

Introduction

There are lots of scams and deceivers today. They write letters, emails, and texts posing as someone else or another organization. They claim they are with the IRS, or the Social Security Administration, or UPS, or Microsoft. They prey on people who are unsuspecting, naïve, or are just not careful. I try to report them and block them when they send things to me. Unfortunately, many people have been deceived and have lost a lot to these scams.

A number of years ago, when I was managing a training company, the Administrator at our Houston office called me. She was at Office Depot, and was shopping for \$50 Apple gift certificates. She said that she had received an email from me telling me to buy \$500.00 of these certificates and then reply to the email with the serial numbers. Fortunately, she was having a difficult time getting ten of these gift cards, and had called me to ask me what I wanted her to do. I told her that I had not requested any gift cards, and not to buy any of them. I told her to forward the email to me so that I could look at it. The deceiver had created an email with a name almost like mine, and it had the same label and return information on the inside of the email. There was an extra “i” in the spelling of my last name, and it was not from our corporate email address, so I was able to quickly spot the fraud. I sent out a letter to all our employees letting them know to be careful about opening emails, checking email addresses, and to never give information or purchase things without verifying the email and information. This kind of thing happens all the time, and it seems that many of these target the elderly, who may not be as alert or discerning.

This is my fortieth year of being a pastor, and one of the things that a shepherd must do is to watch over the flock. Paul exhorted the Ephesian elders to be on guard for themselves and for all the flock. He said that savage wolves would come in, not sparing the flock, and even from among themselves, men would arise, speaking perverse things, to draw the disciples after them. He concluded, “Therefore be on the alert...” As a shepherd, I have been alert and on guard. I can’t remember being taught to do that; I believe that it was just something that God put inside of me, and that I just did. During these forty years, I have on many occasions had to step up and deal with false prophets and false teachers, and take corrective actions to make sure that the people under my care were not deceived and led astray.

(Ac 20:28–31) “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. {29} I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; {30} and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. {31} Therefore be on the alert...”

In our passage today, John gives two exhortations to believers. First, he tells them not to believe every spirit. Second, they are to test the spirits to see if they are from God. Then, he gave them the reason for testing the spirits; there are many false prophets in the world. John does not want believers to be deceived and led astray by false prophets and teachers. Then, John gave believers three ways to test the spirits. First, they were to look at their confession about Jesus. Second, they were to look at their profession of Jesus. Third, they were to examine their affiliation and source.

Test Every Spirit

1. Exhortations
2. Reason for testing
3. Test Criteria

(1 Jn 4:1–6) “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. {2} By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; {3} and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the *spirit* of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. {4} You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. {5} They are from the world; therefore they speak *as* from the world, and the world listens to them. {6} We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.”

1. Exhortations (1 Jn 4:1)

John gives two exhortations to protect believers from being deceived and being led astray. The word, deceive, or a form of it, is used 164 times in Scripture. It began in Genesis 3, where Satan deceived Eve, and she and Adam at the forbidden fruit. Satan is a deceiver, and he has been doing this for thousands of years. Satan made Eve question what God had said, causing doubt. Second, he changed the narrative of what God had said. Satan distorts and twists the truth. Third, he attacks the truth. He rejects what God has said. He is subtle, and he lures and makes sin appealing, but his motive is to deceive and cause people to sin. Satan and his demons still use the same methods today to deceive people, and lead them astray.

There were many deceivers at that time, particularly the Gnostics. We saw in 1 John 2 that many antichrists had appeared, and that was one of the signs that we are in the last hour, day, or times. John pointed out that they were not really part of them, because they had left and not remained with them. At that time, he said that these antichrists denied that Jesus is the Christ. They denied the Father and the Son. John exhorted them to abide in what they had heard in the beginning.

(1 Jn 2:18–19) “Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. {19} They went out from us, but they were not *really* of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but *they went out*, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.”

