



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Testing...One, Two, Three (1 John 4:1-6)

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Weekly Bible Study Schedule

- **Tuesday, February 4, 7 AM in HHR #5**
-Breakfast Provided
- **Tuesday, February 4, 8:30 PM in Office #225**
(Sen. Wayne Wallingford's office)

HOW TO SPOT FOOL'S GOLD

1. Look at the physical properties of fool's gold (also known as pyrite). It is easy to spot the light-yellow color with a metallic luster or brassy look. Real gold is recognized as more gold to silvery-yellow in appearance.
2. Check for the smell of sulfur. Iron sulfide is 47-percent iron and 53-percent sulfur. This iron-sulfide composition gives off sulfur-dioxide fumes that have a distinct odor (like rotten eggs).
3. Get a magnet to spot fool's gold. The iron sulfide in fool's gold will be attracted to the magnet, but pure gold will not.
4. Strike the pyrite (fool's gold) with steel. If it is truly pyrite, it will produce a spark. Pure gold is softer and will flatten.
5. Look closely at the face of the fool's gold (pyrite) crystal. It is most commonly striated, but it can also develop as coarse granules that are easy to spot.
6. Test for fool's gold with a ceramic tile. Scratch a real gold nugget on the tile, and it will leave a yellow-gold streak. If the nugget is fool's gold, it will leave a greenish-black streak.
7. Scratch the metal to determine the hardness. Real gold can be cut, but fool's gold has a brittle hardness and a specific gravity of five.¹

Not everything that looks like gold is gold. The Apostle John says a similar thing in our passage today: Not every "spirit" or "prophet" is from God. Therefore, tests are needed to verify one's origin: is it of God or of the world? Is it true or false? Is it the genuine article or simply a fool's word?

INTRODUCTION

1 John 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. ²By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; ³and 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. ⁴You are from God, little children, and have

overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. ⁵They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶We 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.²

This warning from John, to those he so loved, is quite simple: There are many false prophets, false teachers out there who are claiming to be speak by the Spirit's power. So his command is also quite simple: "Test them—and here is how to do it."

WHAT: TEST THE SPIRITS

"Don't believe everything that you hear." That is still pretty good advice.

After John talked about the work of God's Holy Spirit in the previous passage (3:24), he moved on to warn that not every "spirit" is of God. There are prophets who are moved by "other spirits" in their proclamations. Some may be moved by their own hearts, others by false philosophies and still others have been deceived by Satan. John's warning is not to believe everything you hear. He let everyone know that not all spirits are leading people to say true things—there are false teachings to be found in the world.

Jesus gave the same warning: "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:15-16a).

Instead, John said to "test" the spirits. The Greek word translated "test" comes from the field of metallurgy meaning to examine or to prove—similar to the "fool's gold" example in the forward of this study. All believers are called to be discerning when they hear others teach and preach. Everything may look good and sound fine, but proper testing will expose that which is not of the truth.

HOW: WHAT DO THEY SAY ABOUT JESUS?

So how does a believer know? How does one test the prophet (anyone who is proclaiming or teaching concerning God)? Well, there are some tests which are quite meaningless.

CAPITOL COMMISSION BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS, LOBBYISTS & STAFF: TUESDAYS @ 7AM, HEARING ROOM #5

LEGISLATORS, LOBBYISTS & STAFF: TUESDAYS @ 8:30PM, OFFICE #225

PROCLAIMING THE GREATNESS AND GLORY OF GOD IN THE MISSOURI STATE CAPITOL

Missouri

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- a. **Popularity.** Just because the majority believes in what may be said does nothing to show the truth of the statement. Even popularity amongst the “experts” or “scholars” proves nothing.
- b. **Agreement.** The truth of a matter is not dependent upon one liking it or agreeing with it. Just because someone says, “I don’t agree with that” or “I don’t believe it” does not mean that the statement is true or false.
- c. **Results.** The outcome of teaching does not prove anything. For example, just because a church is growing and exciting does not mean that it is biblical or that the pastor is truly preaching God’s Word.

“By this you know...” said John (a phrase which he has used twice in the last six verses). The test is that “every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God” (4:2)... “And every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God” (4:3).

This “confession” or “acknowledgement” is a verbal statement about one’s belief. It is more than a student giving an answer to a professor’s quiz in order to pass an exam even though the student does not believe the answer is true. The confession that John is noting is an expression of one’s conviction or position. The content of the confession determines the validity of a prophet, pastor or teacher.

JOHN...REGARDS THE DENIAL OF JESUS AS THE INCARNATE CHRIST AS THE CHIEF OF ALL ERRORS AND SEEKS TO COMBAT IT.

