

# 1 John 4:1 Commentary

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FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD AND HIS CHILDREN  
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Another Overview Chart - [1 John](#) - Charles Swindoll

BASIS OF FELLOWSHIP		BEHAVIOR OF FELLOWSHIP	
Conditions of Fellowship	Cautions of Fellowship	Fellowship Characteristics	Fellowship Consequences
Meaning of Fellowship 1 Jn 1:1-2:27		Manifestations of Fellowship 1 Jn 2:28-5:21	
Abiding in God's Light		Abiding in God's Love	
Written in Ephesus			
circa 90 AD			

From Talk Thru the Bible

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

**Greek** - Agaphetoi me panti pneumatī **pisteuete** (2PPAM) alla **dokimazete** (2PPAM) ta pneumata ei ek tou theou estin (3SPAI) hoti polloi pseudoprophetai exeleluthasin (3PRAI) eis ton kosmon:

- **Do not believe** - Dt 13:1-5 Pr 14:15 Jer 5:31 Jer 29:8,9 Mt 7:15,16 Mt 24:4,5 Ro 16:18 2Pe 2:1
- **Test** - Lu 12:57 Ac 17:11 Ro 16:19 1Co 14:29 1Th 5:21 Rev 2:2
- **Many** - 1Jn 2:18 Mt 24:5,23-26 Mk 13:21 Lu 21:8 Ac 20:29 1Ti 4:1 2Ti 3:13 2Pe 2:1 2Jn 1:7

- [1 John 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
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## SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT: DON'T BELIEVE & PUT TO THE TEST EVERY SPIRIT

John is calling on believers to continually be alert to the danger of spiritual deception, which is an ever present danger.

Matthew 7:15; 16-note " **Beware** (present imperative, calling for continual state of spiritual alertness) of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. "**You will know them by their fruits** Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they?

Matthew 24:4; 5-note And Jesus answered and said to them, "**See to it** (present imperative) that no one misleads you. "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many.

Romans 16:18-note For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting (Gk - akakos - of one not expecting to be involved in evil innocent, [naïve](#)).

2 Peter 2:1-note But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce (pareisago - see study of great "word picture") destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.

John has just described "**the Spirit** (pneuma) **Whom (God) has given us**" Who gives us assurance that God abides in us and we in Him (1Jn 3:24-note). But John knows that there are other "spirit" but they are not holy but are unholy liars and deceivers! So now John gives the saints truth that will allow them to test whether the **spirit** is from God or from the evil one. He is pointing out that other "spirits" exist, but they are demonic and one of their evil works is to "teach" false prophets and teachers false doctrine so that the saints will be led astray from the truth. We are to always **believe** the Holy Spirit, but never to **believe** an unholy spirit. And how does an unholy spirit manifest itself? Through the false teaching of unholy men, **false prophets**, of which John warns there are **many**! Indeed, just because a prophet or a teacher uses the language of the Bible, God, and Jesus does not mean that he is a true child of God, a true prophet in the sense of one who speaks forth God's word. Indeed, they may profess to believe in Christ, but they believe in another Jesus (2Cor 11:2-4) and in another Gospel (Gal 1:6-8).

**Simon J. Kistemaker** - With this text John begins the third part of his epistle; the first section begins at 1Jn 1:5, and the second at 1Jn 2:18. There is a distinct parallel between the second part and the third. Both parts expound the following topics: A warning against the antichrist, children of God, love for God and one another. In the first few verses of each section, John speaks of antichrists or false teachers. He exhorts the readers to put the teaching of false prophets to the test. Christians have to be able to detect false teachings and to examine the spirit that expresses them. ([New Testament Commentary - James, Epistles of John, Peter, and Jude](#))

**Steven Cole** see 1Jn 4:1-6 as falling "into three parts: John gives us the reason for discernment (1Jn 4:1); the basis for discernment (1Jn 4:2-3); and, the evidence of discernment (1Jn 4:4-6). ([Spiritual Discernment 1 John 4:1-6](#))

**Ray Stedman** titles his sermon on 1Jn 4:1-6 "[When Unbelief is Right](#)" and in his introductions says "every Christian is also called to be an unbeliever. There is a time when unbelief is the right thing and the only right thing. The very same Scriptures which encourage us to believe likewise urge us not to believe. In fact, they not only urge us, they command us not to believe. This is no contradiction, any more than to say that in order to live it is necessary both to inhale and to exhale. These are contradictory things: You cannot inhale and exhale at the same time, but both are absolutely necessary to maintaining life. You cannot inhale unless you exhale, and you cannot exhale unless you have inhaled. It is the same with this matter of belief and unbelief. You cannot believe truth without rejecting error. You cannot love righteousness unless you are ready to hate sin. You cannot accept Christ without rejecting self. "If any man come after me," Jesus says, "let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me," Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34). You cannot follow good unless you are ready to flee from evil. So it is not surprising, therefore, that the Scriptures tell us we are not to believe, as well as to believe. This is what John declares in the first three verses of Chapter 4. (In Stedman's closing words he says) "God help us to be *unbelievers in error* as well as *believers in truth*." (Ed: And all God's people said "Amen!") ([When Unbelief is Right - 1 John 4:1-3](#))

**NET Note - 1John 4:1–6** form one of three units within 1 John that almost all interpreters consider a single unit and do not divide up (the other two are 1Jn 2:12–14 and 1Jn 2:15–17). The subject matter is so clearly different from the surrounding context that these clearly constitute separate units of thought. Since the Holy Spirit is not the only spirit active in the world, the author needs to qualify for the recipients how to tell if a spirit comes from God. The "test" is the confession in 1Jn 4:2.

