

# Knowing The Spirit Of God

I John Series

I John 4:1-6

By Bill Denton

## INTRODUCTION

### A. Illustration

One night as we were packing up after a concert, we sent a young woman to pick up our children from the home they were staying in. Since the children didn't know her, I told her to give our son, Trevor, our secret family code word so he would know she was authorized to pick them up.

A little later I received a phone call. Trevor refused to leave because the woman hadn't given the right word. The mix-up was on my part--I had said the code word was "Dinosaur Monster," which my son informed me was incorrect. "It's Dinosaur!" he said.

"Are you sure? I was certain it was Dinosaur Monster," I replied.

"I'm sure," said Trevor confidently.

"Well, OK, son," I carried on. "You're probably right. But it's OK for you to come back to the church with this lady."

There was silence on the other end of the line. Then Trevor said, "Who is this?"

"It's me, your father, Mickey Moore! Now get in the car and come on!"

"All right," he replied and hung up.

It was an odd feeling to be interrogated by my six-year-old son. He knew the word, and even though he was given words that were very close to the real thing, they weren't true--and he knew the difference.

A mature Christian knows the Word of God and is not easily tossed about "with every wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:14). We are to test the spirits by the Word to see if they are true.

-- Mickey Moore. Christian Reader, Vol. 25, no. 4.

### B. I John 4:1-6

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.

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

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.

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.

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

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.

NASB95

### C. "We are to test the spirits"

1. Unfortunately, we live in an age of naïveté and gullibility – if something sounds good, too many people are ready to proclaim it good
2. It just doesn't work that way – we must be ready to put things to the test

**D. This is as true when dealing with religious or spiritual matters and anything else**

1. John has already referred to the “antichrist”
  - a. 1 John 2:18-22 -- Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not *really* of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but *they went out*, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. NASB95
  - b. the essence of the antichrist is opposition to truth – it is that which is false
2. John puts a responsibility on Christians to do something more than believe everything that comes along – to test the spirits

**I. TEST THE SPIRITS 4:1**

**A. Do not believe every spirit**

1. John is talking about people here, not some kind of spirit being or ghost or apparition
2. The contrast is set between validating false prophets from true prophets
3. The reason it is important to test the spirits is because many false prophets have gone out into the world
  - a. Matthew 7:15-16 -- “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. “You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes* nor figs from thistles, are they? NASB95
  - b. 2 Peter 2:1-3 -- But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in *their* greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. NASB95
4. John affirmed that these warnings were legitimate

**B. What do you suppose is the case today?**

1. What shall we say about the many conflicting messages we hear about God and his will?
2. How shall we account for the various messages about salvation and forgiveness of sins?
3. What do we do with the multitude of religions and philosophies available on every corner?
4. We cannot ignore the importance of testing the spirits, that is, the teachers

## II. HOW TO KNOW WHAT IS FROM GOD AND WHAT IS NOT 4:2-3

### A. First, a disclaimer – don't make the mistake of thinking that John is giving a complete and total Answer or method for distinguishing false teachers from true

1. Some want to make John's statement the sole measure of truth
2. That wasn't John's intent – read this in the whole context of what he has said so far and you will see that it is part of John's black and white contrast between:
  - a. true and false
  - b. good and evil
  - c. love and hate
  - d. children of God versus children of the devil

### B. Note an interesting repeated phrase in this section – “from God”

1. Different translations may translate this in different ways, but in Greek, it is the same construction (ek tou theou)
2. Literally, it might be “out of God,” but that is clumsy wording in English – the idea is that something originates in or with God and then proceeds outward
3. “From God” is a fairly good way to treat the Greek
4. Look at how John uses this phrase
  - a. 4:1 – test the spirits to see if they are “from God”
  - b. 4:2 – there is a way to know the spirit “from God” (probably not Holy Spirit, but instead referring to the teacher or prophet)
  - c. 4:2 -- the spirit that confesses Jesus Christ is “from God”
  - d. 4:3 – every spirit that does not confess Jesus Christ is not “from God”
  - e. 4:4 – you (his readers) are “from God”
  - f. 4:6 – we are “from God” (John and other true teachers)
  - g. 4:6 – the one who is not “from God” doesn't listen to those who are “from God”
5. So, John's obvious interest in determining who is and who isn't “from God”
  - a. in other words, who are those who have God as their origin, their source?
  - b. who are those who have the devil as their origin, their source?

### C. John says there is a way to know

1. In short – pay attention to what they teach
  - a. it might sound simplistic, but sometimes the answers to tough questions are easier than we might think
  - b. John has already affirmed the truth and faithfulness of the gospel as it was delivered by, or preached by the apostles

2. This is why knowing what God has revealed is so important
  - a. how do you know the spirit from God?
  - b. ask, “What does this person say about Jesus Christ?”
  - c. what is the answer? Is it that Jesus came in the flesh? (direct slam of Gnostics)
3. The one who is from God will agree with the apostolic teachings – they will agree with John and other inspired teachers of the gospel
  - a. Galatians 1:6-9 -- I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is *really* not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 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! 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! NASB95
  - b. 2 Corinthians 11:3-5 -- But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or *if* you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it! For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles. NKJV
  - c. 1 Timothy 1:3-4 -- As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith. NKJV

#### D. Today, we even hear that doctrine isn't important

1. If doctrine isn't important, then there is no way to know the difference between the false and the true
2. If there is no way to know the difference between the false and the true, then it doesn't really matter what is false and what is true
3. If it doesn't matter what is false and what is true, then you can believe or practice whatever you want
4. If you can practice whatever you want, the book of 1 John can simply be eliminated

#### CONCLUSION

##### A. In 1 John 4:4-6, there is a kind of summary by which John encourages his readers to calm down, Look at things objectively, and know the truth

1. Note the three different persons about which John writes
  - a. 4:4 – “you,” the “little children” (John's beloved audience)
  - b. 4:5 – “they” the ones who are from the world, not God
  - c. 4:6 – “we” the critical link between God and his people, teachers of truth who have dispensed the message of Jesus Christ

2. What did John say to “you, little children,” the believers struggling to know right from wrong, good from evil, truth from lies?
  - a. you have overcome the world – a truth that isn’t always readily apparent
  - b. how did that happen – he that is in you is greater than he who is in the world
  - c. don’t let anyone fool you into thinking you need anything more than that
  - d. you don’t need any mystical mumbo-jumbo, no intellectual philosophy, no theological or religious guru, not even a new, improved revelation from God
  - e. you have all you need to overcome the world
3. What did John say about those who are “from the world”
  - a. it’s understandable and perfectly reasonable that they say the things they say
  - b. they are from the world, not God – why would you expect to hear from God through them?
  - c. others who are also from the world listen to them because that’s the kind of message they’re already tuned in to hear
  - d. don’t be swayed just because people all around you are falling for the newest tricks – what else would you expect
4. What did John say about “we” who are from God
  - a. those who know God listen to them – it’s because the message is what they have already heard
  - b. you can know the spirit of truth because that person listens to the truth
  - c. the spirit of error listens to error (or is converted and becomes a spirit of truth)

**B. Bottom line – the message of Jesus Christ, centered on his incarnation, is the truth**

1. John understood that the message that Jesus has come in the flesh is so important that he was willing to hang everything else on that one issue
  - a. listen to the false teachings today – sooner or later, they get around to denying something about the incarnation or its implications
  - b. it is the gospel already revealed that is the truth we must believe and live
2. Below the bottom line – please note that the issue is Jesus Christ
  - a. the issue is not us, not methods, nor the host of issues we like to debate
  - b. the issue is Jesus Christ and the message of who he is and what he has done

**C. Invitation**