

The Epistle of 1 John



“DISCERNING THE SPIRITS”

1 John 4:1-6

Theme: The children of God have the ability to recognize truth and discern error simply through their relationship with Jesus Christ.

I. The Demand for Discernment – **4:1**

A. THE PRESENCE OF FALSE SPIRITS

1. Having just finished providing us comfort in the midst of our doubts by indicating that we are able to have confidence through “the Spirit He has given us.” - 3:24
2. However, he diverts from his main point to explain that this experimental point can be abused when not contested in truth.
3. Hence he cautions us: *“Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God.”*
4. The relevance of being aware that demonic spirits are engaged in matters pertaining to the truth must be constantly acknowledged - cp. **1 Timothy 4:1; James 3:15.**

B. THE PROBLEM OF FALSE PROPHETS

1. In addition to the demonic spirits that involve themselves in confusing people, *“... many false prophets have gone out into the world.”*
2. This takes us back to **1 John 2:18ff**
3. These *“false prophets”* appeared to be gaining great progress in making converts from people of the world since their message appealed to the carnality in those of the world.

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4. However, success, great crowds, and other pragmatic tests were insufficient to authenticate the validity of the message being preached by these demonically empowers false teachers.

II. The Detection of False Prophets – 4:2-3

A. THE TEST TO DETECT GOD’S SPIRIT – v. 2

1. Consequently, John provides a test by which the true servants of God, empowered by God’s Spirit, could be detected - *“By this you know the Spirit of God ...”*
2. *“Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God ...”*.
 - a) To *“confess”* basically means to agree with God concerning a matter [] - “to say the same”
 - b) The phrase *“... that Jesus Christ has come ...”* clearly reflects the preexistence of the Son of God, who was sent from the Father because of His love for us.
 - c) Inherent in this confession is the awareness of the divinity of the Son of God who became incarnate *“in the flesh”* for the purpose of redeeming men from their sins.
3. Hence, those teachers who are genuinely filled with the Spirit fo God will teach the need for faith in the divine Son of God for salvation - cp. **John 16:13-14**.

B. THE TEST TO DETECT A FALSE SPIRIT – v. 3

1. On the contrary, *“every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.”*
2. Hence, those teachers who deny the historicity of Jesus Christ, those who deny the divinity of the

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preexistent Son of God, and those who deny that salvation is through His name, are all participants in *“the spirit of antichrist.”*

3. Although there will be a literal personification of the Antichrist in the Tribulation Period - (*“... of which you have heard that it is coming ...”*) the spirit that will characterize him *“... is already in the world.”*
4. Even as the literal antichrist will be demonically powered, false teachers today are empowered by demonic forces that make their message compelling to the world.

III. The Domination of False Prophets – 4:4-6

A. THE STRENGTH OF THE BELIEVER - v. 4

1. However, the saints are not susceptible to the deceptions of the *“spirit of antichrist”* - as the world is.
2. Those who are indwell by the Spirit of God *“are from God ... and have overcome them.”*
3. As he explains why we are not vulnerable to their lies, John lays down an axiom that brings great comfort to the believer: *“... because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.”*
 - a) *“He who is in you”* - refers to the Holy Spirit of God.
 - b) *“he who is in the world”* - refers to the Devil
4. Since the believer has been born from above, given the indwelling Spirit of God, and is therefore able to overcome the world, he is not vulnerable to the deceptions of the spirit of antichrist - cp. **1 John 5:1**.

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B. THE SUSCEPTIBILITY OF THE WORLD - v. 5

1. However, the world is not so empowered - the false teachers who are in the world are also of the world and from the world - completely separate from the realm of the Spirit of God.
2. *“They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world and the world listens to them”.*
3. That is, they connect with the worldly ones because they have a commonality with them - they appeal to their sexual orientation and decide them through the spirit of antichrist.

C. THE SWAY OF THE TRUTH - v. 6

1. However, the Apostle declares that those who have been genuinely sent from God “are from God” - these are the ones who have provided us with God’s Word.
2. John then declares that *“he who knows God listens to us”* - there is an immediate recognition of the truth as we see God revealed.
3. However *“he who is not from God does not listen to us”* - there is a rejection of truth by those who cannot recognize it since they do not know God.
4. This is identified as one of the best ways *“we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.”*