

3.) How do we test the spirits? [4:2-3a]

There is need for Christian discernment. For many are too gullible, and exhibit a naïve readiness to credit messages and teachings which purport to come from the spirit world. There is such a thing, however, as a misguided tolerance of false doctrine. Unbelief (*do not believe every spirit*) can be as much a mark of spiritual maturity as belief. We should avoid both extremes, the superstition which believes everything, and the suspicion which believes nothing.¹

4.) What was being taught by the spirit of the antichrist? [3]

5.) What are some doctrinally unorthodox teachings (aka: wrong, popular) that are floating around about Jesus in the visible church today?

6.) According to John's test, what is the content of our Holy Spirit-endorsed confession?

4:2; 2:22; 5:1

4:15; 5:5

John 1:1-5, 14

The fundamental Christian doctrine which can never be compromised concerns the eternal divine-human person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.²

Victory

7.) Hearing about the lying spirit of the antichrist coming to deceive believers may sound frightening. Why ought we not respond to John's warning with fear? [4-6]

¹ Stott, 154.

² Stott, 155.

8.) Why is John confident that we will overcome?

2:14

4:4, 12-13

5:4-5; 18

9.) In the context of 1 John 4:1-6, what will our overcoming victory look like—what form does it take? [1-3, 6]

10.) What is the cause of our victory? [4; see also 2:20-21, 26-27]

Here, as in 2:18-27, protection against falsehood and victory over it are ascribed both to an objective standard of doctrine and to the indwelling Spirit who illumines our minds to grasp and apply it, for ‘unless the Spirit of wisdom is present, there is little or no profit in having God’s Word in our hands’ (Calvin).³

11.) In verses 5-6, John writes, “They are from the world... and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us.” Who are “they/them,” and “we/us”?

12.) What is the apostolic testimony and why is it vested with such authority? [Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 2:22-24, 32-33; 4:8-12]

³ Stott, 157-158.

Do not follow the *en vogue* voices, but rather the old apostolic eye, ear, hand, and pen testimony. The clear choice is the canonical Jesus. The New Testament is the only authorized portrait of the true Jesus. Let us stay away from the social-activist Jesus, the merely-a-prophet Jesus, the great-teacher Jesus, the religious-genius Jesus, the pacifist Jesus, the rebel Jesus, the Republican Jesus, the Marxist Jesus, and the vegetarian Jesus.⁴

13.) If Jesus sent the Spirit to empower and inspire the writers of Holy Scripture, will this same Spirit ever inspire teachings or beliefs that are inconsistent with the Scriptures? [John 15:26; 16:13-15; 1 Cor. 12:3; Gal. 1:8]

14.) Throughout 4:1-6 the pronouns and verbs are plural. Read through the passage again with this in mind (For example: verse 2, “By this *y’all* know the Spirit of God...”.) What is the role of the church in the spiritual health of individual believers? [see Acts 17:11, Eph. 4:11-16; 2 Tim. 4:1-4]

15.) In verses 1-3 the test of doctrine concerned the humanity and divinity of Christ. What is the test in verse 4-6? [see also Matt. 7:16-18]

16.) What is the correspondence between the message (2) and the believing hearers (4)?

17.) In contrast to the lies peddled by the ravenous wolves who come in sheep’s clothing (Matt. 7:15), why will the truth resonate with true believers?

John 8:47

John 10:4-5, 8, 16, 26-27

John 18:37

⁴ See Scott McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 122. Quoted by O’Donnell, 122.

The Covenant Thread

John has already told us in this epistle where these false prophets and antichrists come from. In 3:8 he wrote that “Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning.” Clearly, those who are from the world and do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh from God are “making a practice of sinning.” The devil is well-practiced with his deceptions, since “he has been sinning from the beginning,” but we find courage not only in the fact that the Holy Spirit “who is in us is greater than he who is in the world,” but also in that “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” (3:8).

Let’s look back to the beginning, to the first deception of the devil recorded in Scripture. Read Genesis 3:1-5, what was the lie?

Sadly, our first parents believed the serpent and ate the fruit [6-7], thus plunging themselves and the rest of humanity out of fellowship with God and into sin (8-13). They hid from him in shame, expecting the penalty of death to fall upon them immediately (2:16-17). His response, however, was not to strike them down, but to curse their callings, adding difficulty, strife, and pain to their blessings (16-19).

God’s response to the serpent, though, was not only a curse upon the deceiver who led God’s children astray, but a promise that he would be defeated by the offspring of the woman (14-15). This is the *protoevangelium*, the first announcement of the gospel. By making this promise, God was assuring Adam and Eve not only would they live, but that one day, their Offspring would reverse the curse that they brought upon us all. Because of the curse they would eventually die, but one day, death would be defeated by the promised snake-crusher. And to give them a clue to how he would accomplish this, God killed an animal in order to cover their nakedness with its skin (21).

Jesus came at the appointed time and has indeed reversed the curse and freed his people from sin and death through his death and resurrection. He has crushed the ancient serpent and he reigns in victory! And yet, the final skirmishes are still being fought. The offspring of the serpent are still at war with the offspring of God. Though our victory is certain, we must still be on our guard against the deceiver and his strategies to discourage, distract, and derail us. He aims to cause as much pain and disruption as he is able, but for those who are in Christ, our ultimate victory is assured. So assured, in fact, that it is a ‘done deal,’ “Little children, you are from God and *you have overcome* them” (1 John 4:4) because Jesus has overcome them (John 16:33).

Let us therefore be wise and discerning in what and who we believe. Our best defense against the lies of the enemy is our knowledge of the truth. So let us make every effort to know the truth, building one another up in the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, so that we may no longer be gullible children, but discerning adults, not carried about by every wind of doctrine or craftiness in deceitful schemes, but growing up into Christ (Eph. 4:11-16). Beloved, abide in him.