

Test the Spirits – 1 John 4:1-6
Part 3: Discernment

INTRODUCTION: BRIEF REVIEW

1. The command to test the spirits. v.1

- ‘Spirits’ are essentially teachings or beliefs... “...see if they are from God...”

2. The primary criteria for testing the spirits is the CONTENT of their message. v.2-3

- The legitimacy of a ‘prophet’ is determined by the content of his message.

3. Discernment to test the spirits. v.5-6

- Consider the SOURCE, the SPEAKERS, and the AUDIENCE. v.5-6

→ There is the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error. ...Discernment is needed.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION: DISCERNMENT IN ‘TESTING THE SPIRITS’

1. A teaching must be tested in the greater context of GOD’S WORD.

→ What does the rest of the Bible say about this issue?

- God’s Word is coherent, consistent, and unified. Interpret the Bible in accordance with the rest of the Bible.
- 2 Timothy 3: *“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it”* ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.
- God’s Word needs to be used with CAUTION.
 - “Proof-texting.” Interpreting one verse without considering the whole. E.g., James 2:24; Lev. 20:10
 - Attributing things to the Bible which it does not say. ‘God helps those who help themselves.’
 - Importing modern meanings into the text.

2. A teaching must be tested using PRIVATE JUDGMENT.

→ What do I understand about this issue from my own study & prayer under the guidance of the Holy Spirit?

- Private judgment can include things like Bible study, prayer, meditating on God’s Word, journaling, etc.
- See 2 Peter 1:19-21
- At times, God has used an individual’s private judgment to create upheaval and revival in His church.
- Private judgment needs to be used with CAUTION.

→ Do you have a time? Do you have a place? Do you have a plan?

3. A teaching must be tested in the greater context of CHURCH HISTORY.

→ How has this issue been addressed in the lives of believers in the past?

- God’s Spirit was at work in the lives of Christians in the past just as He is at work in believers today.
- What can we learn from historical expressions of the Christian faith? Ecclesiastes 1:9
- Church history needs to be used with CAUTION.

→ To what part of history are you drawn? Have you ever considered why you are drawn to this part of history?

→ Pick 1 or 2 influential Christians from the past and study them. Read their works. Read Biographies.

4. A teaching must be tested in the greater context of our PRESENT COMMUNITY.

→ How is this issue being lived out and addressed today?

- Interpretation needs to happen through intentional interaction with other Christians in the church today.
- God has given us a living community of believers.
- In the church: Small Groups, Bible Studies, Sermons, Discipleship Classes
- Parachurch organizations: Ligonier Ministries
- Christian teachers & authors: John Piper, Matt Chandler, Voddie Baucham, Jr.
- Our present community needs to be consulted with CAUTION.