

# 1 John 4:1 Commentary

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FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD AND HIS CHILDREN  
Click chart to enlarge  
Charts from [Jensen's Survey of the NT](#) - used by permission  
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 pneumat<sup>i</sup> pisteuete (2PPAM) alla dokimazete (2PPAM) ta pneumata ei ek tou theou estin (3SPAI) hoti polloi pseudoprophetai exeluthasin (3PRAI) eis ton kosmon:

KJV 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.

BGT 1 John 4:1 γαπητο , μ παντ πνε ματι πιστε ετε λλ δοκιμ ζετε τ πνε ματα ε κ το θεο σπιν, τι πολλο ψευδοπροφ ται ξεληλ θασιν ε ς τ ν κ σμον.

NET 1 John 4:1 Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to determine if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

CSB 1 John 4:1 Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to determine if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

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

NIV 1 John 4:1 Dear friends, 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.

NLT 1 John 4:1 Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world.

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

NJB 1 John 4:1 My dear friends, not every spirit is to be trusted, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets are at large in the world.

NAB 1 John 4:1 Beloved, do not trust every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they belong to God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

YLT 1 John 4:1 Beloved, every spirit believe not, but prove the spirits, if of God they are, because many false prophets have gone forth to the world;

MIT 1 John 4:1 Loved ones, do not trust every spirit, but test the spirits to determine their derivation. Does the spirit in question come from God? Such an analysis is necessary because many false prophets are at large in the world.

GWN 1 John 4:1 Dear friends, don't believe all people who say that they have the Spirit. Instead, test them. See whether the spirit they have is from God, because there are many false prophets in the world.

BBE 1 John 4:1 My loved ones, do not put your faith in every spirit, but put them to the test, to see if they are from God: because a great number of false prophets have gone out into the world.

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

NKJ 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.

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

- **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
- Related Resource: Critique of Online Resources for First John

#### Related Passages:

1 Timothy 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,

2 Timothy 3:13 But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

Matthew 7:15; 16+ " **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+ 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+ 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+ 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.

1 John 3:24+ The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit Whom He has given us.

1 Corinthians 12:3 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.

### **1 JOHN 4:1-6**

- The reason for discernment (1Jn 4:1)
- The basis for discernment (1Jn 4:2-3)
- The evidence of discernment (1Jn 4:4-6)

## **SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT: DON'T BELIEVE EVERY SPIRIT**

**John MacArthur** introduces this next section - The mention of the Holy Spirit in 1Jn 3:24 prompts John to inform his readers that other spirits exist, i.e., demonic spirits, who produce false prophets and false teachers to propagate their false doctrine (see 1Ti 4:1-2+). Christians are to have a healthy skepticism regarding any teaching, unlike some among John's congregations who were too open minded to anyone claiming a new teaching regarding the faith. Christians are to be like the Bereans who, as students of the Word, examined the Scriptures to determine truth and error (Acts 17:11, 12+). (See [MacArthur Study Bible](#))

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+). So now John gives the saints truth that will allow them to test whether the **spirit** of the speaker is from God or from the evil one. He is pointing out that other "spirits" exist, 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 always to **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 Jesus, while the truth is that they believe in a another Jesus (2Cor 11:2-4+) and in another Gospel (Gal 1:6-8+).

**W E Vine** adds that in 1 John 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." ([Collected Writings](#))

*Christians have to be able to detect false teachings  
and to examine the spirit that expresses them.*

-- Simon J. Kistemaker

**Beloved (agapetos) do not believe (pisteuo) every spirit (pneuma) - Beloved (agapetos)** is John's tender way of addressing believers (1Jn 4:1,7,11). John gives his **beloved** readers two commands. First **do not believe (pisteuo)** in the present imperative with a negative which means either do not begin to accept as true or worthy of their trust (every spirit) or to cease believing, a response which is already in process. Do not be gullible! They were potentially being gullible in an area where naivety (Pr 14:15) can be spiritually harmful and some may have even fallen prey to the erroneous teaching regarding Jesus (1Jn 4:2). John is telling the genuine believers to not to trust what **every spirit** was saying, because some were not guided by the Holy Spirit but by unholy spirits! Note that John is not referring to demon possession, but to men who promoted spiritual error under the guidance of the

unholy spirits.

