

Test the Spirits

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Preacher: Brad Johnson

[0 : 00] I want to say to you that one of the many, many joys that I've had here as your pastor and the ministry here at Highland Park has been the prison ministry.

! And it's difficult to even convey to you what it's like to go there and to be greeted by those men there who are incarcerated.

But so many of them are not just simply believers, but I mean dynamic believers. And they're the kind of guys that help you preach, if you're preaching, if you know what I mean.

Kind of like having a room full of Wes LaRue's, you know. Hallelujah! Yeah, exactly. But it's been such a joy to me. And we went this Friday night, actually, for my last time.

And I had to tell those guys this would be my last time to see them, perhaps, and to pray for them and love on them. And the ministry there is just wonderful.

[1 : 22] And the man who's going to be preaching this morning knows all about that and has given his life to ministering to men in our prison system at Dick Conner.

And I'm talking about Brad Johnson, Chaplain Brad Johnson, who you've heard before. He's been here before to preach to us. Good preacher. Really is a good preacher. And a tremendous ministry at Dick Conner.

So, Brad, you come share with us, would you, brother? Thank you. Okay, so Wes, I gather when I'm starting to lose, I'm just going to point over there and wake him up.

Okay. Okay, just bear with me. I start swatting at this. I get this thing kind of in my, I think it's a fly sometimes. It's me and technology have a running battle. Technology always wins. You know, and the guys there are used to it.

This chap just gets weird sometimes. Just deal with it. It's okay. Now, but it is a very strong ministry there. And, yes, it is the devil's playpen. There's no mistaking it. You know, guys got some bad boys in there.

[2 : 24] But out of the midst of that, you have guys who are really rising to the top. And it's amazing to see what some of those guys turn into from where they've come. And this is a story actually from Arkansas.

There's a guy there about to execute by the name of Kenny Williams. And, I mean, he was terrible. You know, when he first went in, it was like, oh, man. Just, you know, he'd tear into you, call you everything under the sun. And then, you know, whatever you may think of the purpose-driven life, whatever he got a hold of at one time, he started reading it.

And all of a sudden, he had really solid, intelligent questions. You know, and all of a sudden, here's a guy who loves the Lord. You know, and he's got himself together. And, you know, and you could see it was real because he called the newspapers and said he confessed to a couple other murders that he'd done.

He said, I'm living for the Lord now. We've got to get this thing right. You know, I've got to set everything in order. You know, so you do have stories like that that occur all the time. Now, not everybody's on death row, obviously.

You know, a lot of these guys are coming back. You know, they're going to be your neighbors. They're going to be ours. And so the ministry that goes on there is invaluable. The folks that come in, they look forward to it. I mean, it's a breath of fresh air that comes their way.

[3 : 27] And remember, they are coming back. And so kind of think about how you want them coming back. You want them coming back having studied the Word a little bit, having gotten some spirit in them. You know, or you want them coming back even more ticked off. And they were when they got there with a lot more criminal knowledge.

I use knowledge loosely. But that's the choices you really have there. You know, so a lot of guys are really doing well. And now they're talking about a seminary program possibly. I don't know if you've heard of Angola, Louisiana.

They had a seminary program put in by the warden Burrell Kane there about 20, 25 years ago. Transformed the prison. It was one of America's bloodiest prisons. You know, and it's just completely turned it over.

They've trained up some of the lifers in there to be pastors in the cell blocks. And it's just really calmed the whole yard down. And some other states are looking at it. And Burrell Kane visited us a couple of weeks ago to look at a possible pilot here in Joseph Harp.

You know, so that would be an amazing thing. We can use your prayers on that to get all what needs to come together to make that happen. You know, it's still very much in the drawing book right now. You know, things don't always come off the drawing board as you would like them to, as we all well know.

[4 : 29] But that would be a marvelous thing if we'd get it together. Because that then, it spreads through the whole system. You know, because what you have is a lot of guys, I have a badge when I go in there.

A lot of guys are not going to talk to me because of the badge. I understand that. But they're going to talk to somebody. And so you train up the guys inside so they know how to answer the questions that are there. Because there's all kinds of questions.

