

## Test the Spirits – Part 1

1 John 4:1-6

### THE COMMAND TO TEST THE SPIRITS. v.1

#### 1. What does John mean by ‘spirits’?

- ‘Spirits’ are essentially teachings or beliefs.

#### 2. The reality of false spirits. “...do not believe every spirit...”

- “Many false prophets have gone out into the world...” lit. ‘pseudo-prophets’  
→ a ‘great commission’ of false prophets. Ref. 2 John 7; Gal 1:6-9; Mt 7:15-16; 24:11; Mk 13:21-23

#### 3. We are commanded to “test” the spirits. “...do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits...”

- Unbelief (in false teachings) is a sign of Christian maturity. Ref. 1 Thes. 5:21-22

→ What is the standard by which we must “test” the spirits?

### THE PRIMARY CRITERIA FOR TESTING THE SPIRITS IS THE CONTENT OF THEIR MESSAGE. v.2-3

#### 1. John says that you must look at what the spirit confesses. (i.e. What does it teach?) v.2-3a

- In the context of 1 John, the primary issue was: Is Jesus fully God and fully man?
- v.2: This spirit is from God... v.3: This spirit is not from God...

#### 2. The same idea is taught in the Old Testament. → What are the criteria for determining true or false prophets?

- If a prophet’s claims do not come true, the message is not from LORD.
- Deuteronomy 18:20-22: <sup>20</sup>But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.’ <sup>21</sup>And if you say in your heart, ‘How may we know the word that the Lord has not spoken?’— <sup>22</sup>when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.

→ Question: Does this mean if his claims do come true that he is truly a prophet of the LORD? Answer: it depends.

- If his claims do come true, but include false teaching, the message is NOT from the LORD.
- Deuteronomy 13:1-4: “If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, <sup>2</sup>and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, ‘Let us go after other gods,’ which you have not known, ‘and let us serve them,’ <sup>3</sup>you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the Lord your God is testing you, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. <sup>4</sup>You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and hold fast to him.

→ Summary idea: The legitimacy of a ‘prophet’ is determined by the content of his message.

→ Application: A decision that the Word of God is your only rule for faith (what to believe) and practice (how to live).

→ Application: To protect against false teaching we must know the Bible inside & out. (Bible reading plan)

### DISCERNMENT TO TEST THE SPIRITS. v.5-6

#### 1. Consider the SOURCE. v.5a, 6a

→ From where did this teaching come?

- John points out the source of the teaching: *They are from the world....We are from God.*
- JESUS: “I came from the Father.” John 16:27

#### 2. Consider the SPEAKERS. v.5a, 6a

→ Who is giving this teaching?

- John intentionally contrasts the personal pronouns: *THEY speak from the world....WE are from God.*
- John sets up (once again) an “us” vs. “them” mentality.
- JESUS: “The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me...” John 14:10

#### 3. Consider the AUDIENCE. v.5b, 6b

→ Who is following this teaching?

- v.5: Teachers from the world...speak from the world...*and the world listens to them.*
- v.6: Teachers from God...speak the words of God...*and he who knows God listens.*
- JESUS: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” John 10:27