

1 John 4:1-6
“Testing truths”

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I. Intro

The key to understanding this section is found in the phrase of 3:24: “*And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.*” John had taken up the matter of “**TESTING**” ourselves to determine the reality of the transformational encounter we have had with the Lord that would be seen two ways:

1. In obedience towards the Lord and away from our former life where we no longer habitually practice sin. This is a vertical transformation where our lives have changed towards the Lord and His word as we want to follow Him and not continually be enslaved to our former life.
2. It is also seen in a horizontal change in how we treat our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Such a relationship is one characterized by LOVE which is defined by John as more than in word or tongue but in-deed and in truth.

The question John now anticipates as to the knowledge of God’s abiding in us by the Holy Spirit is: “*How do we determine that what we are experiencing is indeed the Holy Spirit?*” The reader of this letter will immediately remember that this is not a new topic as John already addressed in in chapter 2:18-28 where he wrote of the differences between the false spirits and the true Spirit! While we cannot know for certain what this first centenary church was experiencing, we can piece together the fact that there was a schism which those that professed to have a greater knowledge in spiritual matters withdrew fellowship with the true church and were continually engaged in trying to encourage a further exodus from the true church to their “higher

knowledge”. **This “higher knowledge” must have also included an experientialism that was measured upon emotionalism as the basis of determining what is true and what is false!** A make this assessment based upon John’s own words of admonishment “*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.*” **John implies the necessity of testing any truth or experience to make certain that such truth or experience is inspired truth!** A simple outline of these 6 verses will help us understand and apply the text: Vs. 1 The Call, Vs. 2-4 The Test and Vs. 4-6 The Outcome!

II. Vs. 1 The Call

1. Vs. 1 **The Call**: John issues the command to test those who claim inspiration. This call is made up of three parts:

A. *The Appeal*: It starts with the word “**Beloved**” which reveals both his attitude and intensity. This is coupled with the phrase “*do not believe every spirit*”. In the Greek the phrase is “**Stop believing**” and indicates that **the appeal was NOT aimed at prevention but rather at continuation**, as those he is warning were already engaged in believing every spirit! The truth that this points out is that not everything that proposes to be spiritual truth IS! It is not activity that determines truth it is instead truth that determines the reliability of the activity. The devil can also present things that appear to be spiritual and miraculous. The TEST IS NOT if there is some “**supernatural activity**” present, as again the devil can manipulate such things. The QUESTION is what the SOURCE of this inspiration...is it God?

B. ***The Duty***: The responsibility to test the spirits is given to each and every believer; Enthusiasm, popularity and passion are NOT the guarantee of TRUTH. This is why John issues this commandment to test the spirits just like today the believers were either too lazy or too guidable and were prone to believe something was true because HOW IT MADE THEM FEEL! They were to put to test for the purpose of approving it as truth, but it had to meet specific specifications.

C. ***The Reason***: What necessitated this “*appeal*” was that “*many false prophets have gone out into the world.*” This is an amazing reality given to us in the Bible, the presence of false teachers and prophets. Early on we are made aware of false teachers...Cain being the first. The prevalence of such false teaching is seen in the many warnings issued like Deut. 13:1-5 where Moses wrote that if a prophet or a dreamer gives a “sign or wonder” a test was to be employed and that was not if the sign or wonder came true it was if such a sign or wonder advocated going after and serving other gods. Simply put the sign and wonder was NOT that which guided truth and obedience. Jesus in Matt 7:15 warned against false prophets saying, “***Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.***” The point Jesus makes is that they employ false advertising and are not what they appear to be. They were active early in the early church as we can read of them in Acts 13:6 with a Jewish man who called himself Bar Jesus but was in reality a sorcerer named Elymas that Barnabas and Paul were called to render this man as he was spiritually BLIND. What we see is that in every age that which is false has sought to counterfeit that which is true.

This is why the appeal is made to prove the spirits, as *a half-truth is more dangerous than a full lie!* **Many a church has fallen into false teaching simply because they didn't understand that any modification of truth is more dangerous to the body of Christ than those who have openly opposed truth!**

III. Vs. 2-3 The Test

2. Vs. 2-3 **The standardized test:** What follows in these two verses is the criteria by which truth may be known and distinguished from a lie.