*Many claim to be guided by the Holy Spirit,  
when in reality the spirit that guides them is not of God*

-- [Andrews Study Bible](#)

**Bob Utley** says do not believe "usually means to stop an act already in process. The tendency of Christians is to accept strong personalities, logical arguments, or miraculous events as from God. Apparently the false teachers were claiming (1) to speak for God or (2) to have had a special revelation from God.

[The King James Study Bible](#) (borrow) makes an interesting comment that "The Spirit gives assurance (1Jn 3:24). But how do believers know it is God's Spirit, and not a lying one, who is assuring them? John acknowledges the presence of numerous spirits. Christians must be wary that they not be misled."

*John saw a war raging in the unseen world  
between the Spirit of God and the spirit of Antichrist.*

-- [Apologetics Study Bible](#) (online)

**Every spirit** ([pneuma](#)) raises the question of whether John intends this phrase to refer to human spirits or spiritual beings who influence the human spirit? The context supports the interpretation that behind the false prophets with 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. It is notable that John uses the word **spirit** when he could have just said "*do not believe every false prophet*" but he did not. In using the word **spirit** ([pneuma](#)) he was calling attention to the spiritual war that is raging in the unseen world, the **spirit** of error on one side and the **Spirit** of truth on the other. We need to be alert and 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+)

*Christian faith is not spiritual gullibility.*

-- [ESV Study Bible](#)

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."

**D Edmond Hiebert** adds that "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." ([1 John 4:1-6](#))

*You cannot believe truth without rejecting error...*

*"God help us to be unbelievers in error as well as believers in truth."*

In fact **Ray Stedman** entitles his sermon on 1Jn 4:1-6 "[When Unbelief is Right](#)" stating that "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](#))

**NET Note** - **1 John 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 (1Jn 3:24+). And this suggests a warning. The [Cerinthian](#) heresy 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 (testing) the spirits.' ([1 John 3 - Expositor's Greek Testament Commentary](#))

**W E Vine** - While we have the assurance that Christ abides in us by the Spirit which He gave us (1Jn 3:24+), 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](#))

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)

**Comment** - 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.

*Every cult...of our day that seeks to solicit support,  
religiously speaking, does so in the name of love*

**Ray Stedman** goes on to observe 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](#))

**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+; Jn 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](#))

## SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT: TEST THE SPIRITS

**But** (alla) introduces a strong contrast! Always stop and query this term of contrast, asking at least what is the author contrasting, what is the "change of direction?" In this case John moves from a negative command to a positive command. "The use of the adversative "**but**" (alla) marks the contrast between an attitude of credulity and intelligent discrimination." ([Hiebert](#))

**Test** ([dokimazo](#)) **the spirits** ([pneuma](#)) **to see whether they are from** (ek) **God** ([theos](#)) - John's command is in the present imperative, calling for his readers to continually **test the spirits** to determine **whether they are from God** or from the devil. **Test** is in the plural calling not just for the pastor but for all the sheep to apply this test. Even as metallurgists used [dokimazo](#) to describe assaying metals to determine their purity and value, so too the believers were to function as "spiritual metallurgists" so to speak! John's point is that when tested these "spirits" would be shown not to be orthodox and thus not to be trusted. **To see whether they are from God** means 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."

**M M Thompson** gives some interesting background - To understand John's instruction to test the Spirits, we need to place it in the context of Johannine church life. People met in houses in groups of about twenty to thirty people, for worship and fellowship (compare 2 Jn 10). These scattered communities did not have immediate access to authoritative figures like the Elder, and communication with them was not always easy. (Borrow [1-3 John](#)).

[ESV Study Bible](#) (BORROW) The unseen spiritual influences that guide people's speech and actions can be "tested" by observing their doctrine and conduct as well as by the gift of spiritual discernment.

[Believer's Study Bible](#) - this verse emphasizes that believers are not to be naive about claims of spiritual authority, gullibly accepting all such claims. Instead, believers are cautioned to subject the spirits to testing to see whether or not they are of God.

[Faithlife Study Bible](#) on **Test** ([dokimazo](#)) **the spirits** ([pneuma](#)) - Believers derive their ability to test truth and falsehood from their anointing by God, their knowledge of the teachings of Jesus, and the work of the Holy Spirit in them (1Jn 2:20, 27; 3:24).

