

Expanded Report: Testing the Spirits (1 John 4:1-6)

Prologue: Discernment in the Spirit

The evening had settled in with a peaceful calm, the kind that made the family look forward to their Bible study together. The warm light from the living room lamp illuminated the pages of **1 John 4:1-6**, which Ryan was about to read. Tonight's passage focused on a crucial theme: **discerning the spirits**—knowing what teachings align with the truth of God and which ones come from deceptive sources. In a world full of different voices, it's vital to understand how to test what we hear against the truth of Scripture.

Ryan opened the Bible with care, and as he began reading, he set the tone for a meaningful discussion. "Tonight, we're going to talk about how we can tell if the teachings we hear are from God or not," he began. "John gives us a very clear test: If the spirit behind the message acknowledges that Jesus is God in the flesh, then it is from God. But if it denies this truth, it's not from God."

Ariel, always eager to understand how to apply lessons to her life, asked, "How do we know if a teacher is speaking from God or if they're just saying things that sound good?"

"That's an important question," Ryan replied, looking at her with a thoughtful expression. "John tells us to look for the core teaching about Jesus. If someone doesn't believe that Jesus is the Son of God who came in the flesh to save us, then we know their teaching is not from the Holy Spirit."

Alice, holding Mr. Fluffernutter tightly, asked, "So, if someone says Jesus isn't real or He wasn't really God, then we should not listen to them?"

"That's right, Alice," Yaya said, her voice filled with gentle wisdom. "The truth about Jesus is the foundation of our faith. Anyone who denies that truth is not teaching what God wants us to believe."

The family was already engaging deeply with the passage, ready to explore what it means to "test the spirits" and stand firm in the truth.

Key Teachings: Discerning the Spirit of Truth from the Spirit of Error

1. Testing the Spirits (1 John 4:1)

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

Ryan's voice took on a serious tone as he began to explain, "John is reminding us that not every spirit or teaching we hear is from God. There are many false prophets out there, spreading messages that can lead us away from the truth. It's important to test the spirits, to evaluate what's being taught based on God's Word."

Ariel, ever inquisitive, asked, “What does it mean to ‘test the spirits’? How do we do that?”

Ryan nodded, appreciating her desire to understand. “Testing the spirits means we evaluate what’s being taught by comparing it with God’s Word. If it matches the truth of Scripture and affirms who Jesus is, then it is from God. If it doesn’t, then it’s from a false spirit. It’s crucial that we know Scripture well enough to recognize when something doesn’t align with the truth.”

Yaya added, “False teachers often don’t come with obvious lies. They mix truth with error, and that’s why we need to be vigilant and grounded in God’s Word. We need to measure everything we hear against the truth of the Bible.”

Ryan continued, “It’s not just about what we hear—it’s about what we believe. Our faith in Jesus and our knowledge of God’s Word must be strong enough to recognize deception.”

Ariel nodded slowly, understanding the importance of spiritual discernment. “So, we need to know God’s Word for ourselves, so we can tell what’s true and what’s not?”

“Exactly,” Ryan confirmed. “That’s why Bible study and prayer are so important—they help us recognize truth from error.”

2. The Confession of Jesus Christ: The Test of Truth (1 John 4:2)

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

Ryan paused, letting the words sink in. “The most important test to discern whether a spirit is from God is whether the message acknowledges that Jesus Christ is truly God and man. This is foundational to our faith.”

Ariel leaned forward, puzzled. “Why is it so important that Jesus came in the flesh? Why can’t we just say that He’s God in some other way?”

“Great question,” Ryan said. “Jesus’ incarnation—His coming as both fully God and fully man—is central to our salvation. If Jesus wasn’t truly human, He couldn’t fully identify with us, or die for our sins. If He wasn’t truly God, He wouldn’t have the power to conquer sin and death. Jesus’ incarnation is at the core of the gospel.”

Ryan continued, “Any teaching that says Jesus was just a man, or just a spirit, or that He didn’t come in the flesh, is not from God. This truth is what separates Christianity from every other belief system. Jesus is both fully God and fully man, and He came to save us by dying on the cross and rising again.”

Yaya added, “Without this truth, there is no gospel. Everything else is just noise. That’s why we must guard against anyone who denies the truth of Jesus’ divinity and humanity. It’s the foundation of everything we believe.”

Ariel thought about this for a moment. “So, if someone doesn’t believe that Jesus is both fully God and fully man, they’re not teaching the truth?”

“That’s right,” Ryan affirmed. “We have to be careful not to follow teachings that distort or deny this central truth about Jesus.”

3. The Spirit of Antichrist (1 John 4:3)

“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.”

