the incarnate **Word of Life**. That is to point the reader back to his gospel, John 1 – In the beginning:

John 1:1-5 ESV

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was in the beginning with God. **3** All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. **4** In him was **life**, and the **life was the light of men**. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John and the other Apostles believed Jesus is equal to God, because He is God, and His life is what brings understanding to men, which is what the church believes. **People on the outside are always trying to explain to the church what the Bible should mean.** Then John 1:5 gives the outcome of those that don't buy what the world is selling, “the darkness will not overcome it.” The Spirit of the World, the antichrists, shall not overcome those that hold to Jesus' divine Christology. So, if people believe and function as if Jesus is Lord of their lives they are of God. There needs to be a confession of Jesus' deity.

B. A Confession of an Undivine Theology:

In John's Day there were multiple heresies already starting to go around about Jesus, based on the mixture of Greek thought and the practices of polytheism. The Docetists of the day believed Jesus was only a phantom which goes against what the apostles taught because it removes Jesus' divinity because God must come in flesh to enact Salvation. Taking away Jesus' two nature existence is to nullify His work.

Over the centuries multiple heresies have risen up, and the church has combatted them, but they never really go away. This past week the students and I talked about different heresies that included the Docetists and the Ebionites, and early Jewish offshoot of Christianity:³

Interestingly, Ebionism may have been prompted by good motives: a desire to safeguard the foundational affirmation of Judaism that God is one (Deut. 6:4; cf.

³ <https://www.todayintheword.org/issues/2006/2/theology-matters/>



“Test the Spirits”
Wk.10 of Light and Love - 1 John 4:1-6
By Pastor Jody May

Mark 12:29, 32; James 2:19). The Ebionites believed that Jesus was the son of Joseph and Mary and was elected to be the son of God. They emphasized strict obedience to the Mosaic Law and preached a gospel of human effort.

Why Theology Matters

Although no one today claims to practice Ebionism, some of its elements can still be seen in those who make a distinction between the “historical” and the biblical Jesus and who claim that His message was primarily one of moralism. One contemporary group, The Jesus Seminar, for example, is comprised of scholars that have met since 1985 and passed judgment on the authenticity of the statements attributed to Jesus in the Gospels based on popular vote. They say that Jesus did not claim to be God or even the Messiah.

Ebionism is alive and well in our world today for many believe that Jesus was a good and moral person, but He was not indeed the foretold Divine Messiah prophesied about in the OT. Even today people still look to Jewish theologians for a Messianic understanding on Jesus when most Jewish theologians deny Christ.

Interestingly enough, **ALL** heresies can be traced back to a belief in the works of man. **If you take away Jesus’ deity you take away His ability to remove sin, and as we learned last week, condemnation.** Some of us even grew up with a twisted sense of doctrine like Pelagianism, another Christian doctrine alive and well today in the modern church.

Pelagianism is considered heresy **because it departs from essential biblical truth in several of its teachings.** Pelagianism asserts that Adam's sin affected him alone. ... Pelagianism teaches that people can avoid sinning and choose to live righteously, even without the help of God's grace. It means you can work hard to get better outside the grace of God.

People who have heard and accepted the Gospel message, that Jesus died for us while still sinners, far from grace, far from hope, and by His act we are brought near to God to **receive all the benefits of eternal life (1 John 1:2).** If you hear anyone or anything otherwise you are to reject that too as heresy. Listen, John says you know when that time will come:

1 John 2:20-27 ESV



“Test the Spirits”
Wk.10 of Light and Love - 1 John 4:1-6
By Pastor Jody May

²⁰ But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. ²¹ I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but **because you know it**, and because no lie is of the truth. ²² Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.

Family many times the world will offer us what sounds like good talk about making amends, trying harder, giving more, being obedient to the government, don't judge others, and just be more forgiving. The world always takes the root in scripture and twist to fit their desires without ever tying it to Christ. BUT what they lack is a belief that Jesus is Lord, and they are called to obey Him and believe in Him alone for Salvation.

We are not saved by being obedient to everyone, by being tolerant of everyone, by letting anyone do whatever they want to us, our family, or our friends. We are called to be obedient to Christ above all, and God's people know this truth! What you must do is reject their advances, reject their pressuring, and reject their fake hurt feelings.

When we have this truth we have eternal life, that means life that makes sense now (2:25)! Eternal life begins now on earth, we live with the knowledge of the gospel now, I am free from works now, I am free from condemnation now, I am free to do good works without having to earn Salvation now. The world will not like this philosophy because they lose control over you, they are scared of free-minded people that live without consideration of what they think!

Yes, it is hard, but we are **to test the Spirit in people to remain free from false doctrine** AND John says there is a benefit and fruit of this as well.

3. The Results of the Test.

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.



“Test the Spirits”
Wk.10 of Light and Love - 1 John 4:1-6
By Pastor Jody May

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

The result of Testing the Spirits, you will overcome and continue to overcome, because we all love this line: **“He who is in you, is greater than he who is in the world!”** It won’t always feel like that because the world never runs out of those that sympathize with them.

As MacArthur states on this subject:

The world listens to them because they speak from the world –...Their theology has its source in demons. Their religion has its source in demons. Their ideas come out of the world, and the world is in the lap of the evil one. And when you speak to them the truth of God, they don’t listen. They have no affinity for it. They have no capacity for it. They have no apparatus by which they can discern it, understand it, take it in. The world will listen to them. False teachers will have popularity.

Guys, popularity is never a discerning factor of whether someone is right, or of God, it’s the exact opposite. The world supports its’ own and it is quick to turn on its’ own when they fail to deliver followers.

The vast majority of the world is swept away in false teaching, because the world believes false teachers because they’re of the same stock. They recognize their own language. Sinners have an affinity for error. Sinners have affinities for demons, seducing spirits, hypocritical lies cause they have no apparatus for the truth. – Mac Arthur

But we friends have an apparatus for truth, the teaching of the Apostles. The result of the test is that people will accept the Apostle’s teachings. That needs to tell you right now, that a lot of people are of the Spirit of the World, because only a few, a remnant, truly accept the deity and the truth of Jesus.

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

CONCLUSION / RESPONSE:

Today perhaps you are putting too much hope in the words of a politician, a political philosophy, a popular personality, a social justice warrior, because you



“Test the Spirits”
Wk.10 of Light and Love - 1 John 4:1-6
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are too wrapped up in the **“NOW”** of the world. **That means the world is always telling us there is a CRISIS and we need an answer NOW, look to the antichrists to save us!** Family, good news today for you is you do have the answer right now, it is just in stark contrast to what the world offers. **The Truth we find in Jesus has an answer for every Crisis and every situation we will ever encounter.**

When you have the answer to life now, faith in Jesus as the Divine Messiah, you are **not so desperate** as everyone else. Perhaps we all need to spend a little less time listening to the voices in the world and listen to the Word of God which we all start this week in our reading plan together. Then in our groups let us listen to what God has for us in our conversations in our CGs so we don't fall into false doctrine.

Through our Community, let us help one another to keep Testing the Spirit of those around us **to steer clear of False Doctrines...**

Prayer

Communion

Benediction

Go in the name of the Father, that has provided the Truth recorded in the letters of the Apostles.

Go in the name of the Son, that gives us real answers for real problems that are eternal in their nature.

Go in the name and power of the HS, that helps us to test the Spirits revealing those of the world and those of God, and helping us to call all to repentance.