[David Guzik](#) on **Test** ([dokimazo](#)) **the spirits** - This is the responsibility of every Christian, but especially of congregational leadership. According to 1 Corinthians 14:29 (let the others judge) and 1 Thessalonians 5:21 (Test all things; hold fast what is good), testing the spirits is the work of the body of Christ. This job is to be done using the gifts of discernment God has given to Christians in general, especially the leadership of a congregation. All prophecy is to be judged by Scriptural standards. It is never to be received just because it is dramatic or given by a certain person. We trust in the principle that God will never contradict Himself, and we know what He has already said in His Word. 2 Peter 1:20-21 tells us true prophecy is never of any private interpretation. This means that there will be agreement and confirmation from the body of Christ, though perhaps (or probably) not everyone will agree or confirm.

*Test the moral and spiritual implications of any new idea.*

*Does it agree with Scripture?*

*Will it make me more like Christ?*

-- [The Open Bible](#)

[Bob Utley](#) on **Test** ([dokimazo](#)) **the spirits** ([pneuma](#)) - This is both a spiritual gift (cf. 1Co 12:10+; 1Co 14:29+) and a necessity for every believer (Heb 5:14+), as are prayer, evangelism, and liberal giving. This Greek word [dokimazo](#) has the connotation of "to test with a view toward approval." Believers must think the best unless the worst is proven (cf. 1Co 13:4-7+; 1Th 5:20+).

[William Barclay](#) on **from** (ek) **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 is *ek 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).

[A T Robertson](#) adds that [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](#) 2Co 10:18), otherwise it is rejected ([adokimos](#) 1Co 9:27; 2Cor 13:5-7)."

[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."



[Brian Bell](#) sums how to test these charlatans - "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)

**John 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." (Borrow [The Letters of John](#))

*The brother was not to be treated as a heretic before he had shown himself to be one*

**Wuest** adds that a 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."

*The best way to test any teaching is to drop the perfect plumbline of Scripture!*

**THOUGHT** - 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+) The best way to test any teaching is to compare it with Scripture! And do not miss the point that these Bereans did not hesitate to double check the great apostle Paul by "examining (anakrino) the Scriptures daily." What a model for modern Christians to emulate!

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

-- [David Guzik](#)

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+, 1Th 5:21-22+)

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.

## 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.

**John Stott** sums up this verse - "So behind every prophet is a spirit and behind each spirit either God or the devil. Before we can trust any spirits, we must test them. It is their origin that matters." (Borrow [The Letters of John](#) or see [The Letters of John - Page 153](#))

**Many false prophets** ([pseudoprophetes](#)) **have gone out** ([exerchomai](#)) **into the world** ([kosmos](#)) - Note there are not just a few but **many!** The dangerous teaching of these men is already on the scene, exerting a potentially corrupting, destructive impact on the church. Jesus had explicitly foretold the coming of such false prophets (Mt. 7:15+; Mt 24:11, 15+; Mk 13:21–23+) as had Paul (Acts 20:28–30+) and Peter (2Pe 2:1+).

It is likely that these **false prophets** claimed the inspiration of the Spirit for their utterances, but John warns that their prophetic utterances must be carefully weighed and "assayed", especially when they claim their utterances teach a higher "spirituality"! Be wary of "new teachings!" The words of Jehovah through His true prophet Jeremiah are apropos here - LORD, "Stand by the ways and see and **ask for the ancient paths**, Where the good way is, and walk in it; And you shall find rest for your souls." (Jer 6:16) (But Judah said "We will not walk in it!" WOE!)

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 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+) John use of the perfect tense (in 1Jn 4:1) 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 also emphasizes that men of this ilk were there to stay. The implication is that they have left the church yet continued to claim that they speak for God. "They are abroad always." (Robertson) And indeed they are present in our day, masquerading as genuine speakers for God (just turn on your television and listen to the [prosperity gospel](#).)

John uses this same verb ([exerchomai](#)) in 2 John 1:7+ - "For many deceivers **have gone out** ([exerchomai](#)) into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist."

**Simon Kistemaker** quips these men "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" (Mt. 24:24+; also consult Rev. 2:2+)." ([New Testament Commentary](#))

*Spiritual activity is not necessarily Godly activity. We must be discerning.  
We must listen and evaluate carefully the message and messenger  
against the infallible authority of Scripture.*

-- Danny Akin

[ESV Study Bible](#) (BORROW) says "**False prophets** are people who claim to speak for God but are actually speaking by demonic influence (1 John 4:3–4). In today's age of "tolerance," discriminating discernment can be viewed as being judgmental (cf. "Judge not," Matt. 7:1+). Yet Jesus also taught, "Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment" (John 7:24+)."