And there's all kinds of answers, for lack of a better word, again. Because guys are making things up in their cells. You know, and they can really talk a good game. We'll talk a little bit more about that later.

So again, some really good things are happening, even though it is the devil's playpen. You know, and yes, it can be scary. And yes, there's times you can cut the spirit there with a knife. But hey, Jesus wins.

The Lord moves. Spirit's alive and well. Amen. Amen. Amen. Back a couple hundred years ago, there was an event out in California that was known as the Gold Rush.

[5 : 25] Perhaps you've heard of it. Folks flocked from far and wide, going out there, tearing everything up from Sacramento to San Francisco, trying to make their fortune. I mean, they tore everything up. And history does tell us a lot of real gold was found.

But for every ounce of real gold that was found, there was a whole lot of riverbeds and rock piles that were filled with gold and specks that gave the appearance of the real thing. But they turned out to be iron pyrite, which was of no value at all.

This came to be known as fool's gold. And many times, even the skilled, experienced prospectors were hard-foot to tell the difference at first glance. So rather than risk dragging around a whole lot of dead weight, hoping it would turn out to be the real thing, risking the chance that it would not be, they had to find out ways to test the metal right away to know for sure if it was really gold or not. So several tests were devised so they could quickly make the accurate determination. One such test was to bite the rock in question. Now, I never knew that. You've seen some of those old westerns.

You've got that old Walter Brennan type of character, the grizzled beard and everything. They'd flip him the coin. He'd look up, down, whatever, and then start chomping on it. Well, that's why. The real gold is actually softer than a human tooth.

[6 : 34] The fool's gold is actually harder. And there it goes. I knew there'd be an issue with that before we were done here. Again, me and technology. Technology always wins. You know, but if it was not real, there'd be no give to the bite.

So that's why they did it. And that might be old hat to some of you, but I didn't know that. You know, another test was to scrape the metal on a piece of white stone. Because real gold will leave behind a yellow streak.

If it's not real, it'll leave behind a streak that's more greenish-black in color. Spiritually speaking, we face the same kind of dilemma. With the numerous and seemingly never-ending doctrines and religious teachings that are making the rounds, how do we tell what is real from what is false? Because there's going to be supporters of all these false religious theories, and they're going to passionately claim that they're true. Even when so many of them are obviously contradictory of one another, they could not possibly all be true. So every question needs to be aware of the ongoing spiritual battle that rages in this world.

And it's a battle that can be fierce. Because we have an enemy, a bitter enemy, who hates us. And he wants to cut us down at every opportunity that he can. And you have to be alert. Because the devil plays a very dirty game.

[7 : 44] There's no interest or concern for anything in the way of fair play or rules of engagement. There are no timeouts. There are no days off. There are no flags of truce.

There are no codes of conduct that he's even going to think about observing. And this enemy, he temporarily reigns over this world of darkness. And those who are committed to chasing after the comforts of this world, they're marching right in step to the drumbeat he's sounding.

And the effect he seeks to accomplish is that people turn away from the light of God's word to the darkness of his world. And he's blinded their eyes with the bright flashes and the false securities that are offered by the world's treasures.

He uses those as bait, the pursuit of which will blind one to the true riches of spiritual truth. Satan encourages people to store up treasure on earth.

He doesn't want you thinking about treasure in heaven. And he doesn't want people to understand that treasure on earth is a very temporary and fleeting thing. While it may be here today, it can easily be gone tomorrow. And we kind of nod our heads and go, yeah, yeah, we understand that.

[8 : 46] But you know, when we start chasing things, it doesn't really seem like we do sometimes. But there is a day coming for sure when it's not going to be in our hands anymore. And that's why we're called to focus on the eternal treasure that lasts forever, that's never going to be taken away.

Book of 1 John is where we'll be today. 1 John will be the end of chapter 3, and we'll work our way into chapter 4. The Apostle John has made it clear that it's one's consistent pattern of behavior that determines whether they're a child of God or a child of the devil.

And he further states that the evidence of those who are truly children of God is they're obeying the commands of God. They're seeking to bring glory to God through their lives. Now, whenever you study the book of 1 John, you have to understand why it was written.