Ryan’s voice grew even more serious. “John makes it clear: any spirit that denies the truth of Jesus’ divinity and humanity is the spirit of **antichrist**. Now, the antichrist is not just a single person who will come in the future. The spirit of antichrist is already at work in the world, influencing false teachings and leading people away from the truth of Christ.”

Ariel, a bit surprised, asked, “Does this mean that anyone who doesn’t believe in Jesus is an antichrist?”

"Not exactly," Ryan said, clarifying. "Not everyone who doesn’t believe in Jesus is the **antichrist** figure, but their teaching is influenced by the spirit of the antichrist. The term ‘antichrist’ refers to anyone or anything that denies the truth about Jesus—His divinity and humanity. So, we must be cautious not to follow teachings that distort who Jesus is."

Ryan continued, “The spirit of antichrist is actively at work today, in many false teachings and religions. It seeks to diminish or distort the truth of Jesus Christ. We must be on guard and not be led astray.”

Yaya added, “It’s not always obvious. The spirit of antichrist often works through subtle distortions of the truth. That’s why we need to stay grounded in God’s Word and continually test everything we hear against it.”

4. The Victory of God’s Children Over Falsehood (1 John 4:4)

“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.”

Ryan smiled as he read this verse. "John offers us encouragement. He reminds us that, as children of God, we have already overcome falsehood and deception because the Holy Spirit lives in us. The Spirit of truth is greater than any spirit of error."

Ariel’s eyes brightened. “So, the Holy Spirit helps us know the truth and stand strong against lies?”

“Yes,” Ryan said. “The Holy Spirit is our guide. He empowers us to recognize truth from error, to stand firm in our faith, and to resist false teachings. Even when the world around us seems confusing or full of deception, we can trust the Holy Spirit to lead us.”

Ryan continued, “No matter how convincing false teachers may sound, we know that the Holy Spirit gives us the victory. We don’t need to be afraid of deception as long as we stay close to God and His Word.”

Yaya nodded, adding, “We have the victory because of Jesus. We don’t need to fear false teachings. We just need to remain in Him and trust the Holy Spirit to guide us.”

5. The Key Teaching: Spiritual Discernment and Faithfulness to Christ

The key teaching of this passage is that believers must **test every spirit** and **remain faithful to the truth** of who Jesus is—fully God and fully man. Any teaching that denies Jesus' incarnation or distorts the gospel is not from God and should be rejected. The Holy Spirit empowers believers to discern truth from error, and as children of God, we have the strength to stand firm against false teachings.

Ryan summarized, “John teaches us that spiritual discernment is vital. We need to test what we hear, especially when it comes to the person and work of Jesus Christ. If the teaching aligns with Scripture and affirms Jesus’ divinity and humanity, then it is of God. If not, it’s a false spirit, and we should reject it.”

Practical Applications: Discerning the Truth in Daily Life

The family reflected on how they could apply these teachings in their own lives.

1. **Knowing the Bible to Discern Truth:** Ariel suggested, “I can keep reading and studying the Bible so I can know the truth and avoid being tricked by false teachings. If I hear something that doesn’t sound right, I can ask Dad or Mom about it.”
 2. **Trusting the Holy Spirit for Guidance:** Ryan encouraged them, “We can rely on the Holy Spirit to help us understand God’s Word and guide us in the truth. The Spirit is always with us to protect us from lies.”
 3. **Staying True to Christ’s Teaching:** Yaya reminded them, “We need to hold fast to what we know is true about Jesus and not let anyone sway us with false teachings.”
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Takeaway: Guarding the Truth in Love

As the family reflected, Yaya shared a time when she encountered a teaching that didn’t align with Scripture. “I had to carefully examine what I was hearing, and I realized it wasn’t true. I prayed and asked God for wisdom to understand the truth. The Holy Spirit helped me discern the difference.”

Ariel smiled, “So, when we listen to teachings, we need to check them with the Bible?”

“Yes,” Ryan said, “and we need to make sure they honor Jesus and reflect His truth. That’s how we stay rooted in God’s love and the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Key Points Summary:

1. Test the Spirits:

- Believers must be discerning and test every teaching to ensure it aligns with the truth of who Jesus is.

2. Christ’s Incarnation as the Test of Truth:

- Any teaching that denies Jesus Christ’s full divinity and humanity is not from God.

3. The Holy Spirit’s Role in Discernment:

- The Holy Spirit empowers believers to recognize truth and stand firm in the faith.
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Key Verse:

“Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.” (1 John 4:2)

This passage encourages believers to be vigilant, relying on God’s Word and the Holy Spirit to discern truth from error, and to remain faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ.