



Testing the Spirits

1 John 4:1-6

INTRODUCTION

When I worked in the hospital lab, one of my responsibilities was to perform a blood gas test. This was a very critical test and it took much to get it right. Before I could run the test on the actual blood sample, I had to calibrate the machine to an absolute standard. If the machine did not register the correct readings for the standard, then the results on the actual sample would be wrong.

We live in a world today that does not want to recognize the existence of an absolute standard, against which our actions are measured. Consequently, people are getting inaccurate readings of how they are doing in life. Without an absolute standard, everything becomes acceptable. We have no way of knowing what is truly right and wrong.

John understood the need for a spiritual standard against which to measure the many different messages that people were hearing. Just like today, there were many false teachers who were espousing a wide variety of life-style messages. Each message claimed to be true. Many claimed to be from God. Yet, they were at odds with the standard that God had set.

Today, we hear many messages that sound great on the surface. It is easy for us to fall into the trap of accepting these conflicting messages as somehow all true. What we need is discernment to know which are from God and which are not. Although this may seem easy, it is not. The enemy has become very clever at hiding false messages in spiritual sounding terms. If we are going to be discerning, we need to test these messages against the clear standard of God's Word.

Study 1: 1 John 4:1-3

John did not want his people to be led astray by clever sounding messages. He wanted them to develop a positive, critical eye to discern truth from falsehood.

1. In verse 1, John gives a clear warning to his readers.
 - a. What is implied when John says do not believe every spirit?

 - b. What does it mean to test the spirits?

 - c. Why is this so important?

2. In verse 2, John gives the standard against which to judge the spirits.
 - a. Who is it that they were to recognize?

 - b. How could they recognize the true spirit?

3. In Verse 3, John gives the negative side of the equation.
 - a. How can a person recognize a false spirit?

 - b. What does it mean for this spirit to be the antichrist?

 - c. How does John stress that this is a present danger?

MAKE IT PERSONAL

1. What does it mean for you to be a spiritually discerning person?
2. What is essential for you to do to become a spiritually discerning person?
3. What are some of the common messages that we are hearing both in the world and in the church?
4. How do these messages stand up against the message of the Gospel?
5. Where do you see the lines between truth and falsehood being blurred the most?
6. How can you recognize the spirit of antichrist today?

Study 2: 1 John 4:4-6

John continues to explain what it means for us to test the spirits.

1. How does John affirm his readers in verse 4?
2. What is the impact of being from God?
3. What is the source of power to overcome the world's message?
4. How does John describe those who are from the world?
5. Where do those who are of the world get their information?
6. What distinguishes the true believers from those of the world?
7. What does John say is the litmus test for testing the spirits?

MAKE IT PERSONAL

1. What does it mean for you to overcome the world?
2. The one who is in us is the Holy Spirit. How does having the Holy Spirit in us help us to be discerning?
3. What is the dominant viewpoint of the world?
4. How does the viewpoint of the world conflict with the viewpoint of Scripture?
5. John was able to speak with authority because he was one of the Apostles. What does it mean for us to listen to him?
6. Why is it important for us to know from whom we are getting our information? (2 Timothy 3:14-17)
7. How do you recognize the difference between the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood?

Study 4: 2 Peter 1:19-2:3

Peter also addresses the need for spiritual discernment in our lives.

1. What is Peter referring to when he speaks of the word of the prophets?

2. In what ways has the word of the prophets been made more certain?

3. What should be our attitude toward the word of the prophets?

4. What is the source of the Scriptures that we have?

5. Peter warns against false prophets who will infiltrate the church.
 - a. What tactic will these false teachers use?

 - b. What is the danger to the church?

6. What motivates these false teachers?

7. What is awaiting these false teachers?

MAKE IT PERSONAL

1. In what ways is the Bible a light in our dark world?
2. How can the light of the Bible be a guiding star for us?
3. What is your attitude toward the Bible? How does this compare with what Peter writes?
4. What role did the Holy Spirit have in the creation of the Bible?
5. Why is it important for us to not be naive about false teachers in the church?
6. Why do people follow these false teachers? (2 Timothy 4:3-4)
7. What is the outcome of following after false teachers?