

## Spirit of Truth and Error – Part 1

Tonight, we begin a new study from the First Epistle of John, chapter four, verses one through six. Our subject is the Spirit of Truth and the spirit of error.

We are going to ask three main questions:

1. What is the Spirit of Truth?
2. What is the spirit of error?
3. How can we tell the difference?

The Word of God will provide our answers. Our foundation is **1 John 4:1–6**:

### (1 John 4:1–6, KJV)

1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:

3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

4 Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

5 They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.

6 We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

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## The Call to Discernment

John begins with a warning: **“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits.”** He wrote this letter to the church, addressing the saints as “Beloved.” This message is not to unbelievers, but to those already baptized in Jesus’ name and filled with the Holy Ghost.

The word “spirit” here does not mean the human life-force that returns to God at death. It refers to the influence behind teachings and messages—whether sermons, prophecies, or doctrines. These influences are not neutral. They are either inspired by the Spirit of God or by the spirit of error.

John commands us not to blindly accept everything labeled “spiritual” or “Christian.” Instead, we are told to **test, examine, and prove** every message to see if it truly comes

from God. Jesus explained in John 6:63: **“The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.”** His point was that words themselves carry spirit. Preaching and teaching are not just ideas—they are spiritual in nature.

Isaiah 8:20 gives us the standard: **“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”** Every sermon, every prophecy, every doctrine must be measured against Scripture. If it cannot stand the test of the Word of God, it is not from God.

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### **The Rise of False Prophets**

Why is discernment so important? John tells us: **“Because many false prophets are gone out into the world.”** This warning was written nearly two thousand years ago, and the number of false voices has only increased.

False prophets are not just outside the church. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 14:29: **“Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge.”** In other words, believers are not only allowed to judge prophecy, they are commanded to. 1 Peter 4:17 reminds us that **“judgment must begin at the house of God.”**

To judge means to measure what is preached against the Word of God. We are not to accept a teaching because the speaker is popular, eloquent, or emotional. Truth is truth only if it aligns with God’s Word.

Paul warned Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:13: **“Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.”** That prophecy has come true. From the early centuries of the church until now, deception has multiplied. Many doctrines sound appealing, but they are rooted in error.

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### **Identifying the Spirit of God**

John gives us a clear test in verse two: **“Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.”**

To confess this truth is not simply to acknowledge that Jesus once lived as a man. It is to affirm that Jesus Christ was God Himself manifested in flesh.

The apostles preached the Oneness of God. They held to the ancient confession of Israel: **“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord” (Deuteronomy 6:4).** They did not teach

three persons in the Godhead. The doctrine of the Trinity was not established until the Council of Nicaea in AD 325—centuries after the apostles had already delivered the faith.

The true confession is that the Father was in the Son, reconciling the world to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:19). God created a body in the womb of Mary, took on flesh, and walked among us as Jesus Christ. 1 Timothy 3:16 declares: **“God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.”**

Any doctrine that denies that Jesus is both the Father and the Son in one person is not of God. It is the spirit of antichrist.

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### **The Spirit of Antichrist**

Verse three says: **“Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist.”**

Antichrist is not limited to one future world ruler. The spirit of antichrist was already at work in John’s day and is still at work now. Its mark is denial of Jesus’ full identity as God manifested in flesh.

The Trinity denies that the Father and the Son are the same. Islam denies that Jesus is the Son of God at all. Many modern religions deny that God Himself came down to redeem humanity. These are all forms of the antichrist spirit.

1 John 2:22–23 says: **“Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: but he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.”**

To deny the Son is to deny the Father, because the Father was in the Son. To acknowledge the Son is to acknowledge the Father, because they are one.

Jesus said in John 8:24: **“If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.”** The Jews asked Him, “Where is thy Father?” Jesus answered, “Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also” (John 8:19). The Son is the visible manifestation of the invisible Father. To reject the Son is to reject the Father Himself.

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### **Victory Through the Greater One**

Verse four brings encouragement: **“Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.”**

The spirit of antichrist may be active, but the Holy Ghost within believers is greater. The god of this world may blind the eyes of the disobedient, but he cannot defeat those filled with the Spirit of Christ. Paul said in Romans 8:37: **“Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.”**

The Spirit in us is stronger than any deceiver in the world. That is why the church can overcome error and stand in truth.

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### **The Voice of the World**

Verse five shifts the focus: **“They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.”**

False prophets sound appealing to worldly ears. Their messages often revolve around self-improvement, prosperity, and comfort. They avoid the cross, holiness, and separation from sin. The world embraces them because they speak the language of the world.

Jesus warned in Luke 12:15: **“Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.”** Yet much modern preaching centers on possessions and success.

This is the danger of a church that mirrors Laodicea in Revelation 3: **“Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing... and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.”** A worldly church mistakes material prosperity for spiritual health.

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### **The Voice of God**

Finally, verse six declares: **“We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.”**

John places a dividing line. Those who know God receive apostolic teaching. Those who refuse it reveal they are not of God.

Jesus said in John 10:27: **“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”** The voice of the Shepherd is heard today through the preaching of pastors who rightly divide the Word. Jeremiah 3:15 promises: **“And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.”**

The spirit of error is seen in those who reject apostolic doctrine, twist the Scriptures, or insist they do not need a pastor. The spirit of truth is seen in those who submit to the Word of God and continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine.

Hebrews 13:7 exhorts us: **“Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.”** True faith follows the Word of God taught by faithful men of God.

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## **Conclusion**

The Apostle John draws a clear contrast. The Spirit of Truth confesses that Jesus Christ is God manifest in flesh, continues in apostolic doctrine, and produces holy living. The spirit of error denies Jesus' full identity, twists the Word of God, and preaches worldly messages that appeal to the flesh.

Our responsibility is to test every message, hold fast to the Word, and cling to the truth revealed in Jesus Christ. The spirit of antichrist is already at work, but the greater One lives within us. As long as we remain in His truth, we will overcome.