--JAMES M. BOICE

So what is the conviction that shows a prophet to be true? It is an acknowledgement that “Jesus Christ has come in the flesh”. “The man Jesus is God’s Christ,” Daniel Akin wrote, “Upon this truth the Christian faith stands or falls.”³

This confession has already been brought up by John in this letter. In the preceding passage, he noted that one is to “believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ” (3:23a). In other words, one is to believe, and confess all that Jesus is—“the Divine Son, the incarnate Deity, the sinless Human, the Messianic Savior, and all other facets of His unique nature and

personhood.”⁴ Those who are children of God believe all that has been revealed concerning the Son; and those who are true prophets also confess these truths about Jesus.

A truth also taught by Apostle Paul:

1 Corinthians 12:3 Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

In fact, the Apostle Paul sheds light on John’s test concerning the spirits. In 1 Corinthians 12:3, Paul, in a reverse manner than John, wrote that the only person who can say “Jesus is Lord” is one who has been changed by the Holy Spirit. Paul’s teaching agreed with John’s. The person (including a prophet) who confesses the right things about Jesus (that He has come in the flesh and is Lord) is showing that he or she has the Spirit of God.

The person who does not confess that “Jesus is from God” is stating and believing false things about Him. They are denying the truth concerning the incarnation. A denial which James Boice calls “the chief of all errors.”⁵ Therefore, that person is also saying that “Jesus is accursed” for they are not holding to the Spirit-moved eyewitness testimony concerning the person and work of Christ.

And with this position, the false prophet is beholding to the spirit of the antichrist. These false prophets (and in reality, all those who believe in the same manner) may set themselves up to be proclaimers of the gospel of Jesus or followers of Him. But the sad truth is that they are against Him, just like the future one called the “Antichrist”. The same “Christ-hating” spirits abide in all who are opposed to Jesus (cf. Luke 11:23).

RESULT: BELIEVERS HAVE OVERCOME

Now, while John commands his beloved readers to beware and to “test the spirits”, he also reminds them that they have already overcome these false teachers. They believe the truth about Jesus and have not been deceived by the false doctrine proclaimed by these “prophets”.

But this victory is not their own—and neither is it for believers today. Believers overcome because of God. He just reminded them in the previous passage that “The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and

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He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us” (3:24). God, who dwells in the life of His children, is greater than he who is in the world; that is, greater than any who hold to a philosophy or religion or world view that set up against Christ.

The false teachers that John was likely referencing were the Gnostics. They fervently denied Jesus was God in the flesh for anything of the flesh was evil. They were some of scholars of the first century who could intellectually intimidate many believers.

SINCE CHRIST SAID THAT THE WORLD WOULD HATE HIM, WE CAN BE QUITE SURE THAT WHEN THE WORLD LOVES HIM IT IS BECAUSE THEY HAVE MADE HIM INTO SOMETHING HE IS NOT. —ERWIN LUTZER

But John reminded his readers that these were of the world and God, who dwells in them, is much greater. Therefore, while they test the spirits, they do so from a position of victory.

FINAL ANALYSIS

As this section is wrapped up, John presents a contrast between the false prophets and the true teachers and believers.

The false prophets are of the world (4:5). The old saying “if it walks like a duck, looks like a duck and sounds like a duck, then it probably is a duck” is true here. The teachings of the false prophets begin with wrong spirits, they proclaim false doctrine concerning Jesus Christ and they have many followers in the world. Therefore, they must be of the world. Any teaching not based upon and in agreement with the Scriptures, the Bible, is of the world and is wrong. Even if it is dressed up with Christian words and good morals, it is of the world and to be avoided by God’s people.

In direct contrast to the false prophets, John says that he and his apostolic band of brothers are of God (4:6). This is the “we” of verse six. These are the true prophets or teachers of John’s day.

These true prophets are listened to and believed by the people of God. Those who do not listen are those who are not of the people of God. They have been deceived by the false teachers of the world.

These things are still true today. The people of God are those who pay heed, listen to and obey the testimony of the inspired biblical writers. They believe what has been written concerning Jesus Christ. They believe that Jesus is from God and has come in the flesh. They believe the words of the eyewitnesses who observed, “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” (1 John 1:1).

Those who do not listen have been deceived by the world and its philosophies and various religions. They believe false things about Jesus Christ and thus, are not a part of God’s people.

CONCLUSION

For God’s people this is important instruction—test the spirits; test the teachers to see if they are true. If they confess Jesus has come in the flesh (and all concerning His work and person), they are of the truth. If not they are false and to be avoided.

Friend, the Apostle John once again makes the person and work of Christ the essential element between truth and falsehood. You must “believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ”, or you are not of the truth. You are standing before God with no defense but your own good works and charms—which are very lacking and not nearly enough.

God, through His Son Jesus Christ, can forgive a person of his or her sins—are you interested?

¹ http://www.chow.com/how_2095330_spot-fools-gold.html

² All passages in Capitol Commission Missouri studies are taken from the New American Standard Update version of the Bible; unless otherwise noted.

³ Daniel L. Akin, *1,2,3 John* The New American Commentary (Nashville, Tenn.: B & H Publishing Group, 2001), 172.

⁴ Akin, 168.

⁵ James Montgomery Boice, *The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1979), 109.