

Wednesday Night Bible Study

with Dr. Chuck Ward

Current Scripture Series

Anchored to the Truth: Insights for Living from 1 John

Tonight's Study

Why and How We Must Test the Spirits

Scripture Passage: 1 John 4:1-6

The battleground of spiritual warfare is primarily in our hearts, especially our minds. The attacks come on three fronts:

- The world around us makes sin available and attractive.
- The flesh within us rebels against God and godliness.
The world and the flesh work in tandem like a lock and a key.
Christians tend to ignore completely or obsess entirely over the third front.
- The devil before us introduces antichrist thinking and behavior.

That is why it is critically important for us to guard our hearts, particularly our minds.

Prov. 4:23 Keep your heart with all vigilance,
for from it flow the springs of life. (ESV)

Prov. 4:23 Guard your heart above all else,
for it is the source of life. (CSB)

We can think of the verse like the computer acronym GIGO = Garbage in; Garbage out.

James 4:7 Submit yourselves therefore to God.
Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

When the evil one's attack is on the mind, how do we resist?

- 1. We are to test the spirits before we believe or put our faith in the message they bring (1 Jn 4:1a).**
 - a. The test question: Are they from God?
 - b. The word "Spirits" (Gk. Πνεύματι) is used in two ways in v. 1:
 - i. The spirits are behind what the false prophets say. It is their motivation.
 - ii. The spirits are in what is said by the false prophets. It is their message.
 - c. John's first command is to "Stop believing every spirit," or "Stop putting your faith in every spirit." He is telling the readers to curtail something they are presently doing.
 - d. The word "but" (Gk. ἀλλά) is a strong word of contrast.
 - e. John's second command, like the first, is a present imperative. He says, "Begin testing and keep on testing the spirits (i.e., the message of the false prophets)". They are to begin doing something that replaces what they are stopping.
- 2. We must test the messages we hear because many false prophets are in the world (1 Jn 4:1b)**
 - a. The word "prophet" (Gk προφήτης) is made up of two words. First, a preposition meaning "before," and second, a verb meaning "to say."
 - b. Prophet may be used in two ways:
 - i. Temporal meaning "to speak before something happens."
 - ii. Spatial meaning "to speak in front of a person or group."

- c. God puts his word in the mouth of his prophets (Is 51:16, 59:21, Jer 1;9, 5:14). A true prophet is, in a sense, God's mouthpiece.
- d. The false prophets are literally "pseudo-prophets" (Gk. ψευδοπροφήται).
- e. They have gone out and remain in the world (i.e., among the human population).
- f. When we hear a message by someone claiming to reveal spiritual truth, our first question should be, "Does this come from God?"
- g. At any moment, the motives and thoughts of believers come ultimately from one of two sources: The Holy Spirit or the human flesh (Gal 5:16-25). This is practical, not theoretical.

3. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God (1 Jn 4:2).

- a. The simple question is, "Does the prophet's message agree that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh?"
- b. This is a brilliant question! Like all great questions, it takes us to the heart of the matter.
- c. Responding with "yes" requires a commitment to several other facts.
 - i. First, it requires that Jesus existed before he became incarnate. The fact that he "has come in the flesh" assumes he already existed before he came into human flesh.
 - ii. Second, it requires that he did come from God. When he came here, while fully God, his coming to earth meant coming from God.
 - iii. Third, it requires that Jesus became truly human. He did not appear to be human. He was fully human while remaining fully divine.
 - iv. Fourth, it requires that he is the Messiah, which means Christ. Jesus is the Greek rendering of the Hebrew name Joshua. Messiah means "God's anointed." Among other things, belief that Jesus is the Messiah requires that he is the one who fulfills all the promises God makes in the OT.
 - v. Fifth, it requires that Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation.
 - vi. Finally, it requires an understanding of and commitment to the Scriptures. They are the only source of information that testifies to the facts that feed into a positive answer to the question about the person of the Lord Jesus.

To ask a person if Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is the equivalent of asking, "What do you know about the Bible, and do you take it as the final authority to which it speaks?"

4. Every spirit that does not confess or is not committed to Jesus is not from God (1 Jn 4:3).

- a. Notice that in v. 1, John refers to spirits, plural. Yet, in v. 3, John refers to one spirit, singular. John is writing about one particular spirit.
- b. There is a spirit behind the spirits of the pseudo-prophets.
 - i. It is the spirit of the antichrist.
 - ii. This is the spirit that is against everything Christ Jesus is and does.
 - iii. More than standing against Christ, the antichrist wants to take the place of Christ.
 - iv. This is the evil one, named the devil in the OT and Satan in the NT.

5. Because we are from God, he who is in us is greater than the one in the world (1 Jn 4:4).

- a. In the spiritual battle for the mind, believers are to understand who they are and the position of victory they already have.
- b. Contrary to the messages from the world, believers are:
 - i. From God, who is the source of their spiritual lives.
 - ii. Have overcome the antichrist in the world.
 - iii. Have in themselves the one who is greater than the one in the world.