

## 20230205 1 John 4:1-11 Testing Spirits – Loving One Another

### Love for God and One Another

*4 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. <sup>2</sup> By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, <sup>3</sup> and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard was coming and is now already in the world.*

*<sup>4</sup> You are of God, little children, and have overcome them because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. <sup>5</sup> They are of the world. Therefore, they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. <sup>6</sup> We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. (1 John 4:1-6, NKJV).*

We first note that: (1) there will be spirits that we should not believe, (2) many will come along saying they speak for God, (3) we should learn to test (try) the spirits to see whether they are from the Lord, and (4) we are to watch for those who deny either the humanity or deity of Jesus Christ. Jesus couldn't have done what He said He did unless He was all Man and all God. Without his humanity, He couldn't represent us; and to conquer sin, He had to be God.

This is an odd passage to read in 2023. When we read it, we can imagine spirits floating around interacting with believers and trying to convince them of this or that. In reality, that's not far from the truth. We know that John said in the previous chapter that the "spirit of the antichrist" is alive and well on Earth. We lawyers sometimes say, "Well, he might have been following the letter of the law but not the spirit of the law." That's the kind of spirit we're talking about. It's talking about the character, accuracy, or content of what comes our way, trying to explain spiritual reality and the nature of Jesus.

We are not to just pick up and accept every thought from the world. We see this command in other scriptures. For example, Paul urges the Thessalonian church: <sup>19</sup> *Do not quench the Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Do not despise prophecies. <sup>21</sup> **Test all things; hold fast what is good.** <sup>22</sup> Abstain from every form of evil. (1 Thessalonians 5:19-22, NKJV).* These passages warn believers to be careful about receiving every teaching or philosophy they encounter. This is especially true of those who claim to speak for God. We should always test any idea or philosophy against the Word of God. In doing a YouTube search the other night, I ended up reading about the origins of The Nation of Islam. Curiously, a "messenger" showed up and convinced an entire group in Detroit to put their Bibles down and instead follow a strange cooked-up religion that he had concocted. The "mystery" prophet disappeared in 1934, never to be seen again. That

sounds like a "spirit" that wasn't tested and led an entire group of people looking for answers in the wrong direction.

Christians should be very discerning listeners to any sort of messages we hear. We are often quick to believe any teaching we see or hear on a Christian TV or radio program or read about on the internet. I'm not saying there aren't good teachers out there, but we shouldn't give those teachers precedence over our personal Bible study or what we might hear in our local church. We must remember that many "wolves in sheep's clothing" are out there presenting all sorts of false gospels and ideas about the Christian life. Some offer objective truths, but their motivations are not always understood or known.

Many television preachers try to keep the viewership up, trying to sound like they're on to something new that one else is aware of. This is especially true for those who focus on end-times preaching. Don't you think if the Holy Spirit is speaking to them, He's also speaking to other believers?

This has happened many times to those people who have heard a teacher who seemed to have inside information on when Jesus will return. We all want Jesus to return, so it's fascinating when a teacher appears to have an inside track on when He might come again. Some are even foolish enough to give a date of His return, and when it doesn't happen, unbelievers mock it, and often believers drift away disillusioned. Do you know why these predictors never get it right? JESUS TOLD US,<sup>36</sup> "**But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.** (Matthew 24:36, NKJV). Nothing could be more precise. This is an example of how knowing God's Word and what it says can save you a lot of heartaches and chasing after the wrong things (tickling of the ears).

Scripture warns us that there are "false apostles and deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ." Satan is a master at disguising himself in light. Remember that his name is not "Satan" but Lucifer (the bearer of light). So, all teaching (including mine), should be tested to see if it is truly from God or a lie of the enemy. So John tells us to "test the spirits to see if they are of God." So how do we do that?



The means of testing is to compare any teaching to the Bible. The Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God. A few years ago, Sandy and I traveled to Greece to follow Paul the Apostle's steps, and we stopped in the little town of Berea. When Paul first showed up there and began telling the Jews about Jesus and His role as Messiah, the Bible tells us that the Bereans "**searched the Scriptures daily to**

**find out whether these things were so.**" The photo to the left is what we saw from the bus window.

<sup>10</sup> Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. <sup>11</sup> These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica in that **they received the Word with all readiness and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.** <sup>12</sup> Therefore, many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men. (Acts 17:10-12, NKJV).

So first and foremost, when we test any teaching, "examine the Scriptures." Is the teacher adding to the text? Are they saying things that the text doesn't say? The only way for those reading or listening to this sermon to "test it" is to be Bible students. Scripture tells us, "*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth.*" (2 Timothy 2:15, KJV). A person must STUDY to be able to RIGHTLY DIVIDE the Word of truth.



The term "rightly divide" in Greek is from farming. It is *orthotomounta*. *Ortho* means "correct, straight, or proper," and *tomounta* means to "cut." Success in handling the Word means "cut it right, to cut it straight." You need to dig into it and plow it right. It needs to be turned over and looked at correctly. Some think this is about splitting up the Old Covenant from the New Covenant, which is essential but is just part of good Bible interpretation. I believe

it's a much broader concept than that. A good Bible student looks across the field (considering the whole counsel of God's Word) and cuts a new furrow that lines up with the rest of the field. It's a lovely field. It's a beautiful field. It doesn't veer to the right or turn to the left but conforms to the rest of the field. The Word of God has "integrity." One of the meanings of "integrity" is **"the quality or condition of being whole or undivided; completeness."**<sup>1</sup>

Seminary professors call biblical interpretation "hermeneutic ." This discipline presents means and methods to interpret scripture. The term "hermeneutics" comes from the name of the messenger god, Hermes, with his wings on his heels. It's the science, art, and discipline of interpreting what the writer intended to say and determining unto whom they said it. That is what "rightly dividing the Word of truth" is about. It is to "cut" (interpret) God's Word straight, correctly, and accurately. The orthodox interpretation of scripture is straight and usually can be viewed by the historical understanding of a passage throughout the Church Age (the last 2,000 years).

