

We know the Spirit of God—1st John 4:2-3

The churches of Asia Minor that John is writing to were unwisely leaving themselves open to believing false teachers and teachings, accepting and trusting in teachings without testing them, which caused a lot of confusion in the church, just as it does today. Every teaching, every doctrine claiming to be the Truth must be tested. The word for “test” means to examine to prove something’s worth, to test or evaluate or assay like you would silver or gold ore. So, this tells us to have discernment to see if the teachings are sourced in God. We are to test whether the spirit behind the teaching that we hear. And we must be aware and be careful: 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.** We don’t want to be among those who have listened to so many lies that they can no longer tell the difference between truth and error. We don’t want to be among the crowd who will follow false teaching, and guidance of spirits who are not from God.

“By this we know the Spirit of God.” So, how are we to know? Back in 1st John 2:27, John has assured them, **27 And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him remains in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you remain in Him.** In other words, we can rely on the Holy Spirit to teach us about all things and discern truth from error, and as we remain in right relationship with God. We are to test teachers and teachings on the basis of the Truth about Jesus we have been taught by the Holy Spirit as we study the Word of God. John uses the word *ginosko* here, which means to come to know or recognize based on experience in relationship with the Holy Spirit. It isn’t just head-knowledge, but experience walking in relationship with God that gives us this discernment.

John says **“every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.”** The Holy Spirit will always bear witness to the fact that Jesus was born as a Human baby--The Word became flesh. This belief is necessary to be a Christian. It’s belief in the person and work of Jesus that counts. John was an eye-witness to the incarnation (see John 1:1). He saw Jesus in the flesh with his own eyes and touched Him with his hands. So, John’s test of the Truth of the teaching that he hears is based on his experience with Jesus, and the Holy Spirit’s witness that it is True. Now Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:3 **3 Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus is accursed”; and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.** So Paul emphasizes testing the Truth of the teaching by whether it tends to scorn or diminish Jesus saying that “he is accursed, or not from God”, or whether the teaching tends to uphold the fact that Jesus is Lord, meaning that we must confess and agree that Jesus is Lord of All, not 2nd, or 3rd place in our lives, but Number One, Lord of our lives—not money, not power, not position, not security, just Jesus. Paul can affirm that ‘no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit’ because he has been taught this truth from the Holy Spirit. And Paul knows that any teacher empowered by the Holy Spirit will have the same witness! Both apostles are affirming Christ based on their experience with Christ. Because they know God, they know they can trust God for discernment. It is the same with us! We can trust the Holy Spirit to give us discernment as we walk with Him, and His revelation to each of us will be in a way that we’re each going to understand and trust, because of our relationship with Jesus. Just ask the Holy Spirit for discernment (see James 1:5; Psalm 119:66-67; example in 1st Kings 3:9-12).

4:3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God

Christian faith is not spiritual gullibility. The unseen spiritual influences that guide people’s speech and actions can be “tested” by observing their doctrine and conduct, as guided by the Holy Spirit.

Distinguishing the spirit behind the teaching is very important. The Corinthian Church in 2 Cor 11:3-4 was being deceived into believing a distortion of the gospel, and Paul spoke said **3 But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his trickery, your minds will be led astray from sincere and pure devotion to Christ. 4 For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or**

you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, this you tolerate very well! In other words they were falling for false doctrine because it was more palatable to their flesh than real doctrine—and they were quick to welcome the spirit behind the false teaching, rather than the Holy Spirit. False doctrines will always appeal to the flesh, in one way or another. John's now explaining how we know false teachers and false teaching—by how they distort the person Jesus, and Work of Jesus as Christ--Messiah, Redeemer, Savior. It's their view of the person and work of Jesus and specifically the Gospel that tells us what spirit is behind the teaching, and whether a teacher, preacher, prophet, etc. are true or false.

Four patterns or marks commonly found in cults can be remembered by the four basic functions of math: Addition, Subtraction, Multiplication, and Division.

Add to God's Word--False Doctrines or cults tend to Add to God's word. Do they claim that the Bible has some serious errors and needs revision—by them of course. Do they claim that the Bible is not sufficient and must be supplemented by their own words? Deut. 4:2 **2 You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, so that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I am commanding you.** True Christianity is committed to the principle of sola scriptura, which means scripture alone--that the Bible alone contains all knowledge necessary for salvation and holiness.

Subtract from Jesus—True Christians agree on the Person and Work of Jesus Christ, His Life, Death, Burial and Resurrection. One can be wrong on secondary doctrines and still be a Christian. Anyone who puts their faith in a counterfeit, false Christ though has no foundation for their faith. 1 Cor 15:14 **And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith** So, if they believe in some other Jesus, or some other Messiah who wasn't God's Son, and who didn't live a sinless life, and fulfill His life's purpose as Messiah to die for our sins, and wasn't raised again on the third day, then they are a victim of a deadly case of mistaken identity, and their faith is futile, and they are still in their sins (1 Cor 15:17).

Multiply—Some false doctrines try to Multiply the Requirements for Salvation. Religious systems which teaches that Salvation comes through faith plus good works undermine the sufficiency of Christ. Titus 3:4-6. **4 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.**

Division in that they divide the Followers' Loyalties. The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus saves, and that no specific religious organization can grant forgiveness of sins or provide salvation to it's members. Yet some false doctrines teach that "you cannot be loyal to God unless you are loyal to their group!" The Bible tells us to "Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition" (Titus 3:10). The Greek word translated "divisive" is the source of the English word "heresy" which means "a choosing, choice... a self-willed opinion, which is substituted for submission to the power of truth, and leads to division and the formation of sects."

Understand that we must put our faith in the Real Jesus, the Jesus of Scripture, in order to believe and be saved. The Bible is clear, **"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5).** Only the real Jesus can bridge the gap. Only the real Jesus can be a ladder between earth and heaven, to reach our Heavenly Father.