

TEST 5: TESTING THE SPIRITS OF FALSE TEACHERS

1 JOHN 04:01–06

Introduction

This is a critical passage of Scripture. It deals with true and false teachers, in particular with the spirit of truth or error that fills their hearts. This is the fifth test of our love for God. How do we know that we really love God? We can tell by the spirits of the teachers we are following. If we are following the spirit of a true teacher, then it is clear indication that we love God. If we are following the spirit of a false teacher, then it is clear indication that we do not love God. We must test the spirits of teaching throughout the world.

- I. Test the spirits of teachers (v. 1).
- II. Test the confession of teachers (vv. 2-3).
- III. Test yourselves (v. 4).
- IV. Test the followers of teachers (vv. 5-6).

I. 1 John 04:01 Test the Spirits of Teachers

First, test the spirits of teachers; test them to make sure they are of God. This is a strong charge given to believers. Note the term *Dear friends*. This was John's tender address to the believers of the church. He is definitely addressing believers, and this tells us a significant fact: believers can be misled by the *spirits of false teachers*. What kinds of spirits dwell within a false teacher?

=> A false teacher may have a *spirit of light*, especially in industrialized societies. The spirit presents a way of life that seems to be the truth, the very way to live. He presents a way of life that seems to be intelligent and full of knowledge and enlightenment. His way seems to be the way to go, the way that leads to...

- the good life
- education
- progress
- good feelings
- development
- pleasure
- assurance
- possessions
- satisfaction
- recognition
- fulfilment

=> A false teacher may have a *spirit of righteousness*. He may preach and teach righteousness, a righteousness that stresses...

- morality
- goodness
- justice
- education
- development
- ministry
- giving
- serving

=> A false teacher may stress *the life and teachings of Jesus Christ* — all the good qualities of life — all the traits that should characterize people. They may tell people to copy the life of Jesus and to focus their hearts upon the good qualities of life, and if they do, God will accept them.

False teachers make one fatal mistake. This is discussed in the next note. The point in this verse is that we must test the spirits of false teachers, test them to make absolutely sure they are of God. Note one other fact: there are “*many false prophets.*” Scripture is not talking about a few, but many. If there were many in the days of John, think how many more there are today. Think how many more religions there are; how many cults have sprung up around Christianity; how many denominations and ministries have sprung up since John wrote these words. Just think of all the churches and pulpits and podiums that are being filled by the teachers of the world. In addition, think how many preachers and teachers claim to be true followers of Christ. There are many, thousands and thousands, of false teachers in the world today. Who are they? This is the discussion of this passage. This is what every person must test in order to keep from being misled.

Rom 16:18 *For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.*

2 Cor 11:13-15 *For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of as an angel of light. It is not Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.*

Gal 1:6-9 *I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!*

2 Tim 3:13 *While evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.*

II. 1 John 04:02-03 Test the Confession of Teachers

Second, test the confession of teachers. What is it that makes a teacher true or false? Jesus Christ. What a man believes about Jesus Christ makes the teacher true or false. What a man acknowledges about Jesus Christ exposes his spirit, a spirit of truth or a spirit of error. And note what it is about Jesus Christ that exposes a teacher: the incarnation. That is, did Jesus Christ come in the flesh or not?

1. The true Spirit, the Spirit of God Himself, acknowledges that Jesus Christ did come in the flesh, that the incarnation is true. If a teacher has the Spirit of God dwelling in him, then he acknowledges the incarnation, the wonderful truth that God did become Man and did come to earth to save man. The Spirit of God *cannot acknowledge* anything

other than the truth; therefore, every teacher who has the Spirit of God will acknowledge the same truth. He cannot acknowledge anything else because the Spirit of God Himself dwells within him. If he acknowledges anything else, then the spirit within him is not the Spirit of God. Now note the acknowledgment in detail, exactly what it is that a true teacher acknowledges: “Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.”