A. *The Test:* Throughout the Bible as noted above different tests were applied to determine a false prophet from a true prophet. In Jer. 28:9 we are told that one test is *“If what the word which the prophet spoke comes to pass, then the prophet will be known as one whom the Lord had sent.”* And Deut. 18:22 tells us that the opposite if this is true in as much as it what they said was from the Lord doesn't come true then they aren't of the Lord. And again, it wasn't just the results that were to be judged it was the in which direction such results led people towards as noted in Deut. 13:1-5 if the what the prophet spoke came true but led the people away from the true and living God then the person was a false prophet. Added to these twofold tests is what John mentions here in these two verses. The prophet must speak the same and agree on the person and work of Jesus Christ, that specifically He has come in the flesh. What does the person say about Jesus, do they acknowledge that Jesus is the Messiah come in the flesh or do they deny this? If they deny this they are NOT OF GOD no matter how wonderful a speaker they are, how big their church is and how marvelous their activity. This

confession is a statement of fact that Jehovah alone saves, and He does so through His Son who is the only Messiah. That this Jesus came in person is incarnate deity and that only He could satisfy the demands of a Holy God. And it is only by a sinner placing their trust only upon Jesus' sacrifice can the sinner be redeemed.

B. *The Value*: John's point is that only in the Incarnation is a bridge made between sinful man and a Holy God. Without the Incarnation there could NEVER be any contact between the Divine and fallen humanity and because of this there could never be any possibility of redemption. This is NOT just theology it is proof the uniqueness of the person and work of Jesus Christ and that there can be no other way, and nothing added to His sacrifice. Jesus earthly life was the bridge between the human and the divine! In Deut. 13:1-5 **the fundamental test of truth was "monotheism"**: No utterance, no matter how eloquently spoken, no matter the results can EVER contradict or deny **"monotheism"**! And now added to this is the Apostles words by the Holy Spirit: The fundamental truth of Christianity in accordance with what is spoken in Deut. 13:1-5 is that of the **"Incarnation"**: **No utterance, however seemingly inspired, miraculous its signs and wonders, if it denies the incarnation of the above monotheism I the person and work of Jesus, can ever be true!** Christians can never tolerate any so-called truth that denies Jesus' eternal nature as God and His historical humanity as sinless man!

C. *The Issue*: The contrast with this confession of the Incarnation is the proof of the Divine Spirit and the denial is equally evidence of the spirit of the antichrist. Has Jesus Christ come in the flesh and is He God the Son? Those who deny such have no fellowship with truth and are not born again of the Spirit of God.

IV. Vs. 4-6 The Outcome

3. Vs. 4-6 **The outcome when the test is applied**: Immediately the reader of these 3 verses will notice the **emphasized “pronouns” of YOU, THEY and WE!**

A. ***The Victory vs. 4***: The first use of the pronoun is “YOU” and the reference is of those who are of God, true Christians and John says two things about these true Christians: FIRST, they have overcome false teachers! John is not referring to a physical contest but rather an intellectual battle in which these believers have become victorious. The false teachers had sought to deceive believers, but they were unable to succeed in their lies. SECOND, John points out the basis by which they were able to be victorious: It wasn’t that they were smarter, stronger in spiritual things it was simply because of the WORK of Christ in their lives that made it impossible for the lies to work!

B. ***The Contrast vs. 5***: The second use of a pronoun is in verse 5 and it is “THEY” and this is a reference to the false teachers and John says that the false teachers are “of the world” and by this they aren’t believers as they possess the world philosophy even though they may use Christian language and represent Christian teachers and pastors. They were among the believers but NOT OF the Believers!

C. ***The Result vs. 6***: It is the difference between the “You” and the “They” that continually reveals that we note that the “YOU’S” know spiritual truth while the “THEYS” are continually led by false teachers and lies! It isn’t that the “THEYS” don’t know truth it is that they prefer the lie! It is here that John use

his third pronoun “WE” and here it refers to the WE of the letter that John was addressing when he was led by the Holy Spirit to write this letter.

Centuries of come and gone and the church is still facing the same problem; not enough Pastors and teachers to rightly divide the word of God and defend the truth of the Word of God. The truth is the incarnation of God’s Son Jesus the Messiah. It is this that defines and is the focal point of doctrine. There is only truth and error, and anything or anyone that takes us away from this Jesus is not of God!