**David Smith** - The apostle has just said that the Spirit begets in us the assurance that God abideth in us. And this suggests a warning. The Cerinthian heresy ([Cerinthians - Watson's Biblical & Theological Dictionary](#)) also had much to say about 'the spirit.' It boasted a larger spirituality. Starting with the philosophical postulate of an irreconcilable antagonism between matter and spirit, it **denied the possibility of the incarnation and drew a distinction between Jesus and the Christ**. Its spirit was not 'the Spirit of Truth' but 'a spirit of error,' and thus the necessity arises of 'proving the spirits.' ([1 John 3 - Expositor's Greek Testament Commentary](#))

**Vine** introduces 1John 4:1-6 - The apostle now seeks to give his readers a means of assurance that what has been ministered is the truth, in contrast to the errors advanced by false teachers. He shows that there are two spirits in the world, and sets these in sharp contrast. The one is the Holy Spirit who abides in the believer, as mentioned at the end of the third chapter. The other is the spirit of the Antichrist which is in the world. The one is the Spirit of Truth, the other is the spirit of error. We are to be assured as to whether we are being led by the Spirit of God, or by the spirit of error. We are therefore to prove the spirits whether they are of God, that is, whether they proceed from God. The main connection between this chapter and the preceding one is that chapter three shows the necessity of proving our relationship to God by our actions; the beginning of chapter four continues the theme, but puts it another way, namely, that confession of truth attests the fact of relationship to God. The immediate connection between the two chapters lies in the mention of the Spirit of God. ([The Collected Writings of W. E. Vine](#))

**MacArthur** introduces 1Jn 4:1-6- John turns from the importance of love to the importance of belief in God's truth. He focuses once again on the doctrinal test and emphasizes the need to obey sound teaching (Mt 24:11; 2Pe 2:2, 3; Jude 1:3). Scripture presents stern warnings against false doctrine. From his temptation of Eve on, Satan has sought to distort and deny God's Word (Ge 3:1-5). He is the ultimate demonic source behind all false teachers and false doctrine (2Co 11:13, 14). In this section, John gives two doctrinal tests to determine truth from error and false teachers from true teachers. ([MacArthur Study Bible](#))

**Beloved** ([27](#))(**agapetos** from **agapao** = to love, **agape** = unconditional love borne by Spirit) is God's description of His Son (Mt 3:17) and John's term of endearment which expresses his Spirit energized love for the believers to whom he is writing. They are dear to him and very much beloved. **Agapetos** speaks of the special relationship and preciousness of the recipients. This word is used only of believers and is found 5 times in this epistle (1Jn 3:2, 3:21, 4:1, 4:7, 4:11). It is interesting that in secular Greek agapetos was used most often of children, and especially of an only child upon whom all the love of the parents was bestowed.

**Westcott** - The existence of a subtle spiritual danger calls out the tenderness of love. ([1 John 4 Commentary](#))

**Robertson** on **agapetos** - Three times in this chapter (1John 4:1, 1John 4:7, 1John 4:11) we have this tender address on love.

**Vincent** - Again the recognition of danger from false spirits prompts this affectionate address. Compare 1John 3:21. ([Vincent's Word Studies](#))

**Do no believe** (**pisteuo** from **pistis**) is in the form of a **present imperative with a negative** which is a John's charge to the saints to not begin to accept as true or worthy of their trust (every spirit). This verb form can also mean to cease an action (believing) that is already in process. They were gullible in an area where naivety (Pr 14:15) can be deadly and some apparently were being swept along by the false teacher's erroneous teaching, especially as it related to Jesus Christ. John is telling the genuine believers to not even give intellectual assent to what the spirits are saying. Don't put your faith or trust in what they are saying. Openness to new teaching is not a virtue but a potential trap!

**Vine** - While we have the assurance that Christ abides in us by the Spirit which He gave us, yet we are to be on our guard against deceptive spirits. Our assurance should be the means of increasing our powers of discernment in regard to contrary influences. The tense of the verb is continuous, it suggests that we are to be in the habit of refusing to believe every spirit. Not that all who come to teach us are to be regarded as false simply because we are unacquainted with them and their antecedent associations. There must be discernment. ([The Collected Writings of W. E. Vine](#))

Jeremiah recorded a similar warning from Jehovah to Judah "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, 'Do not let your prophets who are in your midst and your diviners deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams which they dream.'" (Jer 29:8) Notice that the goal of false prophets was deception, as it was in John's day and as it is in other day. The best "antidote" for their lies and errors they propagate is a sure knowledge of the truth. John is saying do not gullibly buy into their lies, but test them with the acid test of 1Jn 4:2-3.

