

**Study Notes: 1 John 4:1-6**  
**August 30, 2020: "Don't Believe Everything You Hear"**  
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***Dear friends, 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. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.***

- The Holy Spirit is reliable and will guide us into all truth, reminding us of the hope that we have in Jesus Christ. But there are other spirits which will try to lead us astray. Some spirits will be known through other people and what they outwardly say and do (false prophets). Others will speak to our hearts in the form of feelings and internal guidance. John called upon us to not blindly believe or trust everything we hear, but to discern whether or not the spirit is from God, instead.
- John cautioned his readers to be discerning, because false prophets are all around. The Expositor's Bible Commentary notes this about false teachers, "Not all teachers can be trusted, because some of them are driven by spirits that do not come from God."
- We must test the spirits and use discernment.
  - The Expositor's Bible Commentary explains this idea in more detail, "John says believers must 'test the spirits' (v. 1) to distinguish between true teachers and Antichrists. Strangely, this statement is sometimes taken to refer to a mystical power of discernment or, in extreme cases, a technique of exorcism, despite the fact that John has very little to say about demons or spiritual gifts. The Greek *dokimazō* ('test,' GK 1507) suggests a more objective inquiry, and vv. 2–3 offer the criteria for such an investigation."
  - The New American Commentary adds, "The verb 'test' (*dokimazete*) means 'to prove, to examine,' like coins that are being tested for genuineness and proper weight — something that should be done on a continual basis."
- John offered this as criteria: what the spirit/teacher says about Jesus Christ. If the spirit/teacher refuses to acknowledge Jesus, or attempts to pull us away from the truth, it is an antichrist (set against Christ), and we must stand against this teaching.
  - Specifically, John spoke of Jesus Christ coming in the flesh, and this was to combat a false teaching that was circulating in his day. The Faithlife Study Bible states, "The later heretical teaching known as Docetism held that Jesus appeared to be human, but that His humanity was nothing more than an illusion. The secessionists in 1 John seem to have shared views similar to Docetism. By making this concession, the secessionists were able to deny Jesus' actual human experiences."

**You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.**

- We do not need to be afraid of these false spirits and prophets, because we have overcome them through Jesus Christ. We cannot allow false teachings and feelings to influence us, but we must remember the victory we have in Jesus Christ. John's words in these verses echo the very teaching of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of John (see John 16:33).
- John leaned on the fact that he was teaching the true Gospel. Anyone who listens (and obeys) John's teaching, which is true and comes from Jesus Christ, is clearly from God. Those who will not listen to the truth are not from God. The Spirit of truth is distinguished from the spirit of falsehood in this way, the Spirit of truth will lead us to follow Jesus and follow sound teaching. The spirit of falsehood will reject Jesus and sound, orthodox teaching.
- The Expositor's Bible Commentary further states, "This test, along with the one in vv. 2–3, uses orthodox doctrine to set the boundary for the Spirit's activity. While John cannot prove that the Antichrists' teaching does not have a spiritual origin, he can point out that what they say is inconsistent with received tradition. This being the case, either the Antichrists or the tradition must be wrong, and since John knows that the tradition is based on a genuine witness (1:1–3), the tradition must be preserved. Verse 6 thus portrays the conflict between John and the Antichrists as a struggle between established belief and personal religious experience."