

1 John 4:1 – 6
Five Truths Concerning False Prophets, Part 1

In **1 John 3**, John taught us the importance of love. But, here in the first few verses of **chapter 4** John emphasizes that this love cannot be devoid of God's truth.

Just last week, in **1 John 3:24**, John spoke to us about the work of the Holy Spirit when he said, "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."

But now, as we begin **chapter 4**, John wants us to know that, in addition to the Holy Spirit, there are other spirits at work in this world.

- I. **The Clear Command of God** (v. 1)
- II. **The Conflicting Confession of False Prophets** (v. 2 – 3)
- III. **The Christian's Conquering Salvation** (v. 4)
- IV. **The Charlatan's Compelling Message** (v. 5)
- V. **The Confident Certainty of Scripture** (v. 6)

I. **The Clear Command of God** (v. 1)

In **verse 1**, John gives a very clear command that can be broken up into two parts. **First**, he tells us "...do not believe every spirit ..."

There are many people in this world who claim to be ministers of God. And we know the Bible teaches that every genuine minister of God's Word has God's Spirit working in him and through him. It is the Holy Spirit who calls and separates him to the work; it is the Holy Spirit who qualifies him for the work (e.g. **Eph. 4:11 – 12**).

But here John warns us that there are also demonic spirits at work as well. They seek to influence and inspire false prophets and teachers to distort the truth of God's Word, to blind the minds of the unbelieving (**2 Cor. 4:4**), leading people astray (**1 Tim. 4:1**).

Therefore, behind every false prophet and teacher there is a demon spirit. Consequently, not everyone who claims to speak for God does.

Therefore, throughout the New Testament, believers are issued warnings that false prophets are extremely dangerous. They are not to be believed.

Then, in the **second** part of this command, John tells us to "...**test** the spirits to see whether they are from God ..." Get this! John is asking Christians to judge! **Matt. 7:1** must be one of the most misunderstood verses in the Bible. People have misunderstood this verse to mean that we can never make a judgment about anyone or anything, under any circumstance. But in the context of that passage, Jesus is not condemning all types of judging. What Jesus condemns is a self-righteous, hypocritical judgment that is rooted in pride (**Rom. 12:9; 1 Thess. 5:21 – 22**). Therefore, Christians are commanded to make judgments and moral distinctions, and we are to do this in humility and love.

The verb "test" is in the present tense, meaning we are to continually "...test the spirits..." (**Acts 17:11**). Paul and Silas claimed to be men of God, and the people of Berea examined and compared what they said to what was written in the Scriptures. As a result, God's word refers to the Bereans as "noble minded." In other words, it was very commendable for them to "...test the spirits ..." (see also **Rev. 2:2**).

So again, the Bible clearly teaches that believers are to judge for themselves the truth of what men say who claim to be God's spokesmen.

Why is it so important to “test the spirits”? At the end of **verse 1**, John gives us the reason. He says, “...for [or *because*] many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

Sadly, false prophets are not a rarity in this world. No, John says there are “many.” In fact, there are so “many” of these false prophets, that if we do not “...test the spirits ...” we will be deceived.

So, how are we supposed to identify false prophets? Is there a litmus test we can use?” Well thankfully, John gives us guidance in **verses 2 – 3**. The telltale sign is...

II. The Conflicting Confession of False Prophets (v. 2 – 3)

In **verse 2**, when John says, “By this...” it is a reference to the confession of the “spirit.” “Every spirit” has a confession. “Every spirit” is pushing an agenda.

Notice the words “confess” and “confesses” are in the present tense, meaning that they refer to everyone who “confesses” on a continual basis. The word translated “confess” means “to say the same.” As an example, when we “confess” our sin to God, it means that we agree with or say the same thing about our sin that God does.

John is saying that a true teacher of God, empowered by the Spirit of Truth, will “confess” or will agree with God’s revelation of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures. This includes believing and accepting the truth that Jesus was the Christ, the promised Messiah, and that He came from God and is fully God and fully man.

We must understand that the Holy Spirit will never speak contrary to the Scriptures. God cannot and will not contradict Himself. Therefore, if a teacher does not agree with God’s revelation of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures, he is in fact being influenced by demons. This is what John is saying in **verse 3**. To say it yet another way, the telltale sign of every false prophet is that they will distort the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The Mathematics of a False Prophet (Any One of These Describes a False Prophet or a Cult)	
ADD	If they <u>add</u> to the Word of God a) New Holy Books b) New Interpretation of Scripture
SUBTRACT	If they <u>subtract</u> from the Deity of Christ a) Christ isn’t God b) Christ isn’t the Only Way to Heaven
MULTIPLY	If they <u>multiply</u> the requirements of salvation a) Work for Salvation b) Pay for Salvation
DIVISION	If <u>separation</u> from “us” separates you from God a) To Leave the Group is to Leave God

Satan, the father of lies, is working relentlessly to distort the saving and sanctifying truth of God’s written Word, the Bible, and of the living Word, His Son, Jesus Christ.

The “spirit of the antichrist” promotes erroneous and heretical teaching about the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

- 1) Do you have to be a pastor or an expert on false teachers to distinguish truth from error? Why or why not?
- 2) Can you discern truth from error? Are you able to pick out the true sheep among the wolves?