**Stedman** observes that "It is significant that this warning comes in the midst of John's discourse about love (Ed: Love is major subject in preceding [1Jn 3:10-24] and following sections [1Jn 4:7-21]), because it is rather evident that the false spirits which are abroad make a great deal of the subject of love... It is significant and striking that every cult, every deviant group, every movement of our day that seeks to solicit support, religiously speaking, does so in the name of love... There is no word, perhaps, in our language, that is capable of being stretched in so many directions as this word, love. Yet so many people seem utterly gullible about

it. If someone comes talking about love, this to them is the earmark they must be of God, they must be "of the truth," despite the fact that the oldest trick in Satan's bag is to show a spirit of friendly concern and to appear to offer the fulfillment of love and desire... But the Scriptures warn us that the mark of childish immaturity is to be caught up and taken in by that kind of approach, "to be tossed about by every wind of doctrine" (Ephesians 4:14), every new teaching that comes along. It is childish to gullibly swallow every slick line and go along with it. It is quite true, therefore, that a mark of maturity is unbelief, as well as belief. It is as important that you do not believe certain things as it is that you do believe others, and John is making that clear. Notice, he indicates that this is a widespread problem. "Many false prophets," he says, "have gone out into the world." In Matthew's Gospel, the Lord Jesus warned of this: "beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves," (Matthew 7:15). Wolves in sheep's clothing -- outwardly appearing to be loving, tender, and concerned, but inwardly desiring only to wreck and ravish and to ruin. There are many false prophets, says John. Here again we have underlined for us the fact that we live in a world of deceit. We live, in many respects, in a hostile environment in which falsehoods are widely accepted, and we are greatly pressured to conform to these things."([When Unbelief is Right](#))

**Every spirit** - The question arises is whether John intends this phrase to refer to human spirits or spiritual beings who influence, but the context supports the interpretation that behind the false prophets with their false Christology is the spirit of the antichrist, and ultimately the spirit of the consummate liar Satan (1Jn 4:3), and behind the spirit of believers to which he is writing is the Spirit of God. (Compare the phrase "the spirit of truth and the spirit of error" in 1Jn 4:6b)

Since one cannot see a spirit, **spirits** is a metonymy for the the human agents (and their teachings) who manifested the antichrist spirit. The **false prophets** are the ones who willingly spoke error. However do not miss the significance of what John is saying using the word "spirit" -- he could have just plainly stated "do not believe every false prophet" but he did not. In using the word "spirit" he was calling our attention to the literal spiritual war that is raging in the unseen world, the spirit of error on one side and the Spirit of truth on the other. **Do not let the invisibility of our enemy lull us into complacency and indifference regarding our absolute necessity** to daily, moment by moment

**Put on** (aorist imperative = Do it now! Do not delay! The need is urgent!) the **full armor** of God that (we) **may be able** to stand firm against the schemes (see Greek word **methodeia**) of the **devil**, for our **struggle** is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places!" (Eph 6:11-12-note)

In a parallel passage in 1Ti 4:1 Paul says that "the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons." How are those "doctrines of demons" propagated, except by human agents who are in a sense the "missionaries" of the evil one!

In 1Cor 14:32 Paul writes " the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets."

**Hiebert** - The reality of extraordinary and powerful spirits speaking through human beings as their mouth-piece, proclaiming varied and sundry messages, was well known in the pagan world of John's day. ([The Epistles of John- An Expositional Commentary](#))

**Spirit** (4151)(**pneuma** from **pneo** - to blow) speaks of the movement of air (blowing Jn 3:8, breathing Lk 8:55). In this context it clearly refers to evil spirits and indicates that behind the false teachings of the pseudo-prophets were spirits of lying and deceit and falsehood. The false prophets were merely the "front men," the physical dummies if you will of the evil spirit "ventriloquists" so to speak.

**Wuest on spirit** - The word as used here refers to "one in whom a spirit is manifest or embodied, hence one actuated by a spirit, whether divine or demonical" (Thayer). Paul finds the source of false doctrine in demons who actuate the false teachers who propound heresy (1Ti 4:1 "doctrines of demons" [**daimonion**]). Thus these spirits are human beings actuated either by demons or the Holy Spirit. In this case they would be the teachers, pastors, and evangelists who circulated around the local churches. (Word Studies from the Greek New Testament)

**Steven Cole** - A familiar falsehood goes, "*It doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you believe in something*" That is sheer nonsense! You can believe that you can fly and leap from the edge of the Grand Canyon, flapping your arms for all you're worth. But believing such falsehood has no effect on keeping you in the air. Of course, those who argue that it doesn't matter what you believe would say that there is a great difference between science and spiritual matters. They would say that science is objectively true, whereas spiritual matters are subjectively true. If it "works" for you, then it's "true." But that assumes that God is merely a projection of people's imaginations, rather than that He actually exists and that He is the creator of all that is. The Bible assumes rather that God really exists and that He spoke the heavens and earth into existence (Ge 1:1). Furthermore, the Bible teaches the actual existence of Satan and other fallen angels, called demons. John's teaching here assumes that behind all truth in the spiritual realm is the Spirit of truth (Jn 14:17; 15:26). Behind all spiritually false teaching is "the spirit of error" (1John 4:6), led by Satan, but including all of his demonic forces. Whether they know it or not, behind every false prophet or false teacher is an evil spirit promoting the

errors that they teach. From the day that Satan deceived Eve in the garden, until the last days, when the final antichrist will deceive the world (2Th. 2:3-12), **evil spirits have promoted false teaching to lead people away from the living and true God** When John says, "many false prophets have gone out into the world," we should realize that these were not sinister, evil looking characters. They didn't blatantly encourage Satan-worship or child-sacrifice. They used Christian lingo and professed to believe in Jesus. No doubt, they had attractive personalities and convincing arguments. Jesus called them wolves in sheep's clothing (Mt. 7:15). Paul warned that these men disguise themselves as apostles of Christ and servants of righteousness. Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, not darkness (2Cor 11:13-14). ([Spiritual Discernment 1 John 4:1-6](#))