John, in his circular writing style, has come back around to talk about this matter one more time, and now he goes a little deeper. He gives two exhortations, the reason for testing, and how to test these spirits. John is a true shepherd, and he loves the flock. He addresses them as beloved, showing his love for the flock. He has their best interest in mind. He does not want people to be deceived by false spirits, so he gives two exhortations.

a. Exhortation to not believe every spirit

The first exhortation is, “Do not believe every spirit.” He does not want them to believe or trust the teaching and the things they were hearing. Normally, when we teach or preach, we want people to believe and receive what we are saying, but that is not what John wrote. He did not want them to automatically believe every spirit. By spirit, he is really talking about the teachings and prophecies that they were hearing. He wanted them to listen carefully. He wanted them to listen with some degree of skepticism.

(1 Jn 4:1) “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

John does not want the believers to be naïve, gullible, foolish, or green. They were to have some hesitancy and skepticism about what they were taught. In Acts 17:11, Luke recorded that the believers in Berea 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.” That is exactly the attitude that John wants believers to have. He wants us to check things out and see whether the things we are hearing are so. One of the reasons that I like to give handouts is that I can include all the Scripture references of my message, so that people can go back and review the things that were taught, and to make sure they are correct.

(Ac 17:11) “Now these 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.”

When our family bought some land on Priest Road in Acworth, there was a lot of poison ivy all over the property. I did not want to keep using Round Up, so I threatened to bring home some goats to help us get rid of the poison ivy. One day I was driving up Highway 41, and I had to pass the flea market. I decided to pull in and see if they had any goats for sale, and I found out that one of the vendors did have goats for sale. I bought a male goat and a female goat. The male goat was on the small side, but the vendor told me that he was just young, and would get bigger. I was green, gullible, naïve, and ignorant about goats, and I believed this man. Later on, I figured out that young goats do not have beards yet, so this male, who we named, Toby, was not young; he was a pigmy goat. I had been deceived. For our purposes, it did not matter to much, as the goats did exactly what we wanted them to do; they ate up all the poison ivy and other weeds. They cleaned up the property very nicely. My wife also took a liking to the goats, and we ended up buying many Boar goats, and she raised these meat goats to sell.

We have to become knowledgeable about things so that we are not ignorant, naïve, and gullible, and are not deceived by people. We need to know the truth, the Word of God, so that we are not deceived. John’s first exhortation was for them not to believe every spirit.

b. Exhortation to test the spirits

John’s second exhortation is a follow-up to the first exhortation; we are to test the spirits. We do not automatically believe the spirits, but we test them. We must examine them to make sure that they are from God.

(1 Jn 4:1–2) “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. {2} By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God;”

The Greek word John used that is translated as test is dokimazo (Strong’s G1381). It is used twenty-three times, and the most common translation of it is prove or approve (7x), test (6x), and examine (5x).

Scriptures teach us that we are to test, examine, and approve many things. We are to prove God’s will in our lives (Ro 12:2). We are to examine or test prophecy (1 Th 5:20-21). We are to test or prove leaders in the church before setting them in office (1 Ti 3:10, 2 Cor 8:22). We are to examine ourselves and judge ourselves rightly before taking the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:25-32).

We are to judge what foods we will eat, and whatever foods we approve to eat, we should eat from faith (Rom 14:22-23). And, we are to test the spirits to see if they are from God.

2. Reason for testing

Before giving the specific ways to test the spirits, John shares the reason for testing. He said they need to test the spirits because many false prophets have gone into the world. Just as there are many scams and deceivers today, there were many deceivers that were trying to lead believers astray. We are still in the last days, and there are just as many deceivers today, if not more. There is still a tremendous need for the testing of spirits today.

(1 Jn 4:1) “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

Then John wrote that they had heard that the antichrist was coming, and he wanted them to know that the spirit of the antichrist was already in the world. It was not future; it was already here. Therefore, they needed to pay attention to what they were hearing and what they were being taught. They should not believe every spirit; they should test every spirit.

(1 Jn 4:3) “and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the *spirit* of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.”

John was not the only one to warn about these false prophets and teachers. In the introduction, I shared Paul’s warning to the Ephesian elders. In 1 Timothy 4:1, he warned Timothy, who was in Ephesus, that in later times some will fall away, paying attention to the doctrine of demons. These are antichrists, evil spirits or demons, that bring deceiving doctrine or teaching.

(1 Ti 4:1) “But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,”

In Matthew 7, Jesus warned about the false prophets, who will come dressed like sheep, but inwardly were ravenous wolves. He said that they could be recognized by their fruits. In other words, they were to test them, and the test He gave was to examine the fruit of their lives.

