

“Test the Spirits”
(1Jn 4:1-6)



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Recap of past study themes



Chapter 1:

- ❧ 1-4: Defends Christology
- ❧ 5-10: Reaffirms the Gospel

Chapter 2:

- ❧ 1-6: Reaffirms the necessity of our active participation in sanctification
- ❧ 7-11: Reaffirms the Old and New Commandment
- ❧ 12-14: Reveals divine truth for all seasons of life
- ❧ 15-17: Warn us not to love this world
- ❧ 18: Prophetic warning of antichrists, the Antichrist
- ❧ 19-24: Prophetic warning of the Great Apostasy
- ❧ 20-21: Reaffirms the anointing (our election) we received from God
- ❧ 22-29: Reaffirms the promises we received by that anointing

Recap of past study themes



Chapter 3:

- ❧ 1-3: The purifying hope in seeing Jesus face-to-face
- ❧ 4-10: The Son of God appeared to destroy the works of the devil
- ❧ 11-12: Jesus commands us to love one another
- ❧ 13-22: We are obligated to love in deed and truth

Chapter 4:

- ❧ 1-6: Test the spirits

Overview of our passage



Theme: Test every spirit

✧ 1Jn 4:1-6

Doctrine: Every spirit or teaching that rejects the deity of Jesus is from the spirit of antichrist who is, who was, who is to come

Application: We are to discern what is declared or proclaimed as being from God in light of the truth revealed in Scripture. We are to reject that which contradict Scripture and hold fast to that which is true.

Scripture Reading



1 John 4:1-6 (NASB)

1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because 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, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. 4 You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. 5 They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them. 6 We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Exposit: 1Jn 4:1



1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

- ❧ “beloved”: 4th time out of 6x he addresses believers as this in this letter
 - ❧ Tone of endearment (pastor’s heart)
 - ❧ Declaration of truth (believers are be-loved by God)
- ❧ “do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits” [more on this]
- ❧ “many false prophets have gone out into the world” [more on this]

“do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits”



- ❧ “do not” is a direct command
- ❧ Meaning the opposite (doing) is sin
- ❧ “believe every spirit (pneuma)”
 - ❧ Pneuma is any spirit being: depending on context it could refer to:
 - ❧ The Holy Spirit (the Holy Pneuma)
 - ❧ Angels (good angels and evil angels/ demons)
 - ❧ Man (redeemed/ non-redeemed)
- ❧ “do not believe every spirit” is not also a command, but also prophetic
 - ❧ Just like “last hour”
 - ❧ Current reality
 - ❧ Future reality (up to the time Antichrist comes)
 - ❧ The spirit of antichrist will increase in activity towards the end of the age
 - ❧ Many false christs, false prophets will arrive on the scene

“do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits”



- ❧ In 1Jn 4:1 context, every spirit is false prophets
 - ❧ Again both present and future
- ❧ Instead of believing anyone's claim to be a prophet, we are commanded to:
- ❧ “test (dokimazō) the spirits (pneuma)”
 - ❧ dokimazō means to examine or analyze
- ❧ How are we to test the spirits?
 - ❧ Examine or analyze what is being said or taught through Scripture!
 - ❧ John will expound on this further in the next verse
 - ❧ But for now, let's see what Paul has to say about this in Galatians...

“do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits”



Galatians 1:6-10

6 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel (brought by an evil spirit); 7 which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! 9 As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

- ❧ The believers in Galatia were encountering false teaching (Judaism)
- ❧ Paul was amazed that they quickly changed their view/opinion on what the gospel is
- ❧ “if we (any man or apostle)” or an angel (evil or good angel) from heaven should preach a different gospel, Paul pronounced an eternal curse!
- ❧ Parallel to 1John, this is a prophecy!
- ❧ There was demonic spiritual activity in the churches in Paul’s/John’s day, there will be demonic spiritual activity in the churches at the end of the age
- ❧ This demonic activity will gain traction prior to Antichrist’s arrival up to the Great Apostasy
- ❧ When Antichrist comes, and the false christs, false prophets before him, Paul is pronouncing an eternal curse on them for bringing a different gospel!

“many false prophets have gone out into the world”



John goes on to say in the latter part of v.1 “because many false prophets have gone out into the world”

- ❧ This statement is again proof that John is referring to many false prophets at the time he penned this letter (present)
- ❧ And that this is prophetic about activity of the spirit of antichrist up to the time Antichrist comes and arrives on the scene (future)
- ❧ There were false prophets in John’s/Paul’s day (present)
- ❧ There will be false prophets at the end of the age (future)
- ❧ In keeping with the parallel with what Paul had to endure, Paul not only had to rescue the gospel, but he had to defend his apostleship to not just false prophets, but those who claimed to be super apostles!