**But (alla)** - A strong contrast! Always stop and query this **term of contrast**, asking at least what is the author contrasting? **But** usually marks a "change of direction" so to speak. Make sure you understand what is being contrasted. "The reality of extraordinary and powerful spirits speaking through human beings as their mouth-piece, proclaiming varied and sundry messages, was well known in the pagan world of John's day. The use of the adversative "**but**" (alla) marks the contrast between an attitude of credulity and intelligent discrimination." ([Hiebert](#))

**Guzik** makes a great point about **believing** without **testing** - John warned against believing every spirit; that is, we are never to assume every spiritual experience or every demonstration of spiritual power is from God. We must test spiritual experiences and spiritual phenomenon to see if they are in fact from God. Many, when first encountering the reality of the spiritual world, are too impressed and amazed to ask whether they are of God. This leads to easy deception. ([1 John 4 Commentary](#))

**John Trapp** on **test the spirits** - As lapidaries do their stones, as goldsmiths do their metals. A Bristol stone may look as well as an Indian diamond; and many things glitter besides gold. Try therefore before you trust that which is doctrinally delivered unto you; being neither overly credulous, -the fool believeth everything; nor rashly censorious, as those were that said of our Saviour, "This man blasphemeth." ([1 John 4 Commentary](#))

**Brian Bell** - "Test" – but how? Well consider 3 things: [1] Consider their Creed (1Jn 4:2,3) [2] Consider their Crowd (1Jn 4:4-6) [3] Consider their Love (1Jn 4:7-21)

**Test** ([1381](#))(**dokimazo** from **dokimos** = tested, proved or approved, tried as metals by fire and thus purified <> **dechomai** = to accept, receive) means to put to the test for the purpose of approving like coins tested for genuineness as determined by whether it has met the required specifications. John is issuing a command in the **present imperative**, calling for the saints to continually put the spirit to the test to determine the genuineness, whether from God or the devil. The second-person plural calls for all the readers to apply this test. Even as metallurgists used **dokimazo** to describe assaying metals to determine their purity and value, so too saints were to be "spiritual metallurgists" so to speak! John's implication is that these "spirits" (and especially the teaching of their false prophets) were not pure, genuine or trustworthy!

**Stott** remarks that in testing the spirits it is essential that believers maintain "the biblical balance, avoiding on the one hand the extreme superstition which believes everything and on the other the extreme suspicion which believes nothing." ([The Letters of John](#))

**A T Robertson** on **dokimazo** means to "Put them to the acid test of truth as the metallurgist does his metals. If it stands the test like a coin, it is acceptable (**dokimos** 2Corinthians 10:18), otherwise it is rejected (**adokimos** 1Cor 9:27; 2Cor 13:5-7)." ([Word Pictures of the New Testament](#))

**Wuest** explains that the teacher "was not to be put to the test for the purpose of condemning him, but with the intent to approve him. The brother was not to be treated as a heretic before he had shown himself to be one."

Believers are to be like the Bereans for as Luke wrote these "were more noble-minded than those (Jews) in Thessalonica, for they received (**dechomai** = put out the "welcome mat" for) the word with great eagerness, examining (**anakrino**) the Scriptures daily, [to see] whether these things were so. Many of them therefore believed." (Acts 17:11-12-note) And so the best way to examine any teaching from anyone is to compare it with Scripture.

Writing to the saints at Thessalonica Paul gave a general charge to "not **despise** prophetic utterances (spoken and especially written words of Biblical truth). But **examine** (**dokimazo**) everything [carefully:] **hold fast** to that which is good; **abstain** from every form of evil." (Note all verbs in red are **present imperatives** calling for continual action, something only possible by continually relying on the Spirit) (1Th 5:20-note, 1Th 5:21-22-note)

As **Guzik** says "True prophecy, and true teaching, will present a true Jesus."

**To see whether they are from God** - That is to see whether God is indeed the Source of what they are saying. **Westcott** adds "whether they derive from Him their characteristic being and their power."

John is explaining to this beloved little children" that there are two spiritual spheres coexisting in the world, one the domain of the



Holy Spirit and the other the domain of the evil spirit, Satan, the Devil and they are diametrically opposed to one another, with no possibility of compromise. The former is light, the latter is dark. The former is truth, the latter is error.

**Barclay** on the phrase **from God** (6x in 5v - 1Jn 4:1, 2, 3, 4, 6) - What then does it mean that a person, or a spirit, or a quality *isēk tou theou*? The simplest translation is "**from God**." But what does "**from**" mean in that phrase? Quite certainly it means that the person, the spirit or the quality has its origin in God. It comes "**from**" God in the sense that it takes its origin in Him and its life from Him. So John, for instance, bids his people to test the spirits to see whether they really have their source in God. Love, he says, has its origin in God (1Jn 4:7). (Daily Study Bible)

## KINGDOMS IN CONFLICT

**Because** - Whenever you encounter is a **term of explanation**, pause and ask what is the author explaining? In this case John is explaining why the believers needed to put the spirit (of the teacher) to the test. The key is that there are **many false prophets** who have gone out from the body.

**Many (pollus)** - Not just a few but **many**! The danger is already on the scene for there are many false prophets already at work, exerting a potentially negative impact on the early church. Jesus had explicitly foretold the coming of such false prophets (Mt. 7:15-**note**; Mt 24:11, 15; Mk 13:21–23) as had Paul (Acts 20:28–30) and Peter (2Pe 2:1-**note**).

