



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

1 JOHN 4:1 – REAL GOLD OR FOOL’S GOLD!

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Dan File, P.O. Box 1088, Lake City, CO 81235-1088/303-345-8830 / filefamily@centurytel.net

1 John 3:24 reveals the blessing of the Holy Spirit and His work in our lives to become more like Christ which we can't do on our own. It is a process that begins the moment you become a Christian for as John says, that's when we receive the third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. God has promised the Holy Spirit to us for He knows we are helpless in our own strength not only to know Him, but to grow in Him and obey His commands. Therefore, we are "in Christ" declared righteous, and "Christ is in us" through the Holy Spirit to make us righteous. Indeed we need the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives these days.

I. 1 JOHN 4:1- REAL GOLD OR FOOLS GOLD!

"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."

1 John 4:1

John issues a serious warning to all believers to be wise and discerning, not just accepting of what they hear or are taught. We must be able to distinguish what is Biblically sound. All that glitters is not gold and so John will give us tests to see what is real or fake, true or false from teachers in the church.

Ephesians 4:14 gives us sound wisdom regarding what we hear or see in church, *"As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming..."* And 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 exhorts us to examine everything carefully because Satan will do everything he can to distort the truth.

So John writes to the church that was in danger from false prophets. It is clear there was the tendency to accept whatever teaching claimed to be by God Himself. Even today, we have similar sects and various kinds of religions, all claiming to speak from God. So who are we to believe? How are we to distinguish between what is truly from God and what is false.¹

So John transitions from talking about the Holy Spirit in 1John 3:24 to teaching about the unholy spirit, from pure gold to fool's gold which is of no value. John knew his readers were under attack by false teachers and so as a safeguard, he provides tests to be able to determine the veracity of what is being taught.²

John will lay out the importance of adhering to the Apostles teachings on Jesus Christ, Whose Person and work are the heartbeat of the Christian gospel! So in these next few verses

John will reveal the contrast between the Spirit of God and the spirit of error, the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.³

A. "BELOVED, DO NOT BELIEVE EVERY SPIRIT"- 1JOHN 4:1A

John, who is a wise and affectionate leader, calls his "Beloved" to not believe every spirit. By using this term, John expresses personal and loving concern for his church, knowing they faced the danger of false deceivers.

Basically John doesn't want the church to be gullible and wants us to be on guard and careful not to believe everything you hear taught, even if they claim to be from God. John calls on believers to have critical discernment regarding professed religious teachers. John would say that there is a clear and present danger. Today, with the sweeping inroads of numerous cults and occultic forces, the need for spiritual discernment is urgent.⁴

It's important to note that John is calling on all believers and not just elders and pastors to be discerning here. He is addressing every Christian by using the word "Beloved". Essentially John is saying to stop believing, stop accepting every message given and exercise discernment. We must test and try what is taught against the Scriptures to see if it is true or false. It wasn't a new idea in John's day, and it remains a red alert issue for the church to guard against.

B. "BUT TEST THE SPIRITS"- 1JOHN 4:1B

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits..." 1 John 4:1b John says "but", which indicates there is a contrast between just believing anything but having intelligent discernment and discrimination regarding what is being taught.

"test" Greek "**dokimazo**" used of a metallurgist assaying of metals to test their purity and value. To test, examine for genuineness. This present tense imperative shows an ongoing and continuing testing, a continual, repeated practice. The second person plural lays the responsibility on the reader.

So John says that all believers have the responsibility to "test" these teachers to determine the genuineness, the truth of what is taught by them. Our first responsibility is to test, examine and scrutinize what is being said and taught. This is our continual responsibility. We can't be mesmerized by eloquent or charismatic speech. We must always evaluate what we hear and measure it against what Scripture says. This is the only reliable

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test and the Word is what is given to believers as our main defense against error.