[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+, 2Pe 2:1+), are gone out into the world. 'The spirit of antichrist' inspires them. So 'false Christs' and 'false prophets' are joined together (Matt. 24:24+).

**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...

"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,' 3you 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+, 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)

*We must test spiritual experiences and spiritual phenomenon to see if they are in fact from God.*

**David 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.

*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 suspicion which believes nothing.*

-- John Stott

**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. (BORROW [The Gospel and epistles of John](#))

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).

**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.

**Peter** warned "false prophets ([pseudoprophets](#)) 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. (2Pe 2:1-3+)

**COMMENT** - 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.

**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+)

**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. ([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](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) 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+)

**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 (Borrow [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!

**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. (See [The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament - Page 713](#)) (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](#))

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**Word in Life Study Bible** (borrow) - Christianity has rightly been characterized as a religion of love, but it's important not to take that emphasis to an unhealthy extreme. If, in the name of love, we uncritically accept every idea or value of others, we open ourselves up to error. God never asks us to put our brains in neutral when it comes to matters of faith.

John repeatedly appeals for love (1 John 2:10; 3:3, 10–24; 4:7–12, 16–21), but he also places a premium on truth—not the wishy-washy opinions that pass for "truth" in our society, but the absolute, eternal truths of God's Word. For example, John challenges us to "test the spirits" (1Jn 4:1) and learn to discern between truth and error (1Jn 4:6). He calls for us to avoid sin, which requires that we discern what is sinful (1Jn 2:1; 3:4–10). He tells us to distinguish between the things of the world and the will of God (2:15–17), and he appeals for us to identify deceivers and avoid them (2:18–29; 3:7).

Paul echoes this appeal to be tough-minded when it comes to our faith. To be spiritual, he writes, means to be able to "judge" (discern or test) all things (1 Cor. 2:15). Likewise, we are to have the mind of Christ: tough in discernment, loving toward all, and fearless in the face of judgment (Phil. 2:5–11, 17–18).

Are you discerning on issues of faith and spirituality? If not, consider starting your own study of the Scriptures to understand what they say and mean, or perhaps enroll in a Bible class where you can learn more about God's truth in a systematic way.

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**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. Agapetos 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.

**Vincent** - Again the recognition of danger from false spirits prompts this affectionate address. Compare 1 Jn 3:21.

**Believe** (4100) **pisteuo** means to consider something to be true and therefore worthy of one's trust. To accept as true, genuine, or real. To have a firm conviction as to the goodness, efficacy, or ability of something or someone. To consider to be true. To accept the word or evidence of.

**JOHN'S USES OF PISTEUO** - Jn. 1:7; Jn. 1:12; Jn. 1:50; Jn. 2:11; Jn. 2:22; Jn. 2:23; Jn. 2:24; Jn. 3:12; Jn. 3:15; Jn. 3:16; Jn. 3:18; Jn. 3:36; Jn. 4:21; Jn. 4:39; Jn. 4:41; Jn. 4:42; Jn. 4:48; Jn. 4:50; Jn. 4:53; Jn. 5:24; Jn. 5:38; Jn. 5:44; Jn. 5:46; Jn. 5:47; Jn. 6:29; Jn. 6:30; Jn. 6:35; Jn. 6:36; Jn. 6:40; Jn. 6:47; Jn. 6:64; Jn. 6:69; Jn. 7:5; Jn. 7:31; Jn. 7:38; Jn. 7:39; Jn. 7:48; Jn. 8:24; Jn. 8:30; Jn. 8:31; Jn. 8:45; Jn. 8:46; Jn. 9:18; Jn. 9:35; Jn. 9:36; Jn. 9:38; Jn. 10:25; Jn. 10:26; Jn. 10:37; Jn. 10:38; Jn. 10:42; Jn. 11:15; Jn. 11:25; Jn. 11:26; Jn. 11:27; Jn. 11:40; Jn. 11:42; Jn. 11:45; Jn. 11:48; Jn. 12:11; Jn. 12:36; Jn. 12:37; Jn. 12:38; Jn. 12:39; Jn. 12:42; Jn. 12:44; Jn. 12:46; Jn. 13:19; Jn. 14:1; Jn. 14:10; Jn. 14:11; Jn. 14:12; Jn. 14:29; Jn. 16:9; Jn. 16:27; Jn. 16:30; Jn. 16:31; Jn. 17:8; Jn. 17:20; Jn. 17:21; Jn. 19:35; Jn. 20:8; Jn. 20:25; Jn. 20:29; Jn. 20:31;

