

HOW TO IDENTIFY WHAT IS OF GOD

(1 John 4:1-6)

1 John 3:24-4:6— Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us. Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Many years ago *Harvest House* published a book by Larry Parker entitled *We Let Our Son Die*. The book tells the tragic story of how Larry and his wife, after being influenced by one of America's numerous "word of faith" teachers, withheld insulin from their diabetic son, Wesley. Predictably, Wesley went into a diabetic coma. The Parkers, warned about the danger of making a "negative confession," continued to "positively confess" Wesley's healing until the time of his death.

Even after Wesley's death, the Parkers, undaunted in their "faith," conducted a resurrection service instead of a funeral. For more than one year following their son's death, they refused to abandon the "revelation knowledge" they had received through the "word of faith" movement. Even though they were convinced by their spiritual leaders that if they "really believed God" their son would not die, he did. They thought God was telling them to do this. Not only did their beliefs bring the death of their own son, it resulted in them being tried and found guilty of manslaughter and child abuse.

I don't have to tell you, do I, that some of the largest Christian churches and denominations are full of both leaders and followers who, in the words of Scripture, "don't know their right hand from their left" doctrinally speaking. In other words, their belief about what the Bible teaches is way off from what Jesus and his apostles originally intended. I could literally give you 100's of examples, but what I would rather do this morning is to show you from the passage we just read how to recognize spiritual truth versus spiritual error for yourself.

Title: How to Identify What is of God

(Prayer)

A Barna poll of born-again Christians in America revealed some sad statistics:

- All people are eventually saved or accepted by God 25%

- **A person's religion** does not matter because all faiths teach the same lessons 26%
- **Christians** and Muslims worship the same God 40%

Statistics like I have just given should not surprise us because most churches and pastors in America do not believe the Bible is God's inspired Word. If church leaders do not believe that God's word is inspired, where does this leave the people under their care?

This is why the Apostle John warned God's people:

1 John 4:1 *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.*

1. **We must not be so naïve as to think that God's Spirit is the only spirit at work in the world.**

The word "spirit" can be taken many ways in English (there are **14** definitions for "spirit" given in Webster's Dict.)

John is probably warning us against **any** "spirit" that opposes the truth of God's Word...

- a demon
- a human being who is used as a tool of Satan
- or simply a spirit of error—an unbiblical worldview.

It is the same today as it was in John's day—many false prophets are being used by the enemy.

And Jesus **warned** about false prophets as well:

Matthew 7:15-16a *Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will know them by their fruits.*

False prophets look like "sheep" (= believers).

How do we identify false teachers? By their "fruits."

Matt 12 tells us clearly that Jesus was referring to a false prophet's **words**:

Matthew 12:33-35 *"Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. ³⁴ Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, **speak** good things? For out of the abundance of the heart **the mouth speaks**. ³⁵ A good man out of the good*

treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.

2. **We must test everything we hear**

In other words, we dare not believe everything we hear.

We must always filter what is said through the Word of God. If it is in opposition to the Word, we must reject it, no matter who the teacher is (and that includes yours truly).

This is how you know whether what someone is saying is of God and gets God's approval—by putting it to the test of Scripture.

1 John 4:1-2a Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. **By this** [by testing the spirits] you know the Spirit of God. . .

This is how you recognize if the Spirit of God supports what someone is teaching.

Notice that we have two options:

1. Believing every spirit
2. Testing every spirit

When you do not **test** the spirits what you do, in essence, is you **believe** every spirit (you believe everything you hear). If you do not test the spirits, you have no way of knowing which of them is really of God.

And that is why we need to..

1 Thessalonians 5:20-21 **Test all things; hold fast what is good.**

TV and churches are full of teachers who spout whatever comes into their head—and they truly believe that God is telling them to say it. But they are wrong because what they are saying is either not found in Scripture or opposes the teachings of Scripture.

3. **If a religious leader or movement cannot speak loud and clear about the truth that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah) (the One who guarantees eternal life to every believer), then that leader or movement is not of God** (God is not its source)

1 John 4:2b-3 Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God...

Not a good translation!

(Greek: “Every spirit that confesses Jesus as Christ [Messiah] come in flesh...”)

(That Jesus is recognized as the Messiah—the guarantor of eternal life — is John’s main concern).

