

The Most Crucial Test You Will Ever Take

1 John 4:1-6 KJV Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. [2] Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: [3] And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. [4] Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. [5] They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. [6] We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

I. INTRODUCTION -- JUDGING WITH RIGHTEOUS JUDGEMENT

A. Who Are You to Judge?

This passage immediately puts the reader into an area of discrimination. John is clearly stating that a saint of God is to be very alert to the voices that he listens to. Not only is he to be aware of the voice and what it says but John is urging us to understand that there is a “spirit” behind every voice that we hear. Furthermore not all of those voices are healthy for our spiritual man.

To this command of “believe not” and to “try the spirits,” there may be a tendency to shrink back from this command. In fact, you may have said to yourself or others may have said to you some of the following things:

- *Who are you to judge?*
- Who are you to say what God wants and does not want?
- Who are you to say that this particular religion is wrong?
- Who among us is perfect enough to be the judge?
- You are so petty! How can you make such a mountain out of this doctrinal molehill?

- I would rather just live in unity instead of disunity and judging brings divisiveness.
- What is sinful to you may not be sinful to me!
- I really like to hear him speak. How can you be so sure that his message is wrong?
- God used him to “speak into my life.” How can you say that it does not “feel” right?
- *Who are you to judge anyway?*

Then one is confronted by the words of Jesus:

Matthew 7:1-5 KJV Judge not, that ye be not judged. [2] For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. [3] And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? [4] Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? [5] Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

The last thing that anyone wants to be called is a hypocrite. The strongest words of Jesus were often spent on those who were hypocrites. A hypocrite is one who professes one thing and then distinctly does something else. In reality there are a few hypocrites who spoil the barrel, but by and large there are many more who are seeking to please God with their lives and their actions. But when challenged by the judgment “card” far too many take a backseat and simply say nothing. Our confidence cannot rest in our own merits but rather in the grace of God and the shining light of His Word. One must put their confidence in the grace of God and the Word of God and say, “I am certainly clear in understanding that I am not perfect, but I also clearly understand that the Word of God calls for me to make some judgments about this world. Those judgments are going to affect the choices I make and put me in a direction that God wants me to live out.”

There are several reasons that we shrink back from the hard work of discernment.

- First and foremost, there is a very clear understanding that if it were not for the grace of God, none would be saved from the wrath of God.
- Secondly, we have lost the ability to judge ourselves and therefore we hesitate to judge the world.
- Thirdly, we realize that in judging ourselves that there may be some things that we have to change about our own lives and there is an unwillingness to do this.
- Fourthly, our own commitment to prayer and the spiritual things have left us lacking.
- Finally, our lack of familiarity with Scripture has caused our foundation to erode out from under us. The more Scripture that one is willing digest and incorporate into life, the more discerning that one will become.

The Bible is loaded with passages that call us to discernment and to judgment. One must place ample confidence in the Word of God that is seeking to call us to a higher and more spiritual plane of living. Sometimes the work of discernment in our lives is what God uses to prune the unnecessary, benign, and non-fruit bearing branches. Yet notice this work of discernment or judging that is a common theme:

Matthew 7:6 KJV Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.

1 Thessalonians 5:21 KJV Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

Matthew 7:15-20 KJV Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. **[16]** Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? **[17]** Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. **[18]** A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. **[19]** Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. **[20]** Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

Acts 17:10-11 KJV And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. **[11]** These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word

with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

Romans 16:19 KJV For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf: but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.

Philippians 1:9 KJV And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment;

(Also: **Jude 1-25**)

B. Why Should You Judge?

If a saint of God is to judge there obviously must be reasons for one to do so. There are several reasons that one must come to terms with the thoughts of judging and discerning. First, one must judge to keep himself from error. It is very important to understand that our inability to judge can have dire eternal consequences. In fact blindly following error will lead us to Hell. An understanding of the Word of God makes us much more conscious of what is accurate and what is not. When one judges, it is crucial to be able to point out a specific passage by which he is coming to make the judgment.

Secondly, our motive to judge should be to lead others. Judgment is not meant to be a stumbling block but a stepping stone. The best form of judgment should serve as a motivational point to encourage others toward greater service toward God and the church.