1 Jn. 3:23; 1 Jn. 4:1; 1 Jn. 4:16; 1 Jn. 5:1; 1 Jn. 5:5; 1 Jn. 5:10; 1 Jn. 5:13

**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 demonic" (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. In this case they would be the teachers, pastors, and evangelists who circulated around the local churches. ([Erdmans Publishing](#) - used by permission)

**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. This term is a metallurgist term for testing the genuineness of something (i.e. metaphorically someone) by fire. The fire reveals the true metal and burning off (i.e. purifying) of the dross. This physical process became a powerful idiom for God and/or Satan and/or humans testing others. This term is only used in a positive sense of testing with a view towards acceptance. It is used in the NT of testing: oxen - Luke 14:19, ourselves - 1 Cor. 11:28, our faith - James 1:3, even God - Heb. 3:9.

**Wuest** - The word "try" is dokimazō, "to put to the test for the purpose of approving, and finding that the person put to the test meets the specifications laid down, to put one's approval upon him." Thus, the teacher, for instance, 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. ([Erdmans Publishing](#) - used by permission)

**DOKIMAZO** - 22/20V - **analyze(2), approve(3), approved(1), approves(1), examine(4), examines(1), prove(1), proving(1), see fit(1), test(2), tested(3), try(1), trying to learn(1).** Lk. 12:56; Lk. 14:19; Rom. 1:28; Rom. 2:18; Rom. 12:2; Rom. 14:22; 1 Co. 3:13; 1 Co. 11:28; 1 Co. 16:3; 2 Co. 8:8; 2 Co. 8:22; 2 Co. 13:5; Gal. 6:4; Eph. 5:10; Phil. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:4; 1 Thess. 5:21; 1 Tim. 3:10; 1 Pet. 1:7; 1 Jn. 4:1

**False prophets** ([5578](#)) (**pseudoprophetes** from **pseudēs** = false, untrue + **prophetēs** = 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<sub>±</sub>; Rev 19:20<sub>±</sub>; Rev 20:10<sub>±</sub>).

**PSEUDOPROPHETES** - 11V - Matt. 7:15; Matt. 24:11; Matt. 24:24; Mk. 13:22; Lk. 6:26; Acts 13:6; 2 Pet. 2:1; 1 Jn. 4:1; Rev. 16:13; Rev. 19:20; Rev. 20:10

**Gone out** ([1831](#)) **exerchomai** from **ex** = out + **erchomai** = to come) In early literature exerchomai refers to going out of a place, of words which go out of a man, of sicknesses which leave a man, and of time which passes. It is usually used of living beings. **Exerchomai** is used most often in narrative accounts to refer to a person going away from some place (Heb 11:8). At times it goes further than just a general coming or going to refer to someone going forth to do a set thing, such as preaching (Mark 6:12; 16:20; Luke 6:12) or to do a job (Matthew 13:3).

**World** ([2889](#)) (**kosmos**) can refer to the physical **world** or the **world** of mankind (both with a neutral meaning) or to the **spiritual world** opposed which is totally opposed and actively antagonistic to God (1Jn 2:15-17+). In the context of 1Jn 4:1 kosmos simply to the planet earth which is inhabited by men.

**KOSMOS IN JOHN'S EPISTLES** - 1 Jn. 2:2; 1 Jn. 2:15; 1 Jn. 2:16; 1 Jn. 2:17; 1 Jn. 3:1; 1 Jn. 3:13; 1 Jn. 3:17; 1 Jn. 4:1; 1 Jn. 4:3; 1 Jn. 4:4; 1 Jn. 4:5; 1 Jn. 4:9; 1 Jn. 4:14; 1 Jn. 4:17; 1 Jn. 5:4; 1 Jn. 5:5; 1 Jn. 5:19; 2 Jn. 1:7

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**ILLUSTRATION** - **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" (1Jn 5:6). ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

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**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."