- a. The true teacher acknowledges *Jesus*. The name *Jesus* means *Saviour*. It is believing that Jesus Christ did come from God to save man, to be the Saviour of the world.
- b. The true teacher acknowledges *Christ*. The name *Christ* means *Messiah*, the Anointed One of God. It is believing that Jesus Christ is the promised Messiah of Scripture; that He is the fulfilment of all the prophecies of Scripture; that He is the Anointed Saviour sent from God to earth.
- c. The true teacher acknowledges that Jesus Christ is the *Son of God*; that God did send His Son *out of (ek)* heaven, out of the spiritual world and dimension into this world; that God sent His Son in human flesh to save man in fulfilment of Scripture. It means that Jesus Christ fulfilled the Scripture predicting the coming death, resurrection and exaltation of the Messiah. Simply stated, it means that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who came to earth to save man.

Thought 1. This is the acknowledgment of the true teacher and of every true believer. We must always remember that a true teacher is indwelt by the Spirit of God Himself. Therefore, the true teacher *will always* acknowledge the incarnation, the wonderful truth that “Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.”

Isa 7:14 *Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.*

Isa 9:6 *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

Luke 1:31 *“You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.”*

John 1:14 *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

Rom 8:3 *For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man.*

Phil 2:7 *But made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*

1 Tim 3:16 *Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.*

Heb 2:14-15 *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil — and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.*

1 John 4:2 *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.*

Mat 10:32 *“Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven.”*

Luke 12:8 *“I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God.”*

Phil 2:11 *And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

1 John 2:23 *No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.*

1 John 4:15 *If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.*

2. The false spirit denies that Jesus Christ is from God. He denies the incarnation. He does not believe that God took on human flesh and became a man.
 - a. The false teacher does not believe that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world. He may accept Jesus Christ as a great teacher and a great religious leader, perhaps the greatest, but he does not believe that Jesus Christ is *the Saviour*. He believes there are other ways to God, that other people who believe in God will be as acceptable to God as a follower of Jesus Christ.
 - b. The false teacher does not believe that Jesus is the Christ, the promised Messiah and Anointed One from God. He does not believe the Scriptures are the inspired Word of God. He accepts them only as the writings of great religious people of the past; therefore, there are no prophetic promises of a Messiah, no promise of a coming Saviour. To the false teacher, Jesus Christ is only a great religious teacher, only one way to reach God. He is not *the Anointed One* sent from God to save all men. He is not the only way to God.
 - c. The false teacher does not believe Jesus Christ has *come from God*. He does not believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that Jesus Christ came out of heaven, out from the spiritual world and dimension. He does not believe that God sent His Son into the world

in human flesh as a man. Again, the false teacher believes that Jesus Christ is only a man just like all other men — a great man, perhaps the greatest, perhaps the man who got closer to God than any other man. Nevertheless, to the false teacher Jesus Christ was only a man who taught us how to worship and serve God. The false teacher would say...

- that Jesus Christ was not sinless. He lived close to God, but no man can achieve sinlessness.
- that Jesus Christ died, but not as a substitute for man's sins. He died as a great martyr showing us how we should face death and how we should be willing to die for the great cause of righteousness.
- that the resurrection of Jesus Christ did not take place. It is only a picture of the spiritual truth that man can live in God's presence.

Now note the fatal mistake of the false teachers: to deny that Jesus Christ is not from God is to deny that man can ever be saved beyond this world. Why? Because man can never know for sure that God exists nor how to reach God if He does exist. No person has ever seen God or heaven and they never will, not by physical and material technology. The physical world cannot penetrate or cross over into the spiritual world, no matter what some persons may claim. If man is ever to know God and the spiritual world then God has to come to earth and reveal the truth to us. There is no other way. Therefore, to deny that God sent His Son into the world is to deny that we can ever be saved.

There is another fact that needs to be noted as well, that of perfection. God is perfect and man is imperfect. Therefore God could never let man penetrate or cross over into perfection. Why? Because man's imperfection would affect the perfect world of God. Heaven would no longer be heaven; it would no longer be perfect if God allowed imperfect beings to enter it. No matter what some people may claim about penetrating heaven, they have not. Imperfection just cannot cross over into perfection. The fatal mistake of false teachers is just that, *fatal* — fatal and eternally dooming. The consequences of denying the incarnation of Jesus Christ are terrible. If Jesus Christ is not from God, then it means...