Thirdly, judging involves spiritual warfare. Spiritual warfare is always aimed at controlling the mind of the saint. Examples of spiritual warfare are clearly understood throughout the Old Testament. Such characters as Balaam, Cain, Korah, Ahab, Jezebel, and Athaliah are just a few of the more prevalent examples. To a lesser degree one might notice Nadab, Abihu, Hophni, and Phinehas and their ill contributions to Israel. When one judges, he is clearly taking error to task which is how the devil attacked Eve. Notice the pattern:

- He attacked what God said (Hath God said—Gen. 3:1)—this is causing doubt about what God said.
- He added to what God said (You shall be as gods—Gen. 3:5)—this is distorting what God said.
- He lied about what God said (You shall not surely die—Gen. 3:4)—this is denying what God said.

So the pattern is very quickly noted in this process of the attack. Therefore judging is a requirement because it is an important part of our own spiritual health. Obviously there are other reasons that could be rendered to encourage us to be more discerning but we will now progress on to what John wrote.

II. THE MOST CRUCIAL TEST YOU WILL EVER TAKE

Again, one notices that cyclical pattern that John writes with. He is coming from a different angle to again express that there are false teachers who voice their error about the real identity of Jesus Christ. This is the strategy of false spirits who desire to corrupt the message of the Gospel.

Moses, the prophets, David, Jesus, and Paul all spoke against deceit. Jude was the one who gave an actual description to what they were:

- Ungodly men who turn grace into lasciviousness and deny the Lord—v. 4
- Giving themselves to fornication and pursuing strange flesh—v. 7
- Filthy dreamers who defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities—v. 8
- Brute beasts who corrupt themselves—v. 10
- Spots in your feasts of charity—v. 12
- Feasting on you—v. 12
- Feeding themselves without fear—v. 12
- Clouds without water—v. 12
- Carried about by winds—v. 12
- Trees with withering fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots—v. 12
- Raging waves—v. 13
- Foaming out their own shame—v. 13
- Wandering stars—v. 13
- Murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts—v. 18

- Separated, sensual, do not have the Spirit—v. 19

Every bit of this activity can be ultimately traced back to the evil spirits that are motivating their words and deeds. 1 Timothy 4:1-2 explains that there will be those who depart from the faith because seducing spirits and doctrines of devils will de-rail them. Men are either motivated by the Spirit of God or the spirit of the devil. When it is observed in this manner, all gray areas are removed from the equation.

James 3:15 KJV This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.

Any lofty knowledge that exalts itself against God is inaccurate and ungodly. This wisdom that may seem so accurate is literally from the devil. The mouth-piece of the devil is one who corrupts the message and plan of God. Paul has some advice for this sort of thing:

1 Corinthians 10:19-23 KJV What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? [20] But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. [21] Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils. [22] Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he? [23] All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.

Paul exhorts the Corinthian converts to remove themselves from fellowship because of the presence of demons. This passage again reinforces to us the call of separation from the world. It is not Diana, Artemis, Moloch, and Mohammed, it is demonic.

The OT had some things to say about this kind of worship.

Leviticus 17:7 NASB They shall no longer sacrifice their sacrifices to the goat demons with which they play the harlot. This shall be a permanent statute to them throughout their generations.

Deuteronomy 32:17 NASB They sacrificed to demons who were not God, to gods whom they have not known, new gods who came lately, whom your fathers did not dread.

Psalms 106:37 NASB They even sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons,

So whenever John was encouraging men to try to the spirits, he was referring to evil spirits. Anything that does not concur with the apostolic plan of doctrine laid out directly by the Bible is not on another “path” to get to Heaven. It is motivated by something far more sinister than many even realize. John went on to describe these unclean spirits.

Revelation 16:13-16 KJV And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. **[14]** For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. **[15]** Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. **[16]** And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.

These unclean spirits are like frogs. This is a picture of disdain and their end will be in the battle of Armageddon. Oddly enough very few are really interested in moving to a category that determines to hold to the authority of the Word in such a state that the “spirits” are really identified as demons. The battle of every preacher is to preserve the integrity of the Truth no matter what it may cost him. John is again looking back to the Gnostics that he was referring to in 1st John 1.