(Mt 7:15–16) “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. {16} You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes* nor figs from thistles, are they?”

In Matthew 24:4-5, Jesus warned about being misled or deceived by someone posing as the Christ. Then, in Matthew 24:23-26, he warned about false Christs and false prophets. He told them not to believe them. The church has been warned, and we need to be on guard. We need to be skeptical. We need to test the spirits so that we are not deceived.

(Mt 24:23–25) “Then if anyone says to you, ‘Behold, here is the Christ,’ or ‘There *He is*,’ do not believe *him*. {24} For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. {25} Behold, I have told you in advance.”

Of particular concern today is the lack of a Biblical worldview in the church. In George Barna’s Release # 5, May 10, 2022, he revealed that the majority of America’s pastors do not have a

Biblical worldview. His survey showed that only 37% of pastors have a Biblical worldview. Senior pastors were at 41%, youth pastors and children's pastors were at 12%, and executive pastors were at 4%. He found that only 6% of church-goers had a Biblical worldview. Most pastors do not know God's Word, and can be easily deceived. Most church members do not know God's Word, and can be easily deceived. The deceivers are in the seminaries. The deceivers are already in our churches, and in leadership roles. God's normal protection for the flock, the shepherds, is no longer a reliable protection. The church is extremely vulnerable to these many false prophets and teachers.

3. **Testing of spirits** (1 Jn 4:2-6)

In 2014, Karen and I attended a conference in Europe. After the conference ended, we spent another week in Europe, visiting different places, including Cannes, France. In Cannes, we saw a man near us, and I began speaking French to him. He shrugged his shoulders and turned his palms up, indicating that he had no idea what I was saying. After a few awkward minutes, we discovered that it was not my French that was so bad, the man did not speak any French. He was Hungarian and did not speak any French and very little English. He "accidentally" dropped what appeared to be a gold ring on the ground, and I politely picked it up and handed it to him. He indicated that he wanted to sell it. He needed some money and was willing to sell this ring for a few dollars. I ended up giving him a few dollars, and he gave me the ring. A few minutes later we saw him drop another "gold ring" by another tourist. This was the man's gig. He had a bunch of these cheap gold imitation rings and he would get tourists to give him a few dollars for something that was worthless. Karen and I laughed when we saw him execute his plan the second time on another tourist. He was a shyster. Karen and I knew it was not a real gold ring. How did we know it was not real gold? If it was gold, it would have been worth over a thousand dollars, so any person in their right mind would not sell a gold ring for that cheap. We knew it was counterfeit, but we did not mind giving him a few dollars to help him buy some food.

There are lots of ways to test something to see if it is pure gold or not. There is a visual test. There is a density test. Gold is one of the heaviest metals and weighs 19.3 grams per cubic centimeter. Gold is a soft metal so some people use a bite test to see if their bite leaves an impression. There is a ceramic plate test, where you rub the object on the ceramic plate. If it leaves a gold mark, it is gold, and if it leaves a black mark it is fake gold. Since gold is not a magnetic metal, you can perform a magnet test. Jewelers use a nitric acid test. They put a drop of nitric acid and observe the color. A green reaction indicates your item is either a base metal or gold plated. A gold reaction indicates your item is gold-plated brass. A milk-colored reaction would indicate gold-plated sterling silver. If there is no reaction, you mostly likely are dealing with real gold. These are just ways of proving if an object is gold or not.

Just as there are ways to test gold, there are ways to test the spirits to see if they are from God. John gives us three separate tests to run in our examining these spirits.

a. **Confession about Jesus**

The first test is what they confess about Jesus. John wrote, "By this you know the Spirit of God; every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist.

(1 Jn 4:2-3) "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; {3} and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not

from God; this is the *spirit* of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.”

One of the main sources of the false teaching came from the Gnostics. They taught that salvation came primarily through secret spiritual knowledge, rather than through faith in the atoning work of Christ. They taught that Jesus primarily came to bring secret knowledge, not to atone for the sins of man and to save men. Gnosticism was a broad system of beliefs, and out of Gnosticism came Docetism. They taught that Jesus only appeared to have a physical body, but that Christ could not truly have become flesh. His suffering and crucifixion were only apparent, not real. Most scholars say that John is specifically dealing with Docetism in this first test.