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**QUESTION - [What does the Bible say about the prosperity gospel?](#) [WATCH VIDEO](#)**

**ANSWER** - In the prosperity gospel, also known as the "[Word of Faith Movement](#)," the believer is told to use God, whereas the truth of biblical Christianity is just the opposite—God uses the believer. Prosperity theology sees the Holy Spirit as a power to be put to use for whatever the believer wills. The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is a Person who enables the believer to do God's will. The prosperity gospel movement closely resembles some of the destructive greed sects that infiltrated the early church. Paul and the other apostles were not accommodating to or conciliatory with the false teachers who propagated such heresy. They identified them as dangerous false teachers and urged Christians to avoid them.

Paul warned Timothy about such men in 1 Timothy 6:5, 9-11. These men of "corrupt mind" supposed godliness was a means of gain and their desire for riches was a trap that brought them "into ruin and destruction" (v. 9). The pursuit of wealth is a dangerous path for Christians and one which God warns about: "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs" (v. 10). If riches were a reasonable goal for the godly, Jesus would have pursued it. But He did not, preferring instead to have no place to lay His head (Matthew 8:20) and teaching His disciples to do the same. It should also be remembered that the only disciple concerned with wealth was Judas.

Paul said covetousness is idolatry (Ephesians 5:5) and instructed the Ephesians to avoid anyone who brought a message of immorality or covetousness (Ephesians 5:6-7). Prosperity teaching prohibits God from working on His own, meaning that God is not Lord of all because He cannot work until we release Him to do so. Faith, according to the Word of Faith doctrine, is not submissive trust in God; faith is a formula by which we manipulate the spiritual laws that prosperity teachers believe govern the universe. As the name "Word of Faith" implies, this movement teaches that faith is a matter of what we say more than whom we trust or what truths we embrace and affirm in our hearts.

A favorite term of prosperity gospel teachers is "[positive confession](#)." This refers to the teaching that words themselves have creative power. What you say, prosperity teachers claim, determines everything that happens to you. Your confessions, especially the favors you demand of God, must all be stated positively and without wavering. Then God is required to answer (as though man could require anything of God!). Thus, God's ability to bless us supposedly hangs on our faith. James 4:13-16 clearly contradicts this teaching: "Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." Far from speaking things into existence in the future, we do not even know what tomorrow will bring or even whether we will be alive.

Instead of stressing the importance of wealth, the Bible warns against pursuing it. Believers, especially leaders in the church (1 Timothy 3:3), are to be free from the love of money (Hebrews 13:5). The love of money leads to all kinds of evil (1 Timothy 6:10). Jesus warned, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15). In sharp contrast to the prosperity gospel emphasis on gaining money and possessions in this life, Jesus said, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal" (Matthew 6:19). The irreconcilable contradictions between prosperity teaching and the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is best summed up in the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:24, "You cannot serve both God and money."

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**QUESTION - [Are all prosperity preachers charlatans and/or false teachers?](#) [WATCH VIDEO](#)**

**ANSWER** - Before we can give serious attention to this question, we must first define the term *prosperity preachers*. Different ministries have different approaches to presenting the gospel. For example, relief organizations meet the physical needs of the destitute while giving the credit to Jesus. Some could interpret that approach as preaching prosperity, because many impoverished people equate Christianity with Western prosperity. They may respond to the gospel message while their real motivation is to be prosperous. However, for most relief organizations, meeting physical needs is merely a part of ministering to the whole person. It is a means by which Christians earn the right to speak to the spiritual needs of hurting people. But in prosperity preaching, Jesus is presented as a ticket to perfect health and financial wealth. The true gospel is stripped of its focus on eternity and reduced to a



means by which everyone can experience [his or her best life now](#). It is that message we will address in this article.

In the Old Testament, God speaks a lot about blessing His servants with earthly health, wealth, and honor (e.g., Genesis 12:2; Leviticus 26:3–12; Deuteronomy 7:11–15; 30:8–9; 1 Kings 3:11–14). Material blessings were part of the Mosaic and Land Covenants for Israel. However, the New Testament focus is on eternal, not earthly, rewards.

Not every preacher who teaches the joy of blessing is a “prosperity preacher.” God does promise blessing to those who serve Him faithfully and follow His statutes (Psalm 107:9; Malachi 3:10–11; Mark 10:29–30). But a preacher who presents God as a *means* by which we can obtain earthly wealth is a prosperity preacher and a false teacher. This teaching portrays Almighty God as a type of jolly Santa Claus whose primary purpose is to prosper human beings and make their dreams come true. In prosperity preaching, man—not God—is the real star.