All of this works back to the previous study when the conscience was looked at. The conscience can be dulled by a constant hammering from the world, the flesh, and the devil. The constant attacks will never end until we are literally delivered from this world. The analogy that John Bunyan used when Christian and Faithful were walking through Vanity Fair fits here in that they had to contend with the voices that attempted to entice them there.

A false teacher may have a spirit of light, especially in industrialized societies. The spirit presents a way of life that seems to be the truth, the very way to live. He presents a way of life that seems to be intelligent and full of knowledge and enlightenment. His way seems to be the way to go and will lead to the good life, progress, development, assurance, satisfaction, fulfillment, education, good feelings, pleasure, possessions, and recognition.

A false teacher may have a spirit of righteousness. He may preach and teach righteousness, a righteousness that stresses morality, goodness, justice, education, development, ministry, giving, serving, and helping.

A false teacher may stress the life and teaching of Jesus Christ—all the good qualities of life—all the traits that should characterize people. They may tell people to copy the life of Jesus and to focus their hearts upon the good qualities of life, and if they do, God will accept them.

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e most
critical
test one
will have
to
endure
is the
one that

attacks his faith. Always fight against the error that comes in your direction. If the truth resides within, we will remain in the truth because of the anointing (the Holy Ghost) that will teach us the direction to go.

III. TESTING THE SPIRITS

A. The Command to Test the Spirits -- 1 John 4:1

1 John 4:1 KJV Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

There are two immediate commands given by John: Believe not every spirit and try the spirits whether they are of God. To do this one must listen and not be gullible. The content of what is being said will be a dead giveaway to whether these men are on the right track or not. While it would be foolish to encourage one to walk around in constant suspicion, the facts are that one cannot buy into everything that is heard. Take the test of Scripture to the doctrine, lifestyle, and words that are being taught. Be like the noble Bereans that we read of earlier who carefully looked through the Word to make sure it was correct. They had a willingness to take the test to Scripture.

The Greek word for “try” is literally “test.” This means that the words should be scrutinized, proved, examined. In fact the metaphorical connotation is that metal is tested for its strength. It is literally put through the fires of the forge. This is crucial and there will be times that the active work of the Spirit will allow us to “test” the message that we are hearing.

The test will ask:

- Do they confess Jesus Christ?
- Do they manifest a life of righteousness?
- Are they fully committed to the ways of the divine law?
- Is the Holy Ghost actively working in their lives?
- What is the response to the Word of God?

1 Thessalonians 5:19-21 KJV Quench not the Spirit. [20] Despise not prophesyings. [21] Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

The process of testing the spirits involves a process that Paul summed up to the Thessalonians. First, by not quenching the Spirit, secondly by not despising prophesying (preaching by the root word *prophetes* meaning inspired speaking), gives way to being able to prove or test all things.

The fact that ravenous wolves would be clothed in wool indicates that many will come wearing the prophet's uniform. They will look like prophets, they will sound like prophets, but somewhere there will be a betraying factor that will give away their true nature. The whole role of the false prophet (or preacher) will be to destroy the entire flock. They are subtle in their actions, they are clever in their manipulations of Scripture, they are deceptive in their appearance but far worse they are supernatural in that there is an evil that motivates them. Simply because the message they tout sounds reasonable and appealing does not necessarily make it correct. In fact it very well may mean that it is wrong. Many antichrists are present (Mark 13:22-23; 1 John 2:18-19) and what they have to say will sound so right but in the end the path they offer will be as bitter as wormwood (Jeremiah 9:1-15). Do not be naïve in your discernment!

The deposit of Truth that has been placed in the heart of a saint of God requires that he guard it. There are two requirements of guarding the Truth (which helps us to "test" the spirits) that are the responsibility of the elders and shepherds of the Church. The Truth has to be *known*. This is related sound doctrine. The Truth has to *recognize* error. This relates to sound discernment. Neither of these elements of spiritual life will just come to a saint. He must be taught the solid truth of Scripture.

John commands that a saint of God try the spirits because they are not benign but malignant works of error. The source is not human but rather it is demonic and it breeds an error that can literally kill the soul. The undiscerning are going to be lost.