In 1 John 1, John said Jesus was in the beginning; He was the Word of Life. This directs us to Genesis 1, where God created the heavens and the earth in the beginning. It also takes us to John 1, where Jesus is the Word, and was in the beginning, and through Him, all things were created. He also said that the Word became flesh. Now, in 1 John 1, he wrote that they had seen, touched, and beheld the Christ. He was verifying that Jesus had indeed come in the flesh, and the apostles were witnesses that he came in the flesh.

(1 Jn 1:1–3) “What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life— {2} and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us— {3} what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.”

In 1 John 2:22, John identified the spirit of the antichrist. He wrote, “Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.” John has circled back around to this same point. He is telling us how to test and identify the spirit of the antichrist, those that deny that Jesus is the Christ.

(1 Jn 2:22) “Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.”

Another false teaching that was prevalent was from Cerinthus. He said that Jesus was an ordinary human being, born naturally of Joseph and Mary. The divine Christ descended upon Jesus at His baptism, and empowered Him during His ministry, and then departed from Him before the crucifixion. Only the human Jesus suffered and died. Jesus was not the incarnate God, Immanuel, God in the flesh. Both Docetists and Cerinthus denied the trinity and that Jesus had come in the flesh, fully God and fully man. This was the first test that John gave to test these false spirits.

b. Profession of Jesus

The second test that John gave was profession. He said, “You are from God, little children, and have overcome them. He went on, “they are from the world.” Then, in verse six, he said, “We are from God.” The second test is whether these people profess to having received Christ in their lives. It is not enough to know that Jesus is the Christ; we must receive Christ and be born into His kingdom.

(1 Jn 4:4–6) “You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. {5} They are from the world; therefore they

speaking *as* from the world, and the world listens to them. {6} We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.”

It is not enough to intellectually believe that Jesus is the Christ. Paul wrote that we must believe in our heart that God raised Him from the dead, and to confess Jesus as Lord. We have to make Jesus Lord of our life. We have to yield our life to Him.

(Ro 10:9–10) “that if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; {10} for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.”

James wrote, “You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. The demons know Jesus’ identity; they know who He is. Jesus created everything. Apart from Jesus, nothing that was created was created. What we see, and also what we cannot see were all created by Jesus. James’ point in saying this is that we must place our faith in Jesus, and when we do that, there will be evidence in our lives; there will be fruit in our lives.

(Jas 2:19) “} You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.”

(Jn 1:3) “All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.”

(Col 1:16) “For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.”

In Mark 5, we have the account of the demoniac in the country of the Gerasenes, which was across the Sea of Galilee from Capernaum, where Jesus’ home base was. This demoniac had thousands of demons in him. When Jesus asked him his name, he said, “My name is Legion; for we are many.” When Jesus first arrived, Jesus began saying to him, “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit.” Then, the man said, “What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God, do not torment me!” These demons knew who Jesus was. However, they were fallen angels. These demons were not submitted to Jesus. It is not enough just to know who Jesus is; we must confess Him as Lord.

(Mk 5:7–10) “and shouting with a loud voice, he said, “What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God, do not torment me!” {8} For He had been saying to him, “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!” {9} And He was asking him, “What is your name?” And he said to Him, “My name is Legion; for we are many.” {10} And he began to implore Him earnestly not to send them out of the country.”

In 1 John 5:12-13, John gives another of the many ways to know if you are a believer. He said, “He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.” Notice, he wrote to those who believe, and those that have the Son of God in their life. They have Jesus in their life; they do not merely believe; they profess Christ is their Lord and Savior.

(1 Jn 5:12–13) “He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. {13} These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

c. Affiliation

The first test is what they believe about Jesus. The second way to test these spirits is whether they have also received Christ into their lives. The third test is their affiliation. John said that they are from the world; therefore, they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them. They are affiliated with the world. They are part of the world system. A believer is not of the world. He may be in the world, but he is not of the world. These false spirits are of the world. They identify with the world, and the world identifies with them.

(1 Jn 4:5–6) “They are from the world; therefore they speak *as* from the world, and the world listens to them. {6} We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.”

