

Chardon Christian Fellowship

Wednesday Night Bible Study

1 John

Lesson 5: Testing The Spirits

The church to which John was writing had a serious issue. Heresies were springing up like weeds in the garden. In a garden, one needs to recognize what is a weed and what is a fruit bearing plant. Similarly, we need tests or benchmarks to know what is a true theology or doctrine, and what is false.

We will turn to **1 John 4** for a look at prescriptions for testing the spirit of a teacher or doctrine.

I. First Testing Approach

1. Test #1 – Who is Jesus?

The first test of any teaching is the implied or stated nature of Jesus, the Son of God, the Messiah, the Second Member of the Trinity. Remember .. there were heresies in the church that Jesus was not here in the flesh and that He did not rise from the grave (e.g. Docetism).

1 John 4:2-3 *these two verses show us that any doctrine that (a) denies Jesus is from God and (b) denies that He came in the flesh is from the antichrist*

2. Test #2 – Allegiance to the Apostolic teaching

1 John 4:6 *this verse declares that failure to listen to the Apostolic teaching, and listening to worldly teaching, is error (worst yet - a spirit of error)*

Some of the heresies at that time (and ones that followed) were championed by men who did not know Jesus, and did not walk with Him as the Apostles did. The appeal from John is that those who know God, listen to the Apostles. Those who do not, and listen to ‘other men’ are listening to a spirit of error.

3. Test #3 – Encouragement of Love

1 John 4:7 *any teacher that is does not love the brethren is not from God; any teaching that does encourage loving the brethren is not from God.*

In Greek, the opening of this verse is *agapētos agapaō allēlōn*, that literally means “beloved ones, love (with delight and esteem) one another”. Any teaching or teacher should show love for the brethren, and encourage God’s love for each other. A teacher or teaching is not of God if it encourages factions, disregards, or enmity with fellow believers.

4. Test #4 – Presence of the Spirit of God

1 John 4:12-13

We cannot separate verse 12 and 13 in this passage. Verse 13 starts with *en houtos ginōskō*, where *en* means ‘by, through, in light of, etc.’ and connects verse 12 and 13. The word *houtos* means ‘this thing, this fact, or this account’ and is referring to the previous verse. The word *ginōskō* means ‘to ascertain by examination, to resolve or conclude’. Putting these together, we know (*ginōskō*) that we are of Him, He is in us, and we have Holy Spirit because His love is being perfected in us and we love one another. The love is the evidence of the indwelling Spirit. Lack of love shows lack of Spirit. A ‘mean spirited’ teacher or teaching is to be questioned.

5. Test #5 – Confession about Jesus

Jesus is the Savior of the world. Jesus sacrificial death paid the penalty for our sins (propitiation). Heresies are any teaching that denies salvation through Jesus’s atoning sacrifice, or that Jesus did not really die on the cross (Cerinthianism), or says that salvation is the “cross plus something else” (works).

1 John 4:14-15 *He is the Savior of world*

Also... **1 John 2:2** *propitiation for sins of whole world*

1 John 3:16 *He laid down His life for us*

1 John 4:10 *Jesus is the propitiation for our sins*

6. Test #6 – No Fear

1 John 4:16-18

Let us examine a key word in this passage in verse 18. The Greek word *teleios* is translated in almost all translations as ‘perfect’. Other definitions of *teleios* would include ‘brought to completion, fully accomplished, fully developed, fully realized, thorough, complete, entire, as opposed to what is partial and limited.’ His absolutely perfect, complete, and fully accomplished love, when indwelling us as the Holy Spirit, pushes out (literally ‘casts out’ or ‘throws out’) the fear of punishment, or the fear of anything.

According to **1 John**, if a teacher or teaching capitalizes on fear or tries to instill fear, then it is not from God.

Regarding fear, see also: **Psalm 23:4, Psalm 27:1, Psalm 34:4, Romans 8:15, 38-39, Hebrews 13:5-6.**

7. Test #7 – Love is the Test

1 John 4:19-21

In these passages we see that the indwelling love (*agapaō*) of God is evidenced by a love (*agapaō*) for the brethren (*adelphos*). If someone says they love God, but shows unlove (*i.e.* hatred) for the brethren, then he is a liar and does not have the love of God in

him. As with other contrasts used in Johannine Gospel and Epistles, there is no middle ground on this. You either 'love and therefore are of God', or 'you don't love and are of the antichrist'.

II. Second Testing Approach

According to John R.W. Stott (1921-2011), a widely acclaimed pastor and theologian, there are three tests outlined in **1 John**:

1. The Moral Test

The moral test is consideration of the execution of the commands of Jesus. Does the teacher or teaching compel or teach you to obey Jesus's commands?

1 John 2:3-6

In verse 3, the English 'we can be sure' and 'know' are the Greek word *ginōskō*, that means 'to ascertain by examination, to resolve or conclude' or in other words, 'to have certainty'. We can be certain of our relationship with God as we 'jealously guard and employ' (vs. 3; keep, *tērēō*) His commandments.

The moral test of a teacher and teaching is whether it compels you to obey all of Jesus's commandments. The moral test of your character is whether 'you know' (*ginōskō*) the love of God as evidenced by love of keeping His commandments.

2. The Social Test

This is the test of Love. It is a test of the internalization of Jesus commandments and the effect the obedience and Holy Spirit have on your character. Do you love the brethren?

1 John 2:7-11

John singles out a commandment they had heard from the beginning of their Christianity, and he is reaffirming again, that they should love one another (vs. 7).

3. The Doctrinal Test.

This is the test of one's belief in Christ.

1 John 2:20-25

This test is very straightforward. Truth (vs. 22) is that Jesus is the Son of God and that He came in the flesh as the Messiah. Anything that denies these truths is a lie from the antichrist. The Gnostics of that day, and the heretics of today (*e.g.* Islam, Mormonism), deny that Jesus is the Son of God, and that He is the Messiah. They paint rosy pictures of Jesus, or admit He was a great prophet, but they will deny the essential truth that He is the only Son of God. Verse 23 prescribes the outcome of denial of Jesus as The Son, where the person who denies The Son does not have the Father (or Holy Spirit .. or salvation .. or heaven).

III. Application

The application from this study of **1 John** and testing the spirit of the doctrine someone is “bringing forth” should compel us to examine any teaching, just like the Bereans in **Acts 17:10-12** “... ¹⁰ The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. ¹¹ Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. ¹² Therefore many of them believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men ...”.

(1) We should examine all doctrine against the Scripture as the foundation of our faith. We should listen with ‘open hearts and open Bibles’.

(2) John R.W. Stott stated “... *it is not the person who claims to be a Christian and to know God who is presumptuous, but the person whose claim is contradicted by his conduct. He is a liar.*” (The Letters of John, J.R.W. Stott, p 94.).

Is there any area of your life that is a contradiction to Jesus’s commandments?

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 ⁴ Love (agape) is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, ⁵ does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, ⁶ does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; ⁷ bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Resources:

The Letters of John, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Volume 19. John R.W. Stott, InterVarsity Press

New American Standard New Testament, The Lockman Foundation

Bible Knowledge Commentary, An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Theological Seminary Faculty, John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, Victor Books, 1983

Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, W.E. Vine, MacDonald Books

The Mounce Reverse-Interlinear™ New Testament, Robert H. Mounce and William D. Mounce, 2011

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<https://www.openbible.com>

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<https://www.biblestudytools.com>

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