B. The Way or Means to Test -- 1 John 4:2-6

1 John 4:2-6 KJV Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: [3] And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. [4] Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. [5] They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. [6] We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

i. The Confession of the Deity of Jesus Christ -- vv. 2-3

The first test that one notes is directly following the colon in verse 2. Anyone who denies the Incarnation of Jesus Christ is not authentic. Notice the aspects of biblical Christology in 1st John in the following references.

- **1:1** -- This verse absolutely endorses the humanity and deity of Jesus (Romans 1:3; Hebrews 2:14-17; 5:7-8).
- **2:1** -- Jesus Christ, the righteous, is a sinless Savior (Isaiah 43:25; 45:21-22; Mark 2:7).
- **2:2** -- Jesus Christ is the propitiation—satisfies the righteous judgment of God (Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2; Matthew 26:28; John 1:29).
- **3:23** -- The Son of God.
- **5:6** -- He came into the world to save sinners.
- **5:20** -- He is the true God.

All of these passages working together brings us to the understanding that those who do not affirm Jesus Christ as God and the only way for salvation is motivated by the demonic, antichrist system. This holds true for all religions that do not embrace Jesus Christ and the plan He has for His Church. Some would decry how exclusive that this may sound however the fact remains that the true Gospel is always an exclusive and even narrow way. Those who try to enter heaven by any other way have been characterized by Jesus as a thief and a robber (John 10:1-9). Romans 10:9 proves that one must do more than just recognize the deity of Jesus Christ but rather He has to be confessed as absolute Lord.

If Jesus Christ did not come in the flesh, then it means:

That God has not loved us enough to reveal Himself to us (1 John 1:2)

That God has not loved us enough to send us the Word of Life (1 John 1:1)

That God has not loved us enough to show us eternal life (1 John 1:2)

There is no eternal life (1 John 1:2)

There is not fellowship with God (1 John 1:3)

The message of hope and of Scripture is not true (1 John 1:3)

There is no joy beyond this life, no fullness of joy (1 John 1:4)

That Jesus Christ is not our Advocate (1 John 2:2)

There is no forgiveness of sin (1 John 1:9; 2:2)

There is no perfect sacrifice for sin (1 John 2:2)

From ***The Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible, Peter—Jude, p. 292***

Although others may say that there are differing paths to heaven this is untrue. The name Jesus Christ indicates as much. Jesus means Jehovah saves. Christ means the anointed one. Therefore any religion that leaves out Jesus Christ is not valid. (Look back to the notes that covered 2:18 for another further treatment of this thought.)

ii. The Possession of the Spirit -- v. 4

In the incarnation, God became a partaker of human nature. In regeneration, man takes part in the divine nature.

1 John 2:20-21 KJV But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. [21] I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth.

1 John 2:24 KJV Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.

1 John 2:27 KJV But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

The indwelling Holy Ghost provides an anointing as a point of protection for a saint of God. In addition to the indwelling of the Holy Ghost there is a presence of the mind of Christ that comes to bear in the saint's life.

1 Corinthians 2:16 KJV For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

There is literally no way to understand all of the knowledge of God but there will be clear understanding of the New Birth (John 3, Acts 2). A saint of God will walk in the Spirit and it will help him to overcome the world.

iii. The Profession of the Divine Law -- vv. 5-6

Notice in verse 5 who is listening. The world only listens to itself. It is constantly concerned with the present material world. The world never even considers the spiritual things of life that they are missing. Again, John is very clear in his black and white presentation when he speaks concerning those who are filled with the Spirit.

Those who know God will listen to Him and not to the world. This is where the Word of God again shows its importance. The immediate understanding is

that those who are popular with the world in reality are not showing a good spiritual sign. It does not matter who embraces or endorses the ideas of the world, they are opposing in the idea of what God often desires.

Anyone who is not allowing Scripture to permeate their lives and the way they live are not hearing the voice of God. Those who refuse to hear the Word of God cannot be true saints of God. Sinners have an affinity for error and lies and the saint of God must contrast this with a hunger for truth. We are to seek out the great truth of Scripture as the Bereans did.

Acts 17:10-11 KJV And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. **[11]** These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

They searched out the great answers in Scripture. The more one knows about Jesus Christ the greater their ability to serve as a saint.

Jude 1:2-4 KJV Mercy unto you, and peace, and love, be multiplied. **[3]** Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. **[4]** For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.