In John 15, Jesus said that the world had hated Him, and it will hate the disciples. Then He said, “If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.” Believers have been chosen, and are no longer of the world. They now belong to the kingdom of God; that is their new affiliation.

(Jn 15:18–19) “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it hated you*. {19} If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.”

In John 17, during what we call the High Priestly Prayer, Jesus prayed about the disciples and the world. He said, “I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world even as I am not of the world.”

(Jn 17:14–16) “I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. {15} I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. {16} They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.”

John said, “They are from the world; therefore, they speak as from the world.” How do we know that they speak as from the world? We must know the truth. John wrote, “We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.”

We gain several insights out of this statement. First, a believer has fellowship with God. A believer has a relationship with God. God listens to us. He does not specifically say it, but it is implied that we also listen to God. John goes on to say that they have overcome the world, and greater is He who is in them than he who is in the world. Not only does a believer have fellowship; he has power to overcome the evil one. The world does not have a relationship with God and they are not hearing from God.

(1 Jn 4:4–5) “You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. {5} They are from the world; therefore they speak *as* from the world, and the world listens to them.”

Second, we can tell they are from the world by the audience that they have. They speak as from the world, and the world listens to them. There is an old saying, “A man is known by the company he keeps.” These false teachers went out from among the saints, because they were not of them, and they associate with those in the world. They speak like the world and the world listens to them.

The third way that we know that they are of the world is they speak as from the world. John wrote, “By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.” They are not speaking truth. What is truth? God’s Word, the Scriptures are truth. In John 17, when Jesus was praying, He prayed, “Sanctify them in the truth; Your Word is truth.” We need to know truth, and we find that in God’s Word. In order to know what is error, we have to know the truth. That is why we must know the truth. I encourage and exhort people all the time to read the word, study the Word, memorize and meditate on the Word. We must know the truth so that we can identify anything that is contrary to God’s Word. That is why I am so disturbed by the findings of George Barna on the Biblical worldview of pastors and believers. Since we do not know the truth, we can easily be deceived by false teachers. We are in a very vulnerable position right now.

(Jn 17:17) “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.”

Conclusion and Applications

John did not want believers to be deceived by false teaching about their faith. The Gnostics and Docetists were attacking the deity of Christ and that He had come in the flesh. So, John exhorted believers not to believe every spirit. Second, he exhorted them to test the spirits. This was critical because there were many false prophets in the world, and they are still operating today.

John’s first test was to examine what they confess about Jesus. If they confess that Jesus had come in the flesh, it was the Spirit of God. However, if they did not confess that Jesus had come in the flesh, it was the spirit of the antichrist.

The second test was to examine if they had Jesus in their life, if they were professing Christ. It is one thing to intellectually believe; it is quite another thing to receive Christ into your life and be born again.

The third test was to examine their affiliation. Were they of the world, or were they of God? Do they talk as of the world, or do they speak the truth, as from God? Who listens to them? Does the world listen and follow them? Believers have a relationship with God, and He listens to them. Believers listen to the Spirit of truth.

Let’s look at some applications. First, I give the same exhortations as John. Do not believe every teaching that you hear. There are many false teachers on TV, on YouTube, and in the world. Be careful what you listen to, and do not automatically believe what you hear.

Second, learn to test the spirits. Check out the doctrinal beliefs of those that you listen to. Examine the message that you hear. Be like the Bereans, who received eagerly, and then examined the Scriptures to make sure what they heard lined up with the Word of God.

(Ac 17:11) “Now these 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.”

Third, fill your minds with Scripture. Paul wrote in Colossians 3:16, “Let the Word of Christ richly dwell within you.” That is my cry to the church today. Fill your minds with the Word of God. Let it richly dwell within you.

(Col 3:16) “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

We need to have a Biblical Worldview so that we are not easily deceived by every wind of doctrine. Paul wrote in Ephesians 4, “we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming.