- that God has not loved us enough to reveal Himself to us (1 Jn. 1:2).
- that God has not loved us enough to send us the Word of life (1 Jn. 1:1).
- that God has not loved us enough to show us eternal life (1 Jn. 1:2).
- that there is no eternal life (1 Jn. 1:2).
- that there is no fellowship with God, not for sure (1 Jn. 1:3).
- that the message of hope and of Scripture are not true, not for sure (1 Jn. 1:3).
- that there is no joy beyond this life, not for sure, no fullness of joy (1 Jn. 1:4).
- that Jesus Christ is not our Advocate (1 Jn. 2:2).

- that there is no forgiveness of sin (1 Jn. 1:9; 2:2).
- that there is no perfect sacrifice for sin (1 Jn. 2:2).

On and on the list could go, but the point is clearly seen. The false teacher destroys the hope of salvation and of eternity with God. We are left without hope and without God in this world unless God has loved us, loved us so much that He sent His Son Jesus Christ into the world. Jesus Christ is the crux of the message of the gospel. Note that the spirit of the false teacher is the spirit of antichrist (see notes, 1 Jn. 2:18-23). If a teacher confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, he is a true teacher. If not, he is a false teacher who promotes the very spirit of antichrist. “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits” (v. 1).

Mat 10:33 *“But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.”*

Mark 8:38 *“If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”*

2 Pet 2:1, 9 *But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them — bringing swift destruction on themselves, if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.*

1 John 2:22 *Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist — he denies the Father and the Son.*

Gal 1:6-9 *I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!*

Mat 5:19 *“Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”*

Mat 15:9 *“They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.”*

1 Tim 1:7 *They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.*

1 Tim 4:1-2 The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.

1 Tim 6:3 If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching.

2 Tim 4:3-4 For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

Titus 1:10-11 For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group. They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach — and that for the sake of dishonest gain.

2 Pet 2:1 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them — bringing swift destruction on themselves.

III. 1 John 04:04 Test Believers

Third, test yourselves. How? There are two ways.

1. Ask yourself if you are *from God*; that is, have you been born of God? (See note, 1 Jn. 2:29.)
2. Ask yourself if you are overcoming the spirits of false teachers? The Spirit of God is in you, and He is far greater than the evil spirits of false teachers. He enables you to conquer false teachers. Therefore, if you are following a teacher who denies the incarnation, that the Son of God has come in the flesh, then you are *not from God*. You are not born of God. But if you have rejected the teachings of men who deny the incarnation of Jesus Christ, then you are born of God.

Thought 1. Many false teachers are persuasive. They are very personable, attractive and appealing — full of charisma. Their ideas and teachings sound reasonable and appealing. But if a person has been truly born of God, he has the Holy Spirit to help him see the error of the teaching. And note the words “you have overcome them.” The Spirit of God does not fail. Therefore, if a person is following some strange teaching about Jesus Christ, he is most likely not *born of God*. Those who are truly *born of God* acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who has come in the flesh. They confess...

- the incarnation
- the righteousness and sinlessness of Jesus Christ, the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ

- the ascension and exaltation of Jesus Christ

John 14:17 *“The Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”*

John 14:26 *“But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”*

John 16:13 *“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.”*

Rom 8:9 *You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.*

Rom 8:14 *Because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*

1 Cor 2:12-13 *We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.*

1 Cor 3:16 *Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?*

1 John 2:27 *As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit — just as it has taught you, remain in him.*

1 John 3:24 *Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.*

1 John 4:13 *We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.*

IV. 1 John 04:05–06 Test the Followers of Teachers

Fourth, test the followers of teachers. We can look at the people who follow teachers and tell whether a teacher is false or not.