Prosperity teachers use terms such as *faith*, *positive confession*, or *visualization* to “release” the abundance God has in store. Often such preachers will entice listeners to “sow seeds into this ministry,” promising abundant returns on this investment. The gospel becomes little more than a repackaged get-rich-quick scheme, with the ministers becoming richer than the listeners. Often, an invitation to accept Christ is given at the conclusion of a service that has been based solely around blessing and positivity. Despite the overwhelming responses to the invitation, one has to wonder: are the responders surrendering to the Jesus of the Bible or to a new-and-improved version of themselves?

The shift from truth to error can be subtle, and some well-meaning preachers have been caught up in it. We must be careful not to judge a preacher’s entire message by only one or two sermons. However, when blatant prosperity preaching dominates a speaker’s platform, this is merely an attempt to make greed and materialism sound spiritual. Ephesians 5:5 has strong words for greedy people: “For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.” While we should ask God to provide for our needs and expect Him to do so (Philippians 4:19), Jesus warned us not to stockpile earthly wealth. Rather, we should store up treasure in heaven (Luke 12:33).

The imbalanced focus of prosperity preachers on earthly treasure is in direct contrast to the many passages that warn us not to desire riches ([Proverbs 28:22](#); [2 Timothy 3:2](#); [Hebrews 13:5](#)). [First Timothy 6:8–10](#) speaks directly to this kind of teaching: “But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.” When earthly wealth is our focus, we are not following the teachings of Scripture.

If the quest for prosperity dominates a preacher’s message, he or she may be someone about whom Scripture warns. The following are some common traits of many prosperity preachers or false teachers:

- The core of his/her messages is always God’s desire to bless everyone.
- There is little, if any, mention of Jesus’ words about self-denial, taking up our crosses, or dying to the flesh (Luke 9:23; Matthew 10:38, 16:24).
- Almost all their teaching focuses on the gratification of fleshly desires rather than spiritual transformation (Romans 8:29).
- Obedience to God’s commands is rarely mentioned as a prerequisite to His blessing (Jeremiah 18:10).
- Positive thinking about oneself and one’s situation is often equated with faith and is presented as the means by which one can obtain financial blessing.
- There is a marked absence of any teaching on the necessity of suffering in the life of a believer (2 Timothy 2:12; 3:12; Romans 8:17; Philippians 1:29).
- Very little distinction is made between God’s children and the unsaved in the positive promises of the message (Malachi 3:16–18; Romans 9:15–16).
- The speaker rarely attempts any type of real Bible teaching that does not support the continual message of positivity and blessing (1 Corinthians 3:1–3).
- He or she stays away from passages that contradict the positive spin of the message (2 Timothy 4:3).
- Personal wealth of the minister is often far above the average lifestyle of his congregation (Psalm 49:16–17).
- The only attributes of God ever mentioned are love and generosity. Scant attention is given to His holiness, justice, and righteousness (Ephesians 4:22–23).
- Neither the wrath of God against sin nor the coming judgment is ever mentioned (Romans 2:5; 1 Peter 4:5).
- The only “sins” discussed at length are negativity, poverty, or a person’s failure to believe in themselves (1 Corinthians 6:9–10; Philippians 3:3).
- Forgiveness is emphasized but with very little explanation of the repentance that was so important to Jesus and the disciples (Matthew 4:17; Mark 6:12; Acts 2:38).
- The prayer of faith is often referred to as the means by which humans “leave God no choice but to bless me”

(Job 40:1–2).

There has been a subtle shift within Christianity toward a version of the gospel that the apostles would not recognize. People are becoming biblically illiterate and are thus easily swayed by preachers who appear to know Scripture but who are perverting it to make it sound more appealing. These preachers are attracting huge crowds, just as Jesus did when He fed the thousands (Matthew 14:21), healed the sick (Mark 1:34), and performed miracles (John 6:2). But when Jesus began to teach the hard truths of the gospel, “many of his disciples turned away and no longer followed him” (John 6:66). Waning popularity did not cause Jesus to water down His message. He continued to teach truth whether people liked it or not (John 8:29). Likewise, the apostle Paul exonerated himself before the Ephesians with these words: “Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:26–27). If today’s prosperity teachers would follow the patterns of Jesus and Paul, they could be confident that their works will not be burned up on judgment day (1 Corinthians 3:12–15).

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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.