(Eph 4:14) “As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;”

How do we fill our minds with the Word of God? First, read your Bible every day. If you are not reading your Bible, I exhort you to find a good reading plan and begin reading your Bible every day. We have lots of reading plans on our church website under the tools menu (<https://www.connectionchurch.org/connection-tools/bible-reading-plans.>)

In addition to reading your Bible, I exhort you to learn to study the Bible, and to begin studying. There are lots of different study methods. I use the Subject/Complement method, where you identify the main thought or subject of a passage, and then what the passage says about that main thought, which is its complements. That is what expository preaching is about, and I highly recommend it. There are many other study methods. Kay Arthur has an excellent book, *How To Study Your Bible*, on how to do an inductive Bible study. Rick Warren wrote a book on *Bible Study Methods*, and he covers twelve different ways to study your Bible. Find a way to study your Bible that works for you, and set aside time in your schedule to study.

In addition to reading and studying your Bible, I exhort you to meditate on Scripture. Take a verse or passage and memorize it. Then, as you are walking, driving, or just laying in bed, think about the verse. Think about each word in the verse. Think about cross references, that is, other verses in the Bible that address the same idea. Think about illustrations and applications for the verse. Think about how it can apply in your life. God gives tremendous wisdom to those who meditate on His Word.

When we know God’s Word, which is truth, we can then identify what is not truth, which would be the spirit of error. I have mentioned this before in other sermons, but when the Secret Service trains their agents to spot counterfeit currency, they teach them ten characteristics of genuine money. They published a document called, “Know Your Money” to help us identify counterfeit money.

Here are a few of those ten things they look at: style, paper, watermark, security thread, and serial numbers. Each denomination has a unique thread position and glows a different color

when held to ultraviolet light. For example, on the \$100 bill, the security thread glows light red/pink. If you know this, and hold it up to an ultraviolet light, you will quickly know if it is counterfeit. If you know genuine money, then it is easier to detect money that is different.

That is also how we are to discern false teaching from godly teaching. We need to hold up the teaching to the light of God's Word to see if it is genuine or not.

Closing Prayer

Father God, thank You for this warning about being deceived. I pray for a healthy skepticism in the church. I pray that believers will not accept everything that they hear, but will examine and test it. I pray that the church will begin to fill their minds with the Word of God. I pray that it will be a priority in their lives. I pray that they will long for the pure milk of the word so that they can grow in respect to salvation, and become mature. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Discussion Questions

- What is the difference between a false teacher, and someone like Apollos, whose teaching had to be corrected by Priscilla and Aquila? (See Acts 18:23-28.)
- How do we find out what a preacher or teacher believes about Jesus? What are some ways to find out what they believe?
- Why is a person's testimony and profession of faith so important in testing the spirit?
- John said that we know by the Spirit of truth who is from God. How does the Spirit of God in us reveal to us who is of the truth, and who is of the spirit of the antichrist?
- What are some of the common deceptions that believers today are hearing?
- Why is the defense of the authority of the Scriptures so important?
- Do we sometimes lose sight of the fact that we have overcome the world, and that greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world? What kind of attitude should that cause us to have?
- How does James differentiate the wisdom of the world and the wisdom from above? Does this help us understand how they speak as from the world?

Test Every Spirit

Introduction (Ac 20:28–31, 1 Jn 4:1-6)

1. Exhortations (1 Jn 4:1, Jn 2:18–19)

- a. Exhortation to not believe every spirit (1 Jn 4:1, Ac 17:11)
- b. Exhortation to test the spirits (1 Jn 4:1-2, Ro 12:2, 1 Th 5:20-21, 1 Ti 3:10, 2 Cor 8:22, 1 Cor 11:25-32, Ro 14:22-23)

2. Reason for testing (1 Jn 4:1, 4:3, 1 Ti 4:1, Mt 7:15-16, 24:23–25)

3. Testing of spirits (1 Jn 4:2-6)

- a. Confession about Jesus (1 Jn 4:2-3, 1 Jn 1:1–3, 2:22)
- b. Profession of Jesus (1 Jn 4:1–6, Ro 10:9-10, Jas 2:19, Jn 1:3, Col 1:16, Mk 5:7–10, 1 Jn 5:12–13)
- c. Affiliation (1 Jn 4:5–6, Jn 15:18–19, 17:14-16, 1 Jn 4:4–5, Jn 17:17)

Conclusion and Applications (Ac 17:11, Col 3:16, Eph 4:14)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.