“many false prophets have gone out into the world”



2 Corinthians 11:1-23 (Paul defends his apostleship)

1 I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness; but indeed you are bearing with me. 2 For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. 3 But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. **4 For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully.** 5 For I consider myself not in the least inferior to **the most eminent apostles** (ESV: super-apostles). 6 But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in knowledge; in fact, in every way we have made this evident to you in all things.

“many false prophets have gone out into the world”



- ❧ CASE IN POINT: Both John and Paul shared the same issues and concerns!
- ❧ After they delivered the gospel to the churches they ministered to, they were easily shaken and moved from the truth of the gospel!
 - ❧ Both were combatting false teaching, false gospels
 - ❧ Both were combatting false prophets, false teachers, false Jews
 - ❧ Both were devoted to Jesus and faithful to contend for the faith
 - ❧ Both had a shepherd's heart and looked out for the sheep!
- ❧ Again, this has a two-fold reality:
- ❧ BACK THEN: There was a false gospel, false Jesus, false prophets, false teachers
- ❧ CURRENTLY/FUTURE: There will be a false gospel, false Jesus, false prophets, and false teachers
- ❧ All this is to say 1Jn 4:1 has dual truths and fulfillment
 - ❧ Covers John's penning of the epistle
 - ❧ To the end of the age
 - ❧ And everything in the middle

Exposit: 1Jn 4:2



2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God;

- ❧ “By this you know (ginōskō)” John is telling us how we are to test the spirits
 - ❧ Interesting that John used ginōskō vs. oida
 - ❧ Emphasizing we’ll know through our union with the Holy Spirit!
- ❧ John boils down that test to the confession of Jesus Christ:
 - ❧ “every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ has come in the flesh”
 - ❧ “ever spirit that does not confess Jesus [has come in the flesh]”
- ❧ Let’s look at this closer...

“every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh”



- ❧ “every spirit” in context is false prophets
- ❧ “confesses” is homologeō which means declare or agree
- ❧ If we were to encounter a man who claims to be a prophet of God, the way we test that spirit being is to examine his confession:
- ❧ Who does that person say about the biblical Jesus?
- ❧ Is that self proclaimed prophet declaring or agreeing that Jesus is the Son of God, God incarnate?
- ❧ Or does he have other opinions about Jesus
- ❧ This was the heart when Jesus asked Peter about his opinion (confession) as to who Jesus is...

“every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh”



Matthew 16:13-20

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” 14 And they said, “Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.” 15 He *said to them, “**But who do you say that I am?**” 16 **Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”** 17 **And Jesus said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.** 18 I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock (Peter’s confession) I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.” 20 Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ.

- ❧ Peter’s confession was that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, God in the flesh
- ❧ Peter’s confession was proof that the Father (through the Holy Spirit) revealed (apokaluptō which means to uncover, reveal) the deity of Christ to Peter

“every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh”



- ❧ Thus, John’s point is: any self proclaimed prophet who confesses (declares and agrees) Jesus is the Son of God, God in the flesh, he must have the Holy Spirit in him!
- ❧ In principal, this is true of believers (but this is not the point of the text)
 - ❧ Disclaimer: those with an empty confession (agrees about truths about Jesus in the bible and the gospel, once professed and identified himself as a Christian, but leaves the faith, proves that confession to be empty or false – no evidence of a new birth
 - ❧ Parable of the sower and seed (rocky places) applies to them:
Matthew 13:20 The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21 yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away.
- ❧ The converse is true as well in v. 3...

Exposit: 1Jn 4:3



3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.

- ❧ If the self proclaimed prophet minimizes or diminishes the deity of Jesus, that spirit is not from God
- ❧ If he were to bring the message that Jesus was not God incarnate, but rather:
 - ❧ A prophet (little “p”)
 - ❧ A good teacher (one of the Rabbi)
 - ❧ A moral person
 - ❧ A created being
 - ❧ Just a human being, etc.
- ❧ We are to reject that spirit, outright! We are to reject that teaching!
- ❧ Such a spirit did not pass the confession test and is not from God!
- ❧ Do not believe such a spirit nor entertain his message!
 - ❧ Even if he were to perform signs and wonders
 - ❧ Is this not what our Lord warned us in Mt 24...

