

“Testing the Spirits” (1 Jn. 3:24-4:8)

1. Harmony (3:24-4:1)
 - a. Abiding: Obedience is indicative of abiding (3:24 cf. v.10).
 - b. Testing: Testing is included in obeying (4:1). E.g. →
 - i. OT: Deut. 18:22; 13:1-3
 - ii. NT: 1 Thess. 5:19-22; 1 Tim. 4:16
 - iii. The verb “test” (*dokimazete*) means “to prove, to examine,”¹ Prov. 17:3 speaks of testing and the metallurgical process is indicative of the Greek term here and cited and exemplified in Prov. 17:3. Stott: “Neither Christian believing nor Christian loving is to be indiscriminate.”²
 - iv. ~~Further Study references re: warning/discerning false teachers: Mat. 7:15-16; Mk. 13:22; Acts 20:29-30; Jude; 2 Pet. 2:1; 1 Jn. 2:18; 2 Jn. 7 to site a few.~~
2. Ontology (2-3)
 - a. Confession of the Person of Jesus
 - i. Incarnation: John had stated what the incarnation presupposes viz. Jesus’ divinity (cf. Jn. 1:1, 14, 19, 3:13, 19; 8:14).
 - ii. Docetism, in Greek, “appearance,” denied the literal incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus.
 - iii. We must have the historical Jesus to be saved (Rom. 8:9-10)! Many have made up a Jesus which is an idol of theirs (or someone else’s making). See Exod. 20:3-4 (the 1st 2 Commandments). Idols cannot save – including a Jesus who is phony.
 - iv. The Spirit of truth (6) illuminates the believer re: the person of Jesus via the Word as He is the Author of it. The deceiving spirits distort such even though they know the truth (Mark 1:24; 3:11; 5:7-8; cf. Acts 19:15). They do so as they know a false Jesus saves no one.
 - v. Note: many may confess Jesus is divine and came in the flesh but are still condemned. One of the most telling passages is Matt. 7 where Jesus warned of those who would even affirm truth about His person (Mat. 7:21-23).
 - b. Confession of the Work of Jesus
 - i. Although John doesn’t precisely list Jesus’ work as a criteria for testing spirits, it is clearly presupposed. In fact “Christ” or “Messiah” (in Hebrew) is a title “anointed one,” which indicates His mission as the great prophet, suffering servant, priest, and king who would prevail over sin via righteousness proving triumphant for our salvation (respectively, e.g. Deut. 18:15; Isa. 52:13-53:12; Pss. 24; 68; 118).
 - ii. Furthermore, because of this utterly profound triad of “anointed” offices held and fulfilled by Jesus Messiah, the Holy Spirit of Christ always glorifies Jesus (Jn. 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-14; 2 Cor. 3:17-18) and never directs attention to self. →
 - iii. Note that John’s criteria revolves only around the person of Jesus! When we divert attention to the Spirit and pervert His emphasis, motive, attitude, values, gifts, and fruit, we actually work against Him. READ STRANGE FIRE P. 43-45 QUOTES.
 - iv. The work of Jesus was the Cross and thus we preach Christ crucified – the heart of our message (~~1 Cor. 1:23; 15:2-3~~) – not e.g. what prosperous endeavors are ahead for you or the wonderful spouse you’ll marry. Such is fortune cookie prophesy – always positive and never requiring repentance. Scripture teaches us to be honest in our dealings and wise in our selections and the Spirit offers no short cuts to discipleship.

¹ Akin, D. L. (2001). [1, 2, 3 John](#) (Vol. 38, p. 170). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

² Stott, J. R. W. (1988). [The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary](#) (Vol. 19, p. 153). InterVarsity Press.

“Testing the Spirits” (1 Jn. 3:24-4:8)

The book of Proverbs teaches that we must learn discernment and wisdom and such is done by renewing our minds with the Word of God.

- v. Jesus’ ontology and mission, i.e. person and work, are inseparable as the Son of God’s mission necessitated His incarnation (Heb. 10:5).
- ~~vi. John (and Scripture) leaves no room for middle ground. Either the Holy Spirit informs of accurate theology or spirits of Antichrist attempt to misinform.~~

3. Integrity (4-5)

a. Conquering or Conforming?