C. “TO SEE WHETHER THEY ARE FROM GOD”- 1JOHN 4:1C

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God:” 1 John 4:1c

It is important to know what is the source of inspiration for the one teaching. Are they from God or not? Are they true or false? There are many examples of false prophets in the Old and New Testament of Scripture. Moses gave God’s people tests to determine if the prophet was true or false. You can look at Deuteronomy 18:20-22 where he gave tests for a prophet. John is saying the same thing here. The point of the test is to determine the source of their message, *“if out of God they are.”* So the test John gives in 1 John 4:2-3, will reveal the character of the prophet.

John is saying that believers must continually evaluate what they hear and not just sit and accept what is taught without using discernment through Scriptural lenses. And the only reliable test is to measure what is being said against Scripture. God’s Word is what gives us our main defense against error. (1 Corinthians 14:29, 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21)⁵

D. “BECAUSE MANY FALSE PROPHETS...”- 1JOHN 4:1D

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God: because many false prophets...” 1 John 4:1d

John is not talking about some future danger here, but rather this is a present and clear danger. They were and are already at work in the world. And by this statement, *“because many false prophets...”* we can know that there are true prophets and false prophets and we must be able to distinguish between them. And John’s urgency to believers is tied to the word, *“many”*. There are *“many false prophets”*,

John isn’t talking about an isolated instance. John’s concern is stirred by numerous false prophets exerting a strong impact on the church in his day and it continues to this present day. Jesus Himself foretold of these false prophets during His ministry here on earth. (Matthew 7:15, 24:11, 15; Mark 13:21-23 to mention a few) They are also mentioned by other Apostles in Acts 20:28-30 and 2 Peter 2. John does not want the church of

God deceived by the many false teachers that are already in the church. Therefore, this warning is issued to all believers even to this day. It is a concern, a red alert that every Christian must heed because false teachers can be so destructive as they give false teaching that may sound so good to the ear, but distort the real truth of God.

“False prophets” are individuals who proclaim a false message and not necessarily one who foretells the future. They are ones who come bearing the message of God Himself. So these false prophets are not well meaning teachers with a false message. No, they declare their message under the inspiration of Satan himself and that is why this is dangerous. These false prophets include the various cults that claim Christian as well as numerous religious teachers not directly associated with Christianity who are aggressively propagating their fallacious systems. Today, the sweeping inroads of occult forces through the agency of mystical Oriental leaders with their fantastic teachings and dynamic appeal certainly constitute a growing challenge for God’s people to, *“test the spirits to see whether they are from God...”*⁶

E. “HAVE GONE OUT INTO THE WORLD.”- 1JOHN 4:1E

“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.” 1 John 4:1e

John says that these false prophets *“are gone out”*, which is in the perfect tense, indicating their presence as an abiding reality. Where have they gone out to? John says, *“into the world.”* Our world is the scene of their activity and their mission is from the evil one Satan, who has sent them.

The false prophets oppose the church and intend on deceiving her. They have infiltrated our churches, seminaries, our schools and Christian organizations. And Paul warns in 2 Corinthians 11:14-15 that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. There is so much deception today. Satan masquerades his lies as truth. He is subtle and deceptive as he secretly introduces heresies. He has a way of making evil look good. (Acts 20:30) It is imperative that all believers practice Biblical discernment. We must take John’s warning seriously.⁷

¹ Hamilton, Ian, *Let’s Study the Letters of John*. The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, UK, 2008. Pg. 53.

² MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Commentary Series on 1-3 John*. Moody Press: Chicago, IL, 2007. Pg.153

³ Hiebert, D. Edmond, *The Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary*. Bob Jones University Press: Greenville, SC, 1991. Pg. 176.

⁴ Hiebert, D. Edmond, *The Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary*. Bob Jones University Press: Greenville, SC, 1991. Pg. 177.

⁵ MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Commentary Series on 1-3 John*. Moody Press: Chicago, IL, 2007. Pg.154.

⁶ Hiebert, D. Edmond, *The Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary*. Bob Jones University Press: Greenville, SC, 1991. Pg. 180.

⁷ MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Commentary Series on 1-3 John*. Moody Press: Chicago, IL, 2007. Pg.155.