**Many false prophets have gone out** - As **Kistemaker** says they "have made the world their lecture hall. They desire to gain a hearing from a number of Christians. In his discourse on the end of time, Jesus warns us, "For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible" (Matt. 24:24; also consult Rev. 2:2-**note**)."  
([New Testament Commentary - James, Epistles of John, Peter, and Jude](#))

**Westcott** - The 'many false prophets' stand in a relation towards the Spirit like that which the 'many Antichrists' occupy towards Christ (1Jn 2:18-**note**). Through them evil spiritual powers find expression. Spirits therefore must be proved... Such watchful care is required because many false prophets, through whom the false spirits speak, as the Spirit speaks through the true prophets (2Pe. 1:21-**note**, 2Pe 2:1-**note**), are gone out into the world. 'The spirit of antichrist' inspires them. So 'false Christs' and 'false prophets' are joined together (Matt. 24:24). ([1 John 4 Commentary](#))

**Ray Stedman** - It is important to note that there is here a very clear recognition of what the Bible teaches all the way through -- that behind the false prophet or false teacher is an evil spirit. Men simply do not speak out of their own intellectual attainments. Quite unconscious to themselves they are being guided -- and misguided -- by an evil spirit, a "spirit of error" John calls it, an anti-Christian spirit which is behind these false prophets and teachers. There is a true Spirit, the Holy Spirit of truth, the Spirit of love, and just as he speaks through men, so evil spirits, false spirits, the spirits of error, also speak through men. When you hear men and women talking about religious things or values, do not gullibly swallow everything they say, especially if they appear to be attractively setting forth something about love and sweetness and light and concern for others. Especially test that line, for it is the usual approach of error. Recognize that behind the individual may be a spirit of error. We moderns are in much greater danger than the ancients, for in the world of John and Paul's day, the 1st century, there was a widespread recognition of the existence of invisible spirits, the invisible realities behind the scenes of life. Everywhere the ancient world recognized these as gods and goddesses, and bowed down to them... In the 20th century, we pride ourselves upon the fact that we have grown beyond this, we have come of age. Man is intellectually unable to accept this kind of thing today. As a result we expose ourselves without any defense at all to the control of these evil spirits... We must recognize that the pronouncements of men in this field of religion and spiritual teaching, no matter whether they be professors in seminaries or colleges, or whether they be pastors behind pulpits, or whatever they may be, are not a result of their keen logic or their academic training or their perceptive thinking, alone. These men are oftentimes unaware of the twist that is given to their thinking by the activity of evil spirits, spirits of error. The premises they adopt, which they never seem to examine, are often totally wrong, and in their blindness they base logical deductions upon illogical premises. But we so often seem to be unaware of this. You must remember that you can never recognize this kind of error by listening and reading the arguments. I am not saying it is wrong to read the arguments, but you will not see the error in them that way. For if you read these books, and listen to the messages, they always sound clear, convincing and logical, taken by themselves. That is the way error makes its approach to us. The only way to discover it is to do as John says -- test it. Test these spirits, try them. Lay them alongside a measuring stick, and if they do not match, throw them out. ([When Unbelief is Right](#))

Moses gave Israel clear objective criteria for testing the spirits of the prophets in the Old Testament just as John does here in the NT...

1 "If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, 2 and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,' 3 you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of

dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. 4 "You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him. 5 "But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion against the LORD your God who brought you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, to seduce you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from among you. (Dt 13:1-5)

In Deuteronomy **false prophets** stand were contrasted with the **True Prophet the Messiah**, Moses promised would one day come to Israel...

The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to Him. 16 "This is according to all that you asked of the LORD your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, lest I die.' 17 "And the LORD said to me, 'They have spoken well. 18 'I will raise up a Prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him (referring to the Messiah). 19 'And it shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which He shall speak in My name, I Myself will require [it] of him. 20 (**FALSE PROPHETS**) 'But the prophet who shall speak a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he shall speak in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.' 21 "And you may say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?' 22 "When a prophet speaks in the Name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him. (Dt 18:15-22)

So from Dt 13:1-5 and Dt 18:15-22 the tests of a false prophet were (1) whether they encouraged idolatry and (2) whether their predictions came true or not. See also Dt 13:1-5; Jer 23:9-22; 28:9. Notice that performance of "**a sign or a wonder**" even if it came to pass, was not to be taken as a marker of an authentic prophet of God. As John goes on to explain in 1Jn 4:2-3-**note**, these spirits were to be tested by the objective criterion of whether or not they confess (**see what "confession" entails in 1Jn 4:2**) that Jesus has come in the flesh (**see discussion of this in comments on 1Jn 4:2**). Paul gave a similar test of authenticity in First Corinthians...