- i. Those with the “spirit of error” conform to the sinful world as it appeals to them (their flesh) and those whom they lead astray.
- ii. Those who “overcome,” do so by the Spirit of truth who goes directly against the grain of the world. Read Col. 2:12-15. Such is the “foolishness of God” of which Paul facetiously wrote in 1 Cor. 1:25.
- iii. Jn. 16:33. We overcome the world because we are *in* the One who overcame it!
- iv. We don’t overcome with force, coercion, manipulation (Mat. 11:12) but with righteousness, love, longsuffering, joy, peace, humility, obedience, etc.

b. Theology and Morality

- i. “They are of the world.” The world and God collide (1 Jn. 2:15-17). Our integrity means we are no longer of the world and must come out of her though we live as sojourners here.
- ii. How many of you have figured out that the secular state is not neutral? The spirit of the age is antichrist. Satan, self, and society wars against the Spirit.
- iii. Our faith (the way we live) accords with our doctrine (what we believe) (1 Tim. 4:16).
- iv. Not only our biblical doctrine but our walk opposes that of the world (Gal. 5:16-21).
- v. Satan is clever (2 Cor. 11:14) and knows that wolves must put on wool in order to creep in to the sheep pens. The demonic spirits will actually confirm enough truth in order to lead away from such eventually and ultimately. Bethel has no obviously heretical lyrics, yet Bill Johnson’s teachings, books, and preaching is informed by New Age laws and practices. But just enough truth is presented in order to funnel in undiscerning folk. Consider Acts 16:16-18 where Paul cast out a spirit of divination who was affirming truth. Furthermore, in the following verses, we are told that Paul and Silas were arrested for their act which cost others money. It is a giant red flag when teachers immediately condemn criticism of themselves and refuse to listen to such. I am always testing my teaching before, during, and even after teaching so as to make certain I’m teaching the Word; and if I need to retract, I will. I have changed positions albeit not primary ones. Following are a few critiquing questions we need to be continually asking.
- vi. Does our message encourage obedience, emphasize Christ crucified, or enforce true doctrine? Or, does our message encourage indulgence, emphasize the desires of the flesh, or enforce pet traditions/superfluous teachings etc.? Do we prioritize humility and discretion or assertion and obnoxious presumption? Do leaders have character required of leadership (see 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) or are they sexually promiscuous, ill tempered, unstable, and greedy? Do they love the lime lights and elevate themselves exploiting others, or are they discreet, sacrificial, and serving? “They are of the world.” And “We are of God.” →

“Testing the Spirits” (1 Jn. 3:24-4:8)

4. Accuracy (6)

- a. The Word vs the world. The “we” includes believers but is primarily relevant to John and other eye witnesses who pinned the NT. As we noted re: the Spirit’s illumination (and revelation for the short period), such prophesy and interpretation was inspired and guarded by the Spirit so intimately that John was able to associate his apostolic authority with the truth of the Spirit (v. 6; Jn. 15:26 cf. 14:25-26).
- b. We cannot say that today because we are receiving no new revelation! Either the canon is complete or it isn’t. If it had been complete, John would have pointed to the Scripture alone. Yet the Spirit was still revealing the theology and implications of Jesus’ person/work and how it completely fulfilled the OT (John 5:39; ~~Lk 24:25-27~~). Many preachers are **acting** as if the Spirit is still prophesying of things to come; yet what more does the believer need in order to have joy, peace, purpose, assurance, direction, discernment, etc. that is outside of the complete canon of Scripture? Strange Fire – Martin Lloyd-Jones 261.
- c. Today, legitimate teachers do not say what John said (6) but rather point to the Word as entirely sufficient (2 Tim. 3:16). Extra-biblical revelation is dangerous SEE STRANGE FIRE PP. 68-69. READ PP. 73-74
- d. Therefore, John’s teaching was the test and our teaching is to be tested by the Scripture.
- e. Acts 17:11 Paul commended the Bereans for testing his own teachings against the Scripture. If Paul – who pinned the majority of epistles – was rightly tested, how much more should we test others who are not apostolic – to see if Scripture affirms them?
- f. The “Spirit of truth” and the “Sword of the Spirit” are never in contradiction and always working together. 2 Pet. 1:20-21.
- g. Such renew our mind transforming us into Christ’s image (Ro. 12:1-2; 8:29) vs the spirits who influence those who are waterless clouds and waterless springs twisting the scriptures for their perverted agendas (2 Pet. 2:10, 14-22; 3:16c; cf. Jude 12). “They are of the world” v.5 “We are of God” v.6.
- h. Charles Spurgeon had something to say re: testing the spirits (Strange Fire 258).