1. False teachers are followed by people who are worldly. Note the three things said:
 - a. False teachers are from the world. They have only a natural birth: they have never been born of God, never been spiritually born. The Spirit of God, the divine nature of God, is not dwelling within their hearts.

b. False teachers speak from the viewpoint of the world. What does this mean? It means they teach a worldly or human approach to God:

=> that man reaches God by being good and doing good.

=> that man becomes acceptable to God by living a religious life and by doing religious things such as being confirmed, baptized, going to church, confessing and keeping the rituals and ceremonies.

=> that man secures God's approval by combining his spirit with God's Spirit through communion and through righteous deeds.

Note: such approaches to God centre and focus upon man and what he does. They are centred in the world, not in God and what God has done to save man. Man saves himself, not God through His Son Jesus Christ.

c. The world listens to false teachers. The message of false teachers appeals to man. For if the Son of God has not come to earth, then there is no absolute and infallible rule to govern man. Therefore, we are somewhat free to find our own way to God the best we can. If we stumble here and there, it will not matter that much. God will understand, for He has left us to find our own way. This teaching, of course, tends...

- to excuse sin
- to exalt man as his own Saviour
- to stress ego and self-image over the power of God and His Spirit
- to give man the right to gain personal authority and power over others
- to give man the right to focus upon success, position, money, pleasures and possessions
- to stress man and his inner power [will] over God's power
- to exalt man and his importance over God
- to focus upon the discipline and control of the flesh (sinful nature) over the power of God's Spirit

Luke 18:9 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable:

John 8:42-43 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say."

John 8:46-47 "Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."

Rom 1:20-22 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from

what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools. (cp. v. 18-32)

1 Cor 1:18-21 *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. (cp. 1 Cor.3.19-21)*

1 Cor 8:2 *The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know.*

1 Cor 10:12 *So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!*

Gal 6:3 *If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.*

Prov 3:7 *Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil.*

Prov 20:6 *Many a man claims to have unfailing love, but a faithful man who can find?*

Prov 28:26 *He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe.*

Isa 5:21 *Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight.*

Isa 47:8-10 *"Now then, listen, you wanton creature, lounging in your security and saying to yourself, 'I am, and there is none besides me. I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children.' Both of these will overtake you in a moment, on a single day: loss of children and widowhood. They will come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and all your potent spells. You have trusted in your wickedness and have said, 'No one sees me.' Your wisdom and knowledge mislead you when you say to yourself, 'I am, and there is none besides me.'*

Hosea 10:13 *But you have planted wickedness, you have reaped evil, you have eaten the fruit of deception. Because you have depended on your own strength and on your many warriors.*

Oba 1:3-4 *"The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks and make your home on the heights, you who say to yourself, 'Who can bring me down to the ground?' Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down," declares the LORD.*

2. True teachers are followed by people who know God. They know and acknowledge that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has come in the flesh. Therefore, they follow the teacher who proclaims...

- the incarnation of God, that is, the virgin birth, that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.
- the righteousness of Jesus Christ, that He did live a sinless life when He was upon earth and thereby secured righteousness for man.
- the death of Jesus Christ, that He died for man's sins, that He was the perfect sacrifice for sin, wholly and perfectly acceptable to God.
- the resurrection of Jesus Christ, that He arose and conquered death for all men and made it possible for man to live a new life, a new life that conquers all the forces of evil and that infuses into man the seed of eternal life.

Note what the verse says: those who *know God* are the followers of the true teacher, but those who *are not from God* do not hear the true teacher. This is the way we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Thought 1. We can tell a true teacher by the people who follow him. Our task is to look at the followers of any teacher. What kind of life do they live — a worldly or righteous life? (See notes, 1 Jn. 2:15-17; 1 Jn. 2:29; 3:4-9.)

Luke 8:14 *“The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.”*

John 7:16-17 *Jesus answered, “My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.”*

John 8:31 *To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.”*

John 14:17 *“The Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”*

John 15:26 *“When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.”*

John 16:13 *“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.”*

1 Cor 2:12 *We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.*

1 John 4:6 *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. ■*