Therefore I make known to you, that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. (1Cor 12:3)

**F F Bruce:** "In Deuteronomy two tests are laid down to determine whether a prophet is truly a spokesman of God or not: (i) 'if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously, you need not be afraid of him' (Dt. 18. 22); (ii) even if the word which the prophet speaks comes true, yet if he tries to lead his hearers astray to serve other gods, he is a false prophet (Dt. 13. 1-5). The presence of true prophets in the church of New Testament days stimulated the activity of others who claimed to be prophets but whose claims were unfounded -- or, if they did speak by inspiration, showed by the content of their utterances that the spirit that spoke through them was not the Spirit of God. In either case they were false prophets: men who falsely claimed to speak by inspiration or men who were inspired by a spirit of falsehood. To test the prophets then was in effect to test the spirits by whose impulsion they spoke. John indeed envisages but two spirits -- the Spirit of God and the spirit of Antichrist. ([The Epistles of John- Introduction, Exposition, and Notes](#))

**False prophets (5578)** (**pseudoprophetes** from **pseudes** = false, untrue + **prophetes** = prophet) who teach false doctrines clearly to deceive unwary or unsuspecting saints. These men (1) claim to be prophets from God but in fact are not and (2) they utter falsehoods under the name of divine prophecies. This is the same word John uses to describe the evil false prophet of the end times, the "front man" if you will for the Antichrist (Rev 16:13-[note](#); Rev 19:20-[note](#). Rev 20:10-[note](#)).

Jesus had warned (actually commanded) the hearers of the Sermon on the Mount to continually "**Beware** of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves." (Mt 7:15-**note**)

**A T Robertson** on **false prophets** - Jesus had warned people against them (Mt 7:15), even when they as false Christs work portents (Mt 24:11, Mt 24:24; Mk 13:22). It is an old story (Luke 6:26) and recurs again and again (Acts 13:6; Rev 16:13; Rev 19:20; Rev 20:10) along with false teachers (2Pe 2:1). ([Word Pictures of the New Testament](#))

**Vincent** - The false prophet supports his claims by signs and portents (Matthew 24:24; Acts 13:6; Revelation 19:20) and is thus distinguished from the false teacher. See 2 Peter 2:1, where the two terms occur together. ([Vincent's Word Studies](#))

**Peter** warned "false prophets (**pseudoprophetes**) also arose among the people (referring to the Old Testament), just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will **secretly introduce** destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them (Notice that they deny Christ), bringing swift destruction upon themselves. 2 Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them

the way of the truth will be maligned; 3 and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. (2Peter 2:1-3) Notice the verb "secretly introduce" (**pareisago** from **pará** = at the side of + **eiságo** = bring in or introduce) which means that these teachers would not come in with a pitchfork and a red suit, but that they would subtly interweave lies with a veneer of truth. And just as a dash of strychnine kills, so too their erroneous teachings were deadly.

By **false prophets** John is referring to the **secessionists** (those who withdrew from fellowship and communion with the Body of Christ) had described earlier writing "They **went out from** (**exerchomai** = same verb as here in 1Jn 4:1) us, but they were not [really] of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but [they went out,] in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us." (1Jn 2:19-note)

**Gone out** (1831)(**exerchomai** from **ek** = out + **érchomai** = to go or come) means to depart out of (Heb 11:8). John use of the **perfect tense** signifies they went out at a point in time and are still out there seeking to dupe unsuspecting souls with their "spiritual tonic water". The **perfect tense** emphasize that men of this ilk were here to stay. "They are abroad always." (Robertson) And indeed they are still present in our day, masquerading as genuine speakers for God.

**Jude** warned the saints of the serpentine infiltration of demonically directed deceivers with their deceptive doctrine...

Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain persons **have crept in unnoticed** (see note below on this picturesque verb **pareisduno**.- Where are they? Inside the body!), those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. (Jude 1:3-4-note)

**Comment:** They are like the men John describes in 1Jn 4:3 who do "not confess Jesus is not from God" and clearly are of "the spirit of the antichrist."

**Barclay** on **crept in unnoticed** - The Greek (**pareisduno**) is a very expressive word. It is used of the spacious and seductive words of a clever pleader seeping gradually into the minds of a judge and jury; it is used of an outlaw slipping secretly back into the country from which he has been expelled; it is used of the slow and subtle entry of innovations into the life of state, which in the end undermine and break down the ancestral laws. It always indicates a stealthy insinuation of something evil into a society or situation. Certain evil men had insinuated themselves into the church. They were the kind of men for whom judgment was waiting. They were impious creatures, godless in their thought and life. Jude picks out two characteristics about them. ([Jude 1 - William Barclay's Daily Study Bible](#))

**Paul** warned the elders at the church at Ephesus to be on the alert for false teachers

**Be on guard** (**present imperative**) for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in **among you** (Look out! It will be an "inside job" so to speak!), not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. (Acts 20:28-30)

**World** (2889)(**kosmos**) can refer to the spiritual world opposed which is totally opposed and actively antagonistic to God (as used in 1Jn 2:15-17-note), but in this **context** refers simply to the planet earth which is inhabited by men.