5. Charity (7-8)

- a. Charity is a mark of the Spirit of truth. Our triune God is perfect in purity, power, and person – of whom there are three subsistent coequal eternal persons.
- b. Our love for each other marks us but so does a love for the lost. While we were yet sinners Christ died for us (Ro. 5:8) and our love for Him spurs on our love for those who are perishing as we once were.
- c. Love does not rejoice in iniquity but rejoices in the truth (1 Cor. 13:6) and thus it does not affirm it! Love promotes/pursues truth and righteousness and truth and righteousness promote love. Conclusion →

Too many ministry models (usually in charismatic circles) are **delivery based** and emotionally charged. Though Jesus did His miracles to validate His authority (as John called them "signs," which point to the Word made flesh) - the Apostles' ministry (taken from Jesus' instruction and demonstration) was **not of delivery but of discipleship model**. The Word is absolutely sufficient and we ought not to be looking for easy, so called 'faith deliverances' for long term problems - such will require faith for sure, but faith in Christ to walk us through the discipleship of maturation. God does miracles still, but on His terms and in His time – He is NOT obligated to work them for those with faith showing up to "healing services." God is not a genie in a bottle waiting for us to have the faith and speak it so he can meet our requests. I pray for spiritual maturation - but I know the prayer must be matched with study, service,

“Testing the Spirits” (1 Jn. 3:24-4:8)

solitude, sacrifice, etc. When we do these things, a much deeper healing will take place. And we will not be washed to and fro by the waves of emotion, nor experience “disillusionment” from the faith when our claimed miracles are not a reality. The measurement of spiritual maturity is not how much emotion you display, how often you wave up your hands, how much you say 'thank you Jesus' or the like, or if you speak in tongues etc. It is measured by your faithfulness to His Commands - that' true spirituality. Oh how I long for true revival!

PC

Our world has redefined love as approval. And to “judge” another’s actions is utterly bigoted and intolerant. “Judge not lest ye be judged” they misquote in order to excuse their selfish, prideful, scheming rebellion. Though an accurate quote, it constitutes as a misquote because of their negligence in reading Jesus’ explanation in the following verses – which demand proper judgment (cf. Jn. 7:15ff.). John warned and thus instructed believers to test the spirits who infiltrate and pervert the teaching of the Spirit of truth. How are we to judge and what are our criteria? Answering that is today’s task in *1 John*. It’s all in the Word! In fact, the Scriptures themselves call for a testing of their own validity for they have nothing to fear. Ours is a faith with a firm foundation and that foundation has, is, and will continue to be tested and found true because it testifies to the person and work of Jesus! The deceiving spirits in the days of the formation of the New Testament are still at work today among the churches; and thus we must “not believe every spirit, but test the spirits,” but “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” When one balks at the notion of his message/claims being tested by Scripture, it is a sign of the spirits who are deceiving the world!

PC for July 3

Scripture teaches us everything we need to know about the spiritual life – the new creation of regeneration. With the new birth of the Spirit (Jn. 3:3) there is liberty *from* sin and *unto* righteousness. Scripture teaches us that we are to celebrate the values, motive, attitude, and priorities of the Spirit rather than our circumstances. Therefore we can still celebrate Independence Day for the sacrifices, courage, values, virtues, and truths which informed such a declaration and subsequent war. And though we have digressed far from such honor and convictions, we can cling to the principles found in Scripture and which informed such a revolution, and are indeed the foundation of such. Therefore, we do not need another revolution but a reformation. We need to get back to the Scripture’s instruction for life and eternal life and there we will find liberty regardless of circumstances. Where the Holy Spirit is, there is liberty (2 Cor. 3:17). The spirit of the age promises much but only enslaves unto sin. Such is why we must test the spirits in our midst. Satan need not deceive the lost souls but merely leave them unbothered and uninterested. However, the evil spirits aim to thwart those seeking the spiritual things and deceive those in the Church with little or no discernment. And so we must use the Word of the Spirit to test the spirits and cling to only which is good (1 Thes. 5:21). We must shed all influence of the spirit of the age which ensnares and cling to the Spirit of truth who liberates!

PC for June 26

As I write this I’m five days from leaving for WV. When you read this, (LORD willing) we’ll be heading back to Florida. Of course my prayers are for Allen and all present to worship in spirit and truth as the Word is presented and praises are offered. As for subsequent Sundays: I’m aiming to preach a Sunday or two on testing the Spirits (July 3rd and possibly 10th). Directly afterwards, I plan to start preaching in *Proverbs*. I’m looking forward to learning from the wisdom writings, as such are meant for us to navigate a lost and hostile world. The Church needs such discerning wisdom at this time. On

“Testing the Spirits” (1 Jn. 3:24-4:8)

Wednesdays we will be continuing in *John*, but I’m going to interrupt it for a few weeks to do a small expose on Andrew Wommack and Bethel. I have or will immediately let you know when we will begin this miniseries on Wednesdays. We’ll take a few Wednesdays on it and then return to *John*. Although I didn’t plan on this, the series will work out to be an application of sorts on testing the spirits – which I prepared months ago and all but forgot, until someone mentioned such and I was reminded that I had prepared it. I’ll just take it as providence like all other series, passages, and topics brought to my attention. Praise be unto our great God and Savior! See you all soon – LORD willing!