

WALKING IN THE LIGHT: Passing the Test - 1 John 4:1-12

May 20, 2019, BCC in Midway

1. Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.
2. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,
3. and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.
4. Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.
5. They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them.
6. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.
7. Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.
8. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.
9. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.
10. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.
11. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.
12. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us (ESV)

Illustration:

Some cases of Ebola have just been detected in the Congo. WHO sent out some experts to check this out. They have tests to determine what the truth is about a person's sickness - whether someone really has the Ebola virus. The test is critical to determine the truth.

Fake News: never before the rise of Donald Trump have we heard so much about fake news. Basically it is false news – news that is not the truth.

What results? Confusion and deception and wounded people.

The folks that John is writing to have experienced fake or false teaching.

Some people have been led astray by false teachers who sprang up in their midst and now have left, but are still affecting and infecting the church.

John is very concerned about truth so he is going to help his readers and us to discover the truth by presenting us with 2 critical tests.

Bridge: *Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us (1 John 3:24).*

This verse contains the first reference to the Spirit of God.

He is also called the Spirit of truth and in our passage today John is going to continue to speak about the Spirit and about truth and error.

There is the Spirit of God and there are also other spirits – false spirits not of God.

He refers to the spirit of error and the spirit of antichrist and about he that is in the world. Deception, confusion and error should not be part of God's family.

John is now going to provide them with teaching on how to test the spirits to see what is true and what is false – who and what is from God and who and what is from the spirit of antichrist.

I. The First Critical Test to Determine who is from God – 1-6

Do you believe everything you hear?

A. Jesus came to earth in a Physical body

1. Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

There is truth and there is falsehood;

There are true prophets and there are false prophets.

There is Jesus who said I AM the Way, the Truth and the Life and there is also the devil who is a liar and deceiver

At the heart of all deception is he that is in the world – he who is referred as the ruler of the kingdom of the air (Ephesians 2:2).

How can we truly tell the difference? How do we know if someone is speaking for God or if they are speaking with the spirit of deception?

John wants to set the record straight in telling them how they can know the truth and how they can know error.

There are those who are for Christ and there are those who are against Christ – they are anti – Christ. As followers of Jesus we need to know the difference.

John wants them to be proactive and not apathetic.

Here is a test that you can use to determine what is truth.

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

I want to focus first on the word “know.” A word of assurance – there are things we can know for sure.

At the end of this portion he is going to use the same word, “know.”

6. This is how we KNOW if someone has the Spirit of truth or the spirit of deception.

The truth sets free; untruth enslaves, confuses and deceives.

John is very confident of the truth.

In this section John is not going to beat around the bush. He makes a very sharp distinction between truth and error. Some of the way he does that is by contrasting the 2. In this way he shines an even brighter light on the truth.

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

3. And every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

The critical test centres around the Person of Christ and specifically this: did Jesus Christ come in the flesh. Was He born a physical human being?

Why is this so critical? What's the big deal?

Because Jesus coming in the flesh to this planet is at the heart of the Good News.

As followers of Jesus we believe in and follow a real Person – not some mystical person or idea; not some spiritual guru; not some enlightened pathway. Not some writings from an angel; not some information on gold plates. Not something that is elusively referred to as “spiritual.”

We follow a real Person who was born in Bethlehem, lived for a little over 30 years in Palestine; He was crucified on a cross and then He rose from the dead. All of this He did in a human body.

This test is so critical because without a human and sinless Jesus, we could not have a relationship with God.

The Bible tells us clearly that our sin keeps us from having a relationship with a holy and loving God. Because of our sin we deserve eternal death – separation from God. We deserve the wrath of a holy God.

The wages of sin is death.

Unless our sin is somehow dealt with we are staring at hopelessness and eternal punishment.

Without a Saviour there is no saving.

The wages of sins is death BUT the Gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. PERIOD!!!

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, Jesus, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.

Through the Person of Christ; through the coming of Christ to the earth in a physical body a relationship with God became possible.

Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary.

He lived, walked and talked in the country of Palestine.

He was physically nailed to a cross where died

He was physically placed in a tomb – a dead man

He rose from the dead physically – people saw Him.

He was physically nailed to a cross and He was physically raised to life:

The other thing that is NB about His coming in the flesh was because of some of what the false teachers taught.

“Gnosis” (knowledge) they claimed to have special knowledge that only a few had; it was mysterious, and hard to nail down. They believed that matter was evil and the immaterial or spirit was good.

John 1:14: And the Word became flesh

1 Corinthians 15:1-5

Belief in the physical Resurrection separates true believers and unbelievers:

1 Corinthians 15:13-14

Without the physical body of Jesus we could not have a relationship with God. We would still be in our sins and we would be separated from God forever - we would go to hell. Period!

Do you think the devil wants you to know the truth?

Do you think that he wants you to be rescued from his kingdom; from his grip on your life. He wants you to be his slave?

And it is he and his evil spirits who are doing everything possible to keep the truth from people.

