



PART 12: TRUE SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

1 John 4:1-6

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All spiritual claims must be tested.

I. Introduction

Ex. Spirit medium on Oprah – claiming to channel the spirit of a dead relative of a guest ... What should we think of this? Do we accept it or question it? How do we know?

The question of spiritual reality – spiritual claims and experiences have always been around ...

It is a great gift to have the writings of an Apostle like John, who was an eyewitness to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth and who was authorized and commissioned by Jesus to speak on God's behalf.

Historical context of 1 John ... Challenges in the early Church ... Today ...

II. The Challenge (1 John 4:1, 6b)

There are two spirits at work in the world: the "Spirit of Truth and the spirit of falsehood" (1 John 6b).

"We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood." 1 John 4:6

The "Spirit of Truth" is the Holy Spirit, who is God and always glorifies Jesus Christ (John 16:14, 4:2). The "spirit of falsehood" is the spirit of the antichrist/Satan, the "evil one" (1 John 5:19). This is the spirit embraced by the "world" in opposition to God (1 John 2:15-17, 4:5).

Both the Holy Spirit and Satan/demons speak to minds and use human mouths. There are true prophets of God, and there are false prophets of God (1 John 4:1, Matthew 7:15, 24:5; Acts 20:28-30, 2 Peter 2:1).

"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves." Matthew 7:15

Therefore, we must "test the spirits" (1 John 4:1).

"Dear friends, 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." 1 John 4:1

All spiritual claims must be tested.

"When people abandon the truth, they don't believe in nothing, they believe in anything." Chesterton

III. True Spiritual Discernment

Ex. Back to the Oprah story ...

"Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord..." Deuteronomy 18:10-12

John presents two criteria for our spiritual discernment. First, what is the specific claim made about Jesus of Nazareth? Second, how does this claim relate to the thinking of the world opposed to God?

A. Test # 1

Do they affirm Jesus of Nazareth as the God-Man (1 John 4:2-3)?

"This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world." 1 John 4:2-3

The claims of the true spokesman of God will conform to the apostolic witness about Jesus of Nazareth (2:22-23, 4:2-3).

The Holy Spirit always glorifies Jesus as the Son of God (John 15:16, 16:13-15; 1 Corinthians 12:1-3).

Any claims about Jesus of Nazareth must protect three central truths of the gospel:

1. Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the divine Word of God, i.e., God's fullest and final revelation of Himself;
2. Jesus of Nazareth was and is both fully God and fully man;
3. Jesus of Nazareth is the sole source of eternal life since He alone reveals God the Father and atones for our sins.

B. Test # 2

How does this claim relate to the thinking of the world opposed to God?

John's second test has to do with audiences. Who celebrates this claim? Where does it find a ready following?

The false teachers were simply an echo of their culture's attitudes. They reflected the permissive culture in which they lived where everybody was looking for mystical experience. They did not require anybody to change or repent from their behavior. They were speaking from the spirit of their age, not the Holy Spirit.

IV. Apostolic Witness and Historic Confessions: Boundaries and Guardrails

Two great historic confessions protecting the Apostolic witness are
The Nicene Creed and The Apostles' Creed.

Language of the Nicene Creed protects the person of Jesus of
Nazareth as follows:

*We believe in ... one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
begotten from the Father before all ages,
God from God,
Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made;
of the same essence as the Father.*

Every generation and person must "test the spirits." Every generation of the
Church must discern the false claims of their age and reject them. Ours is
no different.

Profess together the Nicene Creed:

*We believe in one God,
the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
with all things visible and invisible.*

*And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
begotten from the Father before all ages,
God from God,
Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made;
of the same essence as the Father.
Through Him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation,
He came down from heaven;
He became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,
and was made human.
He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate;
He suffered and was buried.
The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again with glory
to judge the living and the dead.
His kingdom will never end.
And we believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life.
He proceeds from the Father and the Son,
and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.
He spoke to the prophets.
We believe in one holy universal and apostolic church.
We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look forward to the resurrection of the dead,
And to life in the world to come. Amen.*