Exposit: 1Jn 4:3



Matthew 24:23-28

(after the ABONINATION THAT CAUSES DESOLATION warning)

23 Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There He is,' do not believe him. 24 **For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders**, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. 25 Behold, I have told you in advance. 26 So if they say to you, 'Behold, He is in the wilderness,' do not go out, or, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe them. 27 For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. 28 Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

- ✎ Again further support that 1Jn 4 is prophetic concerning false prophets up to and including the revealing of Antichrist

Exposit: 1Jn 4:3



- ❧ Back to 1Jn 4:3
- ❧ When such false prophets come, John says “this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world”
- ❧ The spirit of the antichrist was at work in John’s day
 - ❧ John is combatting that antichrist spirit in this letter
- ❧ The spirit of the antichrist remains at work in our day
 - ❧ Lies, falsehood, deceit is concerning God, Christ, the gospel, salvation
- ❧ The spirit of the antichrist will continue in his influence until Antichrist comes
- ❧ The Antichrist as we covered in our “Last Hour” study, will proclaim to be God in the flesh and will kill those who refuse to worship him
- ❧ That spirit, the Antichrist, John says is not from God, but from Satan himself

Exposit: 1Jn 4:4



4 You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.

- ❧ “you” John is addressing believers
 - ❧ Thus “you” can be rendered “all believers”
- ❧ “from God” can also be rendered “belong to God”
- ❧ “have overcome them” [more on this]
- ❧ “greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world” [more on this]

“have overcome them”



- ❧ “have overcome” is past tense
- ❧ “them” is referring to false prophets, spirit of antichrist, and ultimately Antichrist himself

GOD’S PROMISE: regardless of false prophets, false teachings, spirit of antichrist, or even, Antichrist himself, all believers have and will overcome them and enter eternal life!

- ❧ Guess what: v.4 is prophetic too!
- ❧ John expounds on this in Revelation...

“have overcome them”



Revelation 12:11

(after the 7th Trumpet judgment)

11 And *they overcame **him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.

❧ *they are the elect who are on earth during that time

❧ **him is the accuser (Satan)

❧ The prophecy is this: The elect at the time of the 7th trumpet who are on earth will overcome Antichrist (Satan) because they will reject their faith in Jesus and will refuse to worship Antichrist or take his mark and if necessary will face death for their faith

John goes on to further say in v. 4...

“greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world”



- ❧ ‘greater’ is ‘megas’ where we get our English word “mega”
- ❧ megas also means mighty, greater in strength and power
- ❧ Can be rendered: “mega is He who is greater in strength and power and is in you” vs. “he who is in the world”
- ❧ Who is “he”?
 - ❧ Assumption: Satan
 - ❧ And there is truth to this
- ❧ But more technically, “he” is prophetic and referring to Antichrist who is preceded and followed by false prophets

Catarroja AMP: 1Jn 4:4



4 [All believers belong to] God, [and as God's] little children, [believers have overcome false prophets, spirit of antichrist, Antichrist himself]; because [mega] is [Jesus] who is [mightier in strength and power and resides] in you than he [spirit of antichrist, Antichrist himself] who is [already at work through false prophets] in the world.

Exposit: 1Jn 4:5



5 They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them.

- ✎ “they” are referring to false prophets, spirit of antichrist, Antichrist
- ✎ “from the world and the world listens to them” [more on this]

“from the world and the world listens to them”



- ❧ “from the world” is contrasted “from heaven”
- ❧ Keeping in context, this can be viewed as
 - ❧ “belonging to the world” vs. “belonging to God”
- ❧ “the world listens” is a reference to non-redeemed people
- ❧ Scripture has a designation for such non-redeemed people and to show that I’d like to cross reference some other Scriptures...

“from the world and the world listens to them”



Luke 21:34-36

(Jesus on the Mt Olivet discourse concerning His return)

34 “Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day will not come on you suddenly like a trap; 35 for it will come upon **all those who dwell on the face of all the earth**. 36 But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

☞ “those who dwell on the earth” = unredeemed people

“from the world and the world listens to them”



Revelation 3:10

(in the letter to the church of Philadelphia, Jesus said to them)

10 Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test **those who dwell on the earth.**

Revelation 6:9-10

9 When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; 10 and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on **those who dwell on the earth?**”

Revelation 8:13 (after the 4th trumpet)

13 Then I looked, and I heard an eagle flying in midheaven, saying with a loud voice, “Woe, woe, woe to **those who dwell on the earth,** because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!”

