

# Real Disciples (9)- Test the Spirits

---

(1 John 4:1-6)

## I. Introduction

- A. I once met a youth minister from another fellowship over a cup of coffee.
  - 1. We had a lot of things in common— similar job, challenges... elders.
    - a. But we had many differences—tongues, baptism, millennium, music.
    - b. What do you think we ended up discussing— similarities or differences?
  - 2. Yep, we ended up in a friendly debate over a variety of doctrinal issues.
    - a. He finally said, “*You’re hung up on doctrine; why not just stress Jesus?*”
    - b. He added, “*Maybe if we stress Jesus, our other different won’t matter.*”
  - 3. It took awhile, but I came to see that he was right (*Lynn: usually takes awhile*)
    - a. Oh, I still think I was right on the individual issues we were discussing
    - b. He was right in seeking a common ground in a common faith in Christ.
  - 4. That’s been more than 30 years; I wish I could have that cup of coffee over!
- B. Bible says too much about the importance of doctrine to see it as unimportant
  - 1. Paul warnings about the dangers of apostasy are too clear to just ignore
    - a. Elders at Ephesus would face (cause) distortion of truth ([Acts 20:29-31](#))
    - b. Timothy would have to deal with doctrine of demons ([1 Tim 4:1-2](#))
    - c. NT has too many similar warnings to be cavalier about false doctrine
  - 2. But gospel is not at stake with every difference or nuance in understanding
    - a. There are some issues we fight over and just aren’t worth fighting over
    - b. Some issues are in Paul’s words “*foolish and stupid*” ([2 Tim 2:23-24](#))
    - c. Many applications of doctrine are personal and private ([Rom 14:4](#))
- C. How do we draw a line in the sand between doctrine and differences?
  - 1. The question John has been discussing in [1 John](#) has been real disciples
    - a. Three things keep coming up— faith in Jesus, obedience and love
    - b. Where we ended last week was the indwelling of Spirit ([1 John 3: 24](#))
  - 2. But there are more than one spirit— the false teachers claimed a spirit too
    - a. So John tells us that we must test the spirits to see which are from God
    - b. He will give us three criteria to help us test (**Reading:** [1 John 4:1-6](#))

## II. Testing the Spirits: Focus on Jesus Christ (1 John 4:2-3)

- A. The false teachers of 1 John denied that Jesus had come in the flesh
  - 1. He calls those who deny the incarnation “*antichrist*” (1 Jn 2:22, 2 Jn 7)
    - a. To deny Jesus’ flesh is to also deny his blood—no cross, no resurrection
    - b. The part of the gospel denied by false teacher was the part about gospel!
  - 2. The NT is clear that death and resurrection of Jesus are essence of gospel
    - a. Paul saw cross and resurrection as “*of first importance*” (1 Cor 15:3-4)
    - b. Jesus coming in world and rising from dead was “*my gospel*” (2 Tim 2:8)
    - c. Peter makes a big deal about Jesus carrying sin in his body (1 Peter 2:24)
  - 3. There is no Christianity without an emphasis on cross and the empty tomb!
- B. John’s first testing to see if spirits are from God is to check the focus on Christ
  - 1. Somehow, that’s not helpful to many to determine who is a real disciple
    - a. Friend was given a 45 point doctrinal survey before mission trip to Russia
    - b. Several of the questions had to do with KJV— before going to Russia!
      - 1) I spoke at a retreat at his church; he sent a 1 question questionnaire—  
*True or False: I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God*
      - 2) Isn’t that the one question questionnaire we ask before baptism?
  - 2. But somehow we want the “Doctrinal True Disciple Test” to be tougher
    - a. Does this sound familiar? See if this description fits anyone we know.
      - 1) They claimed a special insider-knowledge so they have the truth
      - 2) Those without the special insider knowledge aren’t really disciples
      - 3) Because they aren’t really disciples, no reason to fellowship them
    - b. Am I describing the Gnostic false teachers? Or the church I grew up in?
      - 1) Our “*insider info*” had to do with baptism, church, worship, end time.
      - 2) If someone didn’t have all the truth, they had no truth... *not disciple!*
  - 3. John could have made that argument; he could have given us a 45 point test
    - a. But he didn’t. John rather focuses on faith in the incarnation of Christ
      - 1) Did that mean it doesn’t matter what we believe in addition to Jesus?
      - 2) Well, John does have two more points here, so let’s see what he says
    - b. But the place he begins when speaking of following Christ is Christ!