That is why throughout history there have been false prophets and teachers. That is why there are such a variety of religions and cults and the world is bombarded with deception every single day.

The critical test centres around the Person of Christ and specifically this: did Jesus Christ come in the flesh. Was He born a physical human being?

Application:

So if you hear teaching that you are not sure about, find out what they believe about Jesus. When Mormon missionaries come to your door, ask them what they believe about Jesus. If Jehovah witnesses come and talk with you, always begin with Jesus and stay with Jesus: who do you say Jesus is?

They sing some of the same hymns that we do but they have been deceived.

B. You Are Overcomers:

4. Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

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

6. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Again clear distinction: There are 2 spirits: the Spirit of God and the spirit of the antichrist. We are from God; they are of the world and the one that is in the world. All people are either identified with the Spirit of God or with the spirit of the antichrist (the spirit of the world)

People are either identified with God, or they are identified with the devil.

for He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

He who is in you – that is the Spirit of God.

He who is in the world – that is the spirit of antichrist; that also refers to the one at the head of all evil spirits, namely the god of this world, the devil.

Ephesians 2:1-2: As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now a work in those who are disobedient.

Note again the dichotomy- the absolute contrast:

You are one or the other – it is that simple.

Those on the side of the evil one are of the world, they speak from the world and they listen to those of the world; they do not listen to the truth about God.

Those on the side of God are from God, and they listen to those who are of the truth

If you are identified with the world that means that you listen to the evil one and his slaves. You speak by the spirit of antichrist.

If you are identified with God that means that you listen and submit to Him. You are speaking by the Spirit of God.

John has just given them the critical test to determine whether a person is speaking by the Spirit of God or the spirit of antiChrist.

In verse 4 he encourages them and reminds them that they are from God and are overcomers.

How have they overcome? They have overcome because the One who is in them is greater than he that is in the world – greater than the devil.

They have not overcome in their own strength – NO – it is because of the power of the One that lives in them that they are overcomers.

Greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world.

Friends, allow this to bring you great comfort and encouragement.

How many times have you gone to this verse in times of testing; in times of fear?

Of course the Spirit of Jesus who is in us is greater than the devil, the deceiver.

Romans 8:11: And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who lives in you (NIV).

6. But we belong to God, and those who know God listen to us. If they do not belong to God, they do not listen to us. That is how we know if someone has the Spirit of truth or the spirit of deception (NLT).

II. The Second Critical Test to determine who is from God: 7-12

What are the 2 most repeated words in these 6 verses:

2 words repeated: God (15x) and love (13x)

Observation:

The other thing I observe is that there are 3 couplets or sets of verses: 7&8; 9&10 and 11&12.

A. Whoever loves others knows God (7-8).

In verse 7 he states it positively

7. Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

In a nutshell that is what these next verses are about.

Love comes from God so if you love each other that proves you know God.

Then in verse 8 he puts it negatively:

8. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

How do we know that God is love – that He embodies love?

B. God loved us and sent His Son to give us life (9-10).

9: God showed us how much He loved us by spending His one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through Him (NLT).

God loved us so much that He sent His one and only Son into the world to die so that we could live.

So that we might have eternal life, a life possible because Jesus came in the flesh.

He says basically the same thing in the next verse:

10: This is real love – not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins (NLT).

1 John 3:1: How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

SONG: the love of God is greater far than tongue or pen can ever tell. It goes beyond the highest star and reaches to the lowest hell. The guilty pair bowed down with care, God gave His Son to win; His erring child to reconcile and pardon from his sin.

SO WHAT!!!

And then he wraps up this section with a SO WHAT:

In view of the things that I have just written how should you respond.

C. Loving each other makes our loving God visible (11-12).

11: Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other.

12: No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and His love is brought to full expression (NLT).

John and many others saw God in the flesh – Jesus!

Jesus said if you have seen Me you have seen the Father.

Just as Jesus came in the flesh to bring us into a relationship with God.

Just as Jesus came in the flesh to demonstrate God's love, so we who are children of God; followers of Jesus, also, have the opportunity to reveal God in our flesh.

How do we do that?

By physically demonstrating our love in action and in truth.

God is love – if you are born of God then you too will love. This will be the test that you are born of God – you will love as He did.

John 13:34-35: A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another.

We make visible in our bodies that we belong to God by loving each other.

We make God visible to others by loving them.

Friends, I trust that you and I pass the test that we have in this portion of Scripture - Walking in the Light: Passing the Test.

Prayer:

Song: Greater is He that is in you.

GREATER IS HE

Chorus:

Greater is He that is in me
Greater is He that is in me
Greater is He that is in me
than He that is in the world.

Verse One:

Satan's like a roaring lion roaming to and fro'
Seeing whom he may devour, the Bible tells us so.
Many souls have been his prey to fall in some weak hour,
But God has promised us today His overcoming power.

Chorus:

Greater is He that is in me
Greater is He that is in me
Greater is He that is in me
than He that is in the world.