☞ In these 3 verses “those who dwell on the earth” = non redeemed

☞ This is contrasted even more clearly in Revelation chapter 13...

“from the world and the world listens to them”



Revelation 13:1-8

(Prophecy concerning Antichrist who is to come)

1 And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore.

Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten diadems, and on his heads were blasphemous names. 2 And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority. 3 I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast; 4 they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?” 5 There was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him. 6 And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, that is, **those who dwell in heaven (elect or redeemed)**.

7 It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him. 8 **All who dwell on the earth will worship him (non elect or non redeemed)**, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.

“from the world and the world listens to them”



- ❧ Back to 1Jn 4:5
- ❧ “from the world” is contrasted “from heaven”
- ❧ Keeping in context, this can be viewed as
 - ❧ “belonging to the world” vs. belonging to God”
- ❧ “the world listens” is a reference to unredeemed people
- ❧ Scripture has a specific designation for such unredeemed people
 - ❧ Earth dwellers (those who live on the earth)
 - ❧ Earth dwellers is contrasted with heaven dwellers (citizenship in heaven)

CatarrojaAMP: 1Jn 4:5



5 They [the false prophets, spirit of antichrist, Antichrist) are from the world [they belong to the world]; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world [non elect, non redeemed earth dwellers] listens to them.

☞ TRUTH:

- ☞ **Blessing:** believers will not be overcome by evil, falsehood, lies, deception, will not fall prey to Antichrist
- ☞ **Curse:** non-believers will be overcome by evil, falsehood, lies, deception, will fall prey to Antichrist
 - ☞ Paul speak on this in 2Thessalonians...

Exposit: 1Jn 4:5 (cont'd)



2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 (Paul writing concerning the return of Jesus)

1 Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, 2 that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. 3 Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, 4 who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. 5 Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? 6 And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. 7 For the mystery of lawlessness (spirit of antichrist) is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. 8 Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; 9 that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, 10 **and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. (here comes the curse) 11 For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, 12 in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.**

☞ Paul (and John in 1Jn 4) are speaking on the same thing

☞ Pronouncing a blessing for believers; cursing for unbelievers

Exposit: 1Jn 4:6



6 We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

- ☞ v.6 (redeemed) is contrasted with v.5 (unredeemed)
- ☞ “we are from God” can be rendered “we belong to God”
- ☞ “he who knows God listens to us” [more on this]
- ☞ “he who is not from God” [more on this]

“he who knows God listens to us”



- ❧ ‘knows’ is ‘ginōskō’
- ❧ Those who ginōskō God are born again and have the Holy Spirit
- ❧ ‘listens’ is the verb ‘akouō’ which means to hear and understand
 - ❧ The idea is through preaching
- ❧ “us” is referring to the apostles, their associates and prophets

TRUTH:

- ❧ Believers will hear and understand the preaching of God’s Word
 - ❧ Believers accept the writers of the NT as God’s chosen instruments
 - ❧ Paul speak on this as well:
 - 1 Thessalonians 2:13 For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it **not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God**, which also performs its work in you who believe.
-
- ❧ John further contrasts this in the latter part of v.6...

“he who is not from God does not listen to us”



6b” ...he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.”

- ❧ “he who is not from God” can be rendered “he who belongs to the world”
- ❧ Those who belong to the world (non redeemed people) will not and do not listen to the apostles preaching nor believe any writers of the NT
- ❧ This is how John concludes that you can know if you belong to God or the world (Satan)
- ❧ And that is simply this, what side of truth are you on...
 - ❧ If you accept the apostles and other NT writers, you are on the side of truth, you belong to God, you are redeemed
 - ❧ If you do not accept the apostles and NT, you are on the side of error, you do not belong to God, you are not redeemed

Application



- ❧ We are to discern any self proclaimed prophet in light of the truth revealed in Scripture
 - ❧ In principal: we can apply this to pastors/teachers
- ❧ We are to reject that which contradict Scripture (including the deity of Jesus) and hold fast to that which is true
- ❧ We are to believe that we will and have overcome them, including Antichrist himself
- ❧ We are not to be deceived by the signs and wonders Antichrist or any false prophet may perform
- ❧ We are to be willing to die for our faith vs. worshiping Antichrist or receiving his mark
- ❧ We are to persevere in our faith at all costs for we will be richly rewarded!