### III. Testing the Spirits: Look to God, Not the World (1 John 4:4-5)

- A. Why do you think that the false teachers stress the things they did?
1. John makes it really clear what they were saying by what he teaches against
    - a. You don't have to believe that in Jesus God came into world of flesh
    - b. You don't have to stress over following the commandments of God
    - c. You don't have to love and fellowship other believers in Christ
  2. Why stress those things? Those made faith fit in better with the world.
    - a. That is why John says they "*speak from the viewpoint of the world*" (v. 5)
    - b. Jesus saw a basic animosity between disciples & world (John 15:18-19)
- B. So John's second test of true disciples—they seek God, not spirit of world
1. Why do churches ordain homosexual clergy & bless homosexual unions?
    - a. Well, churches accept divorce or adultery as inevitable in this day age?
    - b. Why did churches once use the Bible to accept racism & segregation?
    - c. It's just easier if you change the Bible to fit into what accepted in world
  2. This past week, the Vatican released a new list of "updated" sins including
    - a. Included drugs, pollution, genetic manipulation, socioeconomic injustice
      - 1) Of course, no man or group of man can really add new sins
      - 2) It was refreshing they **added** sin rather than making holiness easier!
    - b. To stretch or shrink faith to make it better fit world... not discipleship!
    - c. Jesus sounds pretty hard-nosed with demands of disciples (Lk 14:27)
      - 1) Carrying a cross is not burden-bearing as in "*It's my cross to bear*"
      - 2) Carrying a cross is what one did before they were crucified!
      - 3) Jesus says we cannot be disciples until we died to this world!
- C. John warns us not to fall in love with the spirit of the age (2:15)
1. Does that sound hard? It is! Does that sound complicated? It is!
    - a. But does that sound optional? John assures us that it is not!
    - b. But then, John also wants you to know that we aren't on our own (v. 4)
    - c. The one who is in us (Spirit) is greater than one in the world (Satan)
  2. Do we really believe that? If we did, maybe we wouldn't give up so easily
  3. The second test of true disciples is that disciples seek God, not the world

## IV. Testing the Spirits: Spiritual Authority (1 John 4:6)

- A. Grammar was never my favorite subject, but notice John's use of the pronouns
1. He starts out with **YOU**, "*You, dear children, are from God...*" (v. 4)
    - a. He switches to **THEY** (false teachers), "*They are from the world*" (v. 5)
    - b. Then switch to **WE**, "*We are from God, and whoever listens to us*" (v. 6)
  2. This indicate three different groups—disciples, false teachers & apostles
    - a. **THEY** (false teachers) are from the world; **WE** (apostles) are from God
    - b. True disciples are those willing to listen/follow apostolic teaching
    - c. This is a continuation of last point—to listen to God is hear the apostles
- B. I had a teacher who said, "*Christianity is the religion of Biblical authority.*"
1. The Bible preserves a record of the apostolic authority to which John points
    - a. So when John says, "*Whoever knows God listens to us,*" that is the Bible
    - b. Will we listen to the Bible? Do we really believe that God speaks there?
  2. My brother-in-law sent me a tape; it had a sermon on the back (*providence?*)
    - a. It was old, retired preacher, and he said something that I'll never forget  
*No one really studies the Bible; they read it and remember what someone told them it means*
    - b. We can use the Bible in one of two ways—we have to decide which
      - 1) We can decide what we believe and go to the Bible to prove it
      - 2) We can go to the Bible to be taught, regardless of what we believe
    - c. **Problem:** Even though we know the second is right, the first is easier!
  3. Disciples won't always reach same conclusions—they always listen to God

## V. Conclusion

- A. What does John tell us about testing the Spirits to see which are from God?
1. His list is pretty short—he doesn't have a 45 question doctrinal survey
  2. John's list is here is situational; he is dealing with a particular group/issue
  3. So his list of "*test the spirits*" may not specifically answer all our issues
- B. John does show us that the list of critical issues is shorter rather than longer
1. Do you believe that Jesus came in the flesh, died for sins and was raised?
  2. Do you seek to listen to the Spirit of God rather than spirit of the age?
  3. Do you seek to follow the teaching of the Bible as the apostolic word?