**Steven Cole** - True faith is not a blind leap into the dark. It examines its object carefully before putting trust in it. Thus, as **John Stott** observes ([The Letters of John](#)), both Paul and John assumed, as the Reformers insisted, that "*even the humblest Christian possessed 'the right of private judgment' ... and both could and should apply the objective test John is about to give in the next verse.*" We need spiritual discernment because Satan and his forces are alive and well, promoting error at every opportunity. ([Spiritual Discernment 1 John 4:1-6](#))

**Guy King** writes - There are many spirits abroad in the world to-day angling for our adherence and allegiance; and there is a type of Christian, ill-instructed in the Scriptures (which, incidentally, the wrong spirits misquote ad lib.), who are only too readily gullible to every front-door exponent of false teaching - only too liable to "**believe... every spirit**" (1Jn 4:1). Apparently, it was very much the same in John's day; and, under Divine guidance, he offers the members of the Fellowship (now, as well as then) an acid test whereby the real nature, whether true or false, can be determined. "Hereby know ye the Spirit of God" (2). **Try this next time they come to your doorstep!** What, then, is the Test? "Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that confesseth not ... is not of God, and this is that spirit of antichrist" (1Jn 4:2-3). For many years this passage troubled me, because I could not see why such tremendous issues should hang upon so simple a thing as the acknowledgment that JESUS



CHRIST was an historical personage. Of course He was: even these false spirits will agree to that. Secular historians, quite independently of the Bible - Josephus, Pliny, for instance - record the fact. Before giving you my conviction, let me remind you that "JESUS" is the Name of the Master's Humanity, and that "CHRIST" is the title of His Deity, the Divine anointed One come to be the promised and predicted Messiah, Saviour, and KING. Do you see now what I am driving at? Yes; this is the suggested meaning behind the verse, "Every spirit that confesseth that JESUS is CHRIST come in the flesh..." An acknowledgment, you see, of His Deity. 1Jn 5:1 of the Epistle supports my interpretation, doesn't it? And the first and fundamental test of every spirit claiming to be of GOD is, "What think ye of Christ?" (Matthew 22:42). If you are satisfied that they believe that He was more than a wonderful, remarkable Man, more than a unique Man, the Best ever, that, indeed, they confess to a belief in His true, real, complete Deity - then you can proceed to a further examination. If they do not hold this belief, this passage justifies you - even instructs you - to close the interview. Waste no further time!

**Warren Wiersbe** - A missionary to the American Indians was in Los Angeles with an Indian friend who was a new Christian. As they walked down the street, they passed a man on the corner who was preaching with a Bible in his hand. The missionary knew the man represented a cult, but the Indian saw only the Bible. He stopped to listen to the sermon.

"I hope my friend doesn't get confused," the missionary thought to himself, and he began to pray. In a few minutes the Indian turned away from the meeting and joined his missionary friend.

"What did you think of the preacher?" the missionary asked.

"All the time he was talking," exclaimed the Indian, "something in my heart kept saying, 'Liar! Liar!'"

That "something" in his heart was "Someone"—the Holy Spirit of God! The Spirit guides us into the truth and helps us to recognize error. This anointing of God is "no lie," because "the Spirit is truth" (1John 5:6). (Bible Exposition Commentary)

**Craig Keener** - Judaism especially associated the Spirit of God with prophecy but acknowledged the existence of false prophets, who John says are moved by other spirits. His readers would understand his point; Jewish people were familiar with the idea of other spirits besides the Spirit of God. **There were many pagan ecstasies in Asia Minor, as well as Jewish mystics claiming special revelations; the need for discernment would be acute.** ([The IVP Bible Background Commentary- New Testament](#)) (Bolding added)

**Steven Cole** introduces his sermon on 1Jn 4:1-6 with some interesting remarks...

P. T. Barnum made a fortune on the theory that "a sucker is born every minute," and he has many disciples today. The Internet has only widened the door of opportunity for those that prey on the unsuspecting. I have read that the second most lucrative industry in Nigeria is scamming foolish Americans out of their money by promising to give them millions of dollars.

Perhaps even more widespread than financial scams are spiritual scams. False cults and religions lure millions into their traps, promising them fulfillment, happiness, and more. Mormonism is growing rapidly worldwide. Jehovah's Witnesses aggressively pro-mote their heresies in just about every country of the world. It has been predicted that Islam will take over Europe before the end of this century, and it is also growing in America. And, judging by the popularity of it, many Americans are apparently being sucked in by the blasphemous book and movie, [The Da Vinci code](#).

Even among those claiming to be evangelicals, who say that they believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, false teaching abounds. The "New Perspective on Paul," which has captured many evangelical scholars and pastors, undermines justification by faith alone. [The emerging church movement](#) embraces much of the [postmodern philosophy](#) that there is no absolute truth. Christianity Today (March, 2006, pp. 52-54) recently ran an article on a theologian who was at Bethel College, but now teaches at Regent University. He suggests that the Holy Spirit is at work in the world's other major religions and that Christians should "be open to learning from and being enriched by the Spirit's work in world religions" (p. 54)! With respect to other religions, he asks, "If others have something to say about God, should we not at least listen both sympathetically and critically?"

In addition to these blatant errors, the "seeker church" movement has subtly redefined the gospel, so that the issue is no longer that we are sinners who need reconciliation to a holy God. Rather, we are religious consumers with needs that God is willing and ready to meet, if we will just give Him a try. An ad this month in our local paper, sponsored by a seeker church, read,

*"Have you ever wanted more out of life? We can help! Discover powerful and easy secrets that have been proven and are guaranteed to give you the results you want. Whether you desire love, health, money or simply*

*more fulfillment and satisfaction in your life, now is the time to take advantage of this new and exclusive series being introduced for the first time in the Flagstaff area—absolutely free. Learn how you, too, can start seeing an immediate difference! No matter who you are, you, too, can profit from knowing these safe, trusted and easy-to-understand principles for personal growth and achievement. Stop missing out on the life you could be living. You have nothing to lose ... everything to gain!"*

The ad goes on to invite interested people to attend their first session, "How to Find That-Something-More." I wonder, are they going to get people in the door and then tell them that they must repent of their sins and deny self to follow Jesus as Lord? If not, what are they offering in the name of Christianity? Where does the Bible promise to grant sinners' desires for love, health, money, or more fulfillment and satisfaction?