To interpret the scriptures correctly, the interpretation must be in line and in light of the rest of the Bible. If you know what the Bible says and doesn't say, you'll be able to discern what you hear better. And being a good Bible student doesn't just happen from sitting and wondering what it all says. It doesn't even just come from the Holy Spirit,

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://duckduckgo.com/?q=meaning+of+integrity&t=ffab&ia=definition>

somehow depositing the knowledge and wisdom in your head. Paul says we must STUDY, BE DILIGENT to present yourself approved unto God. If you're doing this, you won't be ashamed (or be led astray), and you WILL accurately know what the Bible is (and is not) saying.

God's Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path (Psalm 119:105). This means that it WILL GUIDE YOU in all spiritual things. Not only that, it will guide you with many other principles applicable to almost every area of your life: financial, familial, career, relational, sexual, holy conduct, etc. The Bible is the standard by which all teaching (and all spirits) can and must be judged.

Vv.2-3 John again emphasizes the importance and necessity of believing and accepting that Jesus was God incarnate (in the flesh). He came in a human body, and He was human *and* God in every way. While He was, is, and will be God in human flesh, He is simultaneously the God Who created all things. As I mentioned, He cannot sympathize with us if He isn't man. If He isn't God, He is powerless to conquer sin.

*<sup>15</sup> For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup> Let us, therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:15-16, NKJV).*

Because He was like us in His humanity, He can sympathize (feel with) with us in every way. God, in Jesus, has experiential knowledge of our human condition and our human struggles. This is key in our ability to have fellowship with Him. And remember that John is writing this book as Dr. Constable said: as a "Gateway to Fellowship."

John is giving us "rules of discernment" in these two verses. If there is any group or any teaching that teaches that Jesus was and is anything other than God in human flesh, you are dealing with a spirit of antichrist, no matter how lovely or "moral" these people might seem.

V.4 John gives total assurance that God + you/me = a majority. Greater is He that is IN US than he (the enemy) that is in the world. This is so comforting to know that whatever comes our way, God is greater than the obstacle. He is greater than the problem. He is GREATER THAN ANYTHING WE CAN FEAR. I know many of us can recite this verse and it comes easily from our mouths, but it has not found its way into the recesses of our heart. There are great spiritual truths in this verse. We need to inwardly digest this truth and live it out. We are from God and we can overcome any "spirit of error" because we're in Christ. And we do this through the power of the Holy Spirit that is there. Jesus lives in our heart through the power of His Holy Spirit.

God is greater than ANYTHING, ANYWHERE, OR ANYBODY.

God dwells WITHIN the believer in the person and power of the Holy Spirit. This is how we overcome the darkness and the spirit of deception. He that is "in the world" (Satan,

the enemy of our souls) has already lost. He cannot win. Regardless of whatever circumstances we encounter, we are more than conquerors in Christ Jesus. As God proclaimed to the Prophet Zechariah, "*This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel<sup>2</sup>: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' Says the LORD of hosts.*<sup>7</sup> 'Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! And he shall bring forth the capstone with shouts of "Grace, grace to it!" (Zechariah 4:6b-7, NKJV).

These are not just trite verses that we quote to feel good. This is the **ACTIVE, BREATHING WORD OF GOD ALMIGHTY THAT IS TRUTH TO OUR SOULS.** When we truly get our minds around these truths, they are game-changers.

Vv. 5-6 John tells us that those who don't believe in the true personhood of Jesus Christ (God-Man), are of the world. They are the enemy and are antichrists. The "world" will hear them and receive them as truth-tellers. But we believers are "of God." The person that knows God (true believers) hears the true message of Jesus and who He is/was and receives it. John says those who do not accept these basic orthodox truths are not of God and they do not speak the truth. They are in a spirit of error.

So the Big Idea today is that the best way to keep straight in your Christian walk is to become a diligent student of God's Word. Love the Bible and make a life-long study of it. That is the best measuring stick for your life. Be on your guard for any teacher who intimates that he or she has some corner on the truth. Beware of those who seem to know something that no one else knows.

Beware of those who teach something different about Christ. Beware of those who suggest and teach that He was created and is a lesser being than Almighty God, the Creator of the Entire Universe. Also, beware of those that say He wasn't really a true human being such as we are. He is Almighty God yet He has chosen to indwell us by His Holy Spirit. There is no spirit, idea, philosophy, or movement that is more powerful than He that is within you. By the presence of His Holy Spirit within us, **WE KNOW THAT WE ARE HIS!**

Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at [uniongrove362@gmail.com](mailto:uniongrove362@gmail.com) or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Neese- Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.

---

<sup>2</sup> Zerubbabel Grandson of Jehoiakim, Governor of Judah after the Babylonian captivity, ancestor of Jesus (Matt 1:12-13)