*3 and every spirit that **does not confess** that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.*

Notice that John does *not* say **every spirit that denies**, but rather **every spirit that does not confess**.

False teachers will not always come out and boldly deny a biblical truth. But John says that if a teacher is of God, he will confess the truth — openly and unashamedly. Heretics obviously will not do this.

When I grew up in the Catholic church I regularly heard that “Jesus is the Savior.” What I did not hear confessed openly and unashamedly from the pulpit is that Jesus is the Savior of only those who trust in Him **ALONE** for eternal life (because they didn’t believe that).

4. **All victory over Satanic deception is through reliance on God and His Word**

1 John 4:4 You are of God, little children, and have overcome them (the false prophets), because He who is in you (the Holy Spirit) is greater than he who is in the world (Satan/false teachers).

This is how believers can protect themselves from false teaching—relying on Spirit of God and the Word of God.

I love the following story shared by Christian musician Mickey Moore. He said:

One night as we were packing up after a concert, we sent a young woman to pick up our children from the home they were staying in. Since the children didn’t know her, I told her to give our son, **Trevor, our secret family code** word so he would know she was authorized to pick them up. A little later I received a phone call. Trevor refused to leave because the woman hadn’t given the right word. The mix-up was on my part—I had said the code word was “Dinosaur Monster,” which my son informed me was incorrect. “It’s Dinosaur!” he said. “Are you sure? I was certain it was Dinosaur Monster,” I replied. “I’m sure,” said Trevor

confidently. "Well, OK, son," I carried on. "You're probably right. But it's OK for you to come back to the church with this lady." There was silence on the other end of the line. Then Trevor said, "Who is this?" "It's me, your father, Mickey Moore! Now get in the car and come on!" "All right," he replied and hung up.

Moore went on to say: "It was an odd feeling to be interrogated by my six-year-old son. He knew the word, and even though he was given words that were very close to the real thing, they weren't true—and he knew the difference."

When you are a new Christian, you don't know the Word like you should. No problem. **But**, you're not to remain in that state. Ephesians tells you that God has given us teachers so...

Ephesians 4:14 ----- that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting...

As pastors and teachers share the Word, the Spirit of God equips you to stand against false teaching. False teachers, John says:

1 John 4:5 They are of the world [embrace an unbiblical message]. Therefore they speak as of the world [their message is unbiblical], and the world hears them. [worldly people receive such a message]

(Evolution and abortion are just two examples of this...)

John says the false prophets are **of the world**. But (verse 6):

1 John 4:6 We [= the apostles] are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

The apostles were "of God" because everything they wrote was directly from God.

And this brings us to our final point:

5. **The person who rejects apostolic teaching is out of touch with God**

1 John 4:6 ----- We are of God. He who knows God hears us; **he who is not of God does not hear us**. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Paul and the other apostles gave us the very words of God Himself. When you go against apostolic teaching, you go against God Almighty Himself!!!

How do we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error?

If a spirit was in accordance with the teachings of Christ and the apostles, it was of God. If it was not in accordance it was not of God.

Close:

In his book *Immeasurable*, Skye Jethani writes:

Compare two leaders. **Leader A lifted** an entire nation in a time of despair. He mobilized his people against unimaginable odds with a clear vision and inspiring passion. He launched a movement that has impacted literally everyone alive today. He set in motion an industrial and scientific revolution that produced the first computer, the first jet airplane, began human exploration of space, and unlocked the mystery of nuclear energy. Almost every aspect of the modern world has, in one way or another, been influenced by this man. By the time he died at the age of only 56, everyone on the planet knew his name. Without a doubt, Leader A changed the world.

Leader B lived during the same era. In fact, he died just 21 days before Leader A, but his life was very different. At the height of his influence, Leader B ran a school with just 100 students. He wrote a few books but was not widely regarded. He was beloved by his friends and family and had a reputation for being both intelligent and faithful, but at the time of his death almost no one knew his name, and most considered his life's work unfulfilled—including Leader B himself.

So given the choice...which leadership conference would you rather attend—the one featuring a keynote address by Leader A or the one with the small workshop in a back hall led by Leader B? If you are inspired by the world changing effectiveness of Leader A, congratulations! **You've chosen Adolf Hitler**. Leader B was Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor who was executed by the Nazis for his relentless opposition to Hitler.

(Closing comments)