

Test The Spirits 1st John 4:1

John wants to address the confusion in the body of Christ that is caused by the working of false spirits, and false inspirations within the church.

Beloved, do not believe every spirit.

John is concerned for their spiritual welfare. He begins with a command not to believe every spirit, every pneuma, every wind of new doctrine yes, everything that promises to be a breath of new life. Remember that John's just told us in 1st John 3:24 **24 The one who keeps His commandments remains in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He remains in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.** So John is contrasting the Spirit of Truth, this Life-Giving Spirit from God with the false spirits that come from the evil one. And the implication here is that these believers were becoming confused by believing deceiving spirits who were lying and trying to impersonate the Holy Spirit. So John is warning them, and warning us, don't do that!

The churches that John is writing to were in danger of coming under the influence of the false doctrines and heresy of Gnosticism, which tended to diminish the person and work of Jesus. Faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus is absolutely essential to Christianity, and any attempt to deny them can only come from the pit of hell. So John is warning them, and us not to be open to just any inspired word of doctrine—make sure that it is True Doctrine inspired by the Holy Spirit, not inspired by the one of these false spirits. They were committing themselves to believing teachings without testing them, and that was the problem. And this was causing a lot of confusion in the church, just as it does today.

Test Every Spirit to See if they are from God

Remember that God never demands blind faith, He provides us the evidence of His Word, and of changed lives, and says decide whether you want to believe and see the truth or not. Luke gave the Berean people praise as they judged the teaching of Paul and Silas: **11 Now these people were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.** The question, when it comes to Christian teaching, is whether it lines up with the Word of God, or not! Every teaching, every doctrine claiming to be the Truth must be tested. We have a responsibility to be discerning in understanding the spiritual motivation of teachers. We are to be vigilant, allowing the Holy Spirit to give us discernment, chiefly by hiding the Word of God in our Heart, so that the Holy Spirit can remind us of the Word, when discernment is needed.

So, what exactly are we supposed to be testing? In context, it appears to be saying to test the spirit behind the teaching that we hear, their ultimate source. Just as Truth is Sourced in God, and the Holy Spirit of Truth, Error and deceit is sourced in Satan and his emissaries the fallen angels or demons. Later in 1st John 4:6, John is going to continue this contrast saying **6 We are from God. The one who knows God listens to us; the one who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.** I believe that this is a warning to test teaching and doctrine, just as Paul gives us in Timothy 4:1-2 **But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, 2 by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron,** He's warning against joining this crowd who will follow false teaching, and guidance of spirits who are not from God. These are the teachers who are influenced strongly by the "spirit" of this age (the world's values, their culture) which is continually being influenced by the servants of Satan.

But we must continue sharing the hope of Jesus Christ in the face of increasingly difficult circumstances. If you cave in, and don't talk about sin or don't "preach the gospel" then you'll face less pressure here, but risk being one of those who falls away from the faith. Jesus said in Matthew 5:14-15 **14 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; 15 nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16 Your light must shine before people in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is**

in heaven. We can't be the light of the world if we let the world dim or put out our light by compromising with the darkness! We must stand for the truth during the storm.

Standing in the storm of false teaching

For those of us who will walk with Him, Jesus has demonstrated to us over and over that He will keep us through the storm. And it has built our faith in Him, our foundation. He has the power. In Matthew 8:23-27 God allowed a storm to come upon Jesus and the apostles **Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and it became perfectly calm. 27 The men were amazed, and said, "What kind of a man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"** Jesus demonstrated His power over the storms in their lives, literally! And there's another reason for the storm. 6 Chapters later in Matthew 14:22 we find out that Jesus made his disciples get on a boat without him and go on ahead across the sea of Galilee. In Matthew 14:24 we read **24 and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. 25 Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.** The storm was a test of faith, just as the other had been. Jesus had told them that He would meet them on the other side, so if they really believed in Him as they should, then they should have known that they'd make it to the other side. Even with the wind and the waves against them, they had already been shown that even the wind and the sea obey Jesus, and He had assured them they'd make it. And notice that when their attention was on the storm around them, it produced fear. That's why we shouldn't spend our time listening to the spiritual storm coming from our televisions and computers, on the news which is controlled by the prince of the power of the air, the enemy over the airwaves. We're not going to be able to discern if that's what we're paying attention to. Instead we must listen to Jesus when He tells us too in Matthew 14:27 **27 But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."** Now this is a command to look to Jesus for courage. It demanded faith in order to overcome fear. One disciple out of twelve understood what was going on. **28 "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." 29 "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.** People ask what was different about Peter? He had discernment to know Jesus when he saw him, and was not confused, thinking that it was a ghost or spirit. And once he knew it was Jesus, it was only THEN that he took his eyes off the storm, and actually listened to what Jesus had said—Take Courage. Rom 10:17 **17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.** It was listening to the Word of God, Jesus in faith that made the difference. The Bible says in Ephesians 2:9 we read that **faith is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.** Faith comes from God, and Peter was looking to Jesus for it. Faith is defined biblically in terms of the action that it produces—we are not called to create faith within ourselves, but to look to Jesus for it. He found that because He listened to the Word of God, and put his trust in it, that he could walk on water just as long as he kept his eyes on Jesus **2 looking only at Jesus, the originator and perfecter of the faith** as Hebrews 12:2 tells us. That's what made the difference—that He looked to, and placed his trust in Jesus.

And so, in our verses today, we find that it's recognizing whether the teachings line up with the Word of God—are the teachings sourced IN God, that lets us know whether it is something that we should accept or reject the teaching. John calls us to evaluate teachers and teachings in order to discern the source of that teaching, whether it is of God or from elsewhere, just like Peter discerned that the person coming to him over the sea in the wind and the waves was Jesus, and not a ghost. Faith is only valid if it's faith in God, so we must be sure of the Word that we stand on, the truth it is based on. Just as Peter examined the person coming to Him on the Lake, and knew it was the Word, just as the Bereans Examined the Scriptures to know that the word from Paul and Silas was according to the scriptures, "True faith examines carefully what or who it's putting the faith and confidence in, before placing faith in them. Otherwise it is only self-deception, that will fail in time of trouble.

I believe that John is asking us to look at the Word to examine teachings and teachers so we won't be misled. So what is to be evaluated? Just as Jesus said: their fruits (Matt 7 vs. 15-20. These "fruits" may be visible conduct, but may also include their teachings. So, we don't look at what they say about themselves, but at what they teach about the Bible, and how they conduct themselves (see Rev 2:20-22). It is not a small thing to put your lot in with those who hate God! It is not a small thing to ignore and wink at evil, refusing to call it sin. It is not a small thing to tolerate and participate in evil, because it brings you financial benefits, or social acceptance, or popularity among your friends. We must stand up and be counted with the people of God, against this evil tide, or we will find ourselves counted amongst those who stand against God, and be destroyed! Which means we are to live our lives instead in righteousness, doing right before God. As John says in 1st John 3:10 **10 By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.** This is what we're supposed to spend our time doing. **"because many false prophets have gone out into the world"**. Don't spend your time trying to sniff out false teaching and false prophets, or you'll miss a lot of good teaching, because you're always looking at all teaching with a critical eye. Don't be fearful, have faith in God. Instead, focus on keeping your eyes upon Jesus, and trust the Holy Spirit to give you the discernment to easily identify the false teaching, call it deception and sin, reject it, and focus your eyes upon Jesus. Don't pay attention to the waves, Keep your eyes upon Jesus.