Evangelical pastors often say that we don't need to emphasize doctrine or theology, because that is divisive. Rather, we need to come together on the areas where we agree and demonstrate love, tolerance, and unity to the world. This includes unity with the Roman Catholic Church, which teaches a false way of salvation.

In view of these many deceptive tactics by the enemy, John's words in our text are absolutely vital for the preservation of God's truth. (Many who buy into the current thinking would wince at my statement, which implies that there is such a thing as God's truth, and that anyone can know it and proclaim it.) After telling us (1Jn 3:23) that God's commandment is "that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another," John now (1Jn 4:1) tells us not to believe everything: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." John especially had in mind the false teachers who had left the church and were drawing others after them (1Jn 2:19, 22-23).

As **Ray Stedman** points out ([When Unbelief is Right - 1 John 4:1-3](#)), *"It is significant that this warning comes in the midst of John's discourse about love, because false spirits tend to make a great deal of the subject of love. Every cult, every deviant group, every false movement makes its appeal in the name of love."*

Like John, Paul emphasized the demonic aspect of false teachers (1Ti 4:1), "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons." Of course, the deceitful spirits and their demonic doctrines teach through people who advocate the false teaching. So we must pay close attention to John's words. ([Spiritual Discernment 1 John 4:1-6](#))

**Brian Bell** - (Music Artist Mickey Moore)- 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. 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. Do you know the difference between truth & error? – You can't unless you know the truth... "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth."

The late **A. W. Tozer** had some wise counsel on "How to Try the Spirits" (adapted from, Moody Monthly [12/79], pp. 51-55 - [Read an elaboration on the 7 principles in Chapter 29 of Tozer's book "Man the Dwelling Place of God"](#)). He posed seven tests to apply to any teaching:

- (1) How does the teaching affect my relationship with God? Is He magnified and glorified, or diminished?
- (2) How does the teaching affect my attitude toward the Lord Jesus Christ? Does it magnify Him and give Him first place? Or, does it subtly shift my focus onto myself or some experience?
- (3) How does the teaching affect my attitude toward Scripture? Did the teaching come from and agree with the Word? Does it increase my love for the Word?
- (4) How does the teaching affect my self-life? Does it feed self or crucify it? Does it feed pride or humility?
- (5) How does the teaching affect my relationships to other Christians? Does it cause me to withdraw, find fault, and exalt myself in superiority? Or, does it lead me to genuine love for all that truly know Christ?
- (6) How does the teaching affect my relationship to the world system? Does it lead me to pursue the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life? Does it lead me to pursue worldly riches, reputation,

and pleasures? Or, does it crucify the world to me?

(7) How does the teaching affect my attitude toward sin? Does it cause me to tolerate sin in my life or to turn from it and grow in holiness? Any teaching that makes holiness more acceptable and sin more intolerable is genuine. ([Spiritual Discernment 1 John 4:1-6](#))

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**Bait-And-Switch** - Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, ... because many false prophets have gone out into the world. — 1John 4:1 - In an unethical selling technique called the bait-and-switch method, a retailer lures customers into his store by advertising a well-known product at a very low price. When the buyer asks to purchase it, however, he is told that it is out of stock. The salesperson then tries to sell him an inferior line of merchandise, hoping to pocket a bigger profit. The brand name was used just to get potential customers to step inside.

In a similar way, a false teacher uses biblical words to capture interest and gain a hearing. He may talk about Christ, redemption, the cross, and the resurrection, but these “trusted terms” amount to nothing more than a come-on. The “seller” uses them to advertise truths that, as far as he is concerned, are “out of stock.” When an interested person responds, he is confronted by beliefs that are completely contrary to God’s Word.

Never swallow someone’s line just because he uses terms of the Christian faith. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you discern whether or not the speaker is really being true to the Bible. Then you won’t get hooked by false teachers who use the doctrinal bait-and-switch method to deceive their hearers. By Mart DeHaan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

When someone comes along who says  
His message is from God,  
What he believes about the Lord  
Will show if it is flawed.  
—Sper

Error often wears the disguise of truth.

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**Lost Books?** Read: 1John 4:1-3 | Everybody likes a good story, but many people are taking the best-selling novel The Da Vinci Code as historical fact. Central to the book’s plot line is the allegation that “lost books of the Bible” have been suppressed by the church for centuries. These lost books claim that Jesus married Mary Magdalene and had children with her. This radically misrepresents history and is misleading many people. These alleged “lost books of the Bible” were found at Nag Hammadi, Egypt, in 1945. They deny the biblical Jesus and promote goddess worship, self-deity, and secret knowledge. So why did the church exclude these books from the Bible? Because the documents did not meet the criteria for authentic Scripture, which involved several central questions: Was the writer someone Jesus had chosen as an apostle? Did the book have widespread acceptance among church leaders? Did God’s Spirit speak through it? The “lost books” did not pass these tests. All the books we have in our New Testament did.

When people question the trustworthiness of the Scriptures, we need to give them a respectful and an informed answer. It might just make them want to know more about our Bible—and our God. By Dennis Fisher ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

God's words of pure, eternal truth  
Shall yet unshaken stay,  
When all that man has thought or planned  
Like chaff shall pass away. —Anon.

To the wise, God's Word is sufficient.