It was written in response to false teachings that had run wild all through the area. I mean, John was a pastor of churches in Ephesus. False teaching had infiltrated in there. It was leading a lot of people astray.

And this letter is written in response. So as you go through 1 John, if you see that phrase in there, if someone should say, well, the reason it's there is because someone was saying it. A lie was being presented that needed to be exposed, and then the truth clarified.

[9 : 55] So we start in chapter 3 at verse 23. And this is the commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another as he gave us commandment. Now, he who keeps his commandments abides in him, and he in him.

And by this we know that he abides in us by the Spirit whom he has given us. Now, John is establishing here that the presence of the Holy Spirit is one's life. That's the direct evidence of their being in right relationship with God.

It's his presence in the hearts of believers that will produce the fruit of the Spirit in their lives. John holds this will be clearly seen in the way they are conducting themselves. It will be demonstrated by their actions.

As an analogy, it's just as the effects of the wind can be seen, heard, felt. You can tell when it's kicking up a fuss, even though you can't physically see the wind itself. So the effect of the Spirit working in people's lives and those who are God's children, they will be seen.

There will be an effect there, even though the Spirit himself is not actually visible. Virtues of a Christian life, they cannot be lived apart from a right relationship with God.

[10 : 55] It's not going to happen. And such a relationship is only available through Jesus Christ, his Son, and it's made possible by the presence of the Holy Spirit, who is Jesus living inside of us. Now, one of God's central commands is stated in verse 23.

We are to believe in his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another according to his command. It's our intimacy with the Son, delivered and ensured through the Spirit, that gives us the ability to obey those commands, because we are not capable of doing that in our flesh.

It is a Spirit who guides and directs Christians in our daily lives. It's why I've often called him the experiential element of the Christian life. He's the power behind our living in faith. He is the power behind our living in love.

It is his power by which we can carry out those commands. It is by his power that we can love, even when others around us aren't very lovable. And it's through his power that we can carry out God's will for our lives.

Now, John identifies the Holy Spirit here as being the Supreme Spirit. We said earlier, we're living in the midst of a fierce spiritual battle. There are many spirits out there, as John's about to address.

[12:02] And there are spirits that seek to deceive. Spirits who seek to lead people away from God. But there is only one Holy Spirit who stands apart from and above all the rest.

He is the one we are to believe. He is the one who we are to trust, because he is God. And it is his presence that identifies one as a true child of God. With that, we move into chapter 4, verse 1.

John emphatically here declares, We are not to believe every spirit.

Rather, we are to test them. Because there is a spirit of truth, and there are spirits of deception. And these spirits are raging against each other constantly. We have to be able to determine which is which.

Just like the old miners, they devised tests to determine if their gold was real. What's coming from the Spirit of God must be quickly distinguished from what the many spirits who are intending to deceive. There are many supporters of false doctrines and religious theories out there They are excellent talkers.

[13:28] They are top-notch debaters. You can't get a word in with them edgewise once they get themselves going. And they can make their positions sound really good. And they can speak with that authoritative tone, because you can't get a word in edgewise.

And it can make them appear to have expertise in what they're saying, even when they have no expertise at all. And they are especially dangerous to those who are uninformed, those with limited Bible knowledge.

Fact of the matter is a good sales pitch with a polished speech is no guarantee there's any truth at all to what they're saying. And while we'd be very quick to be suspicious of this if we're talking, say, with a used car salesman or a politician, you know, people will accept this type of thing in spiritual matters virtually every day, seemingly without question.

One's claimed to be true does not mean that they are. There's only one truth. That truth comes from God. Therefore, we must always be recognized that any ideology, philosophy, thought, religious theory, opinion, whatever it may be, if it's steering away from God's truth, that's coming from Satan. It doesn't matter how good it may be made to sound by a speaker. And that's why it's crucial for us to recognize the difference between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. Christians have the spirit of God, who is the spirit of truth.

[14:46] But there are many other spirits out there who are of the enemy. And it makes for a major conflict in the spiritual realm. And it's for this reason, John says, we are to test the spirits. Because there is a clear way to differentiate between what comes from the Holy Spirit from what is coming from the other deceiving spirits.

There never was, never will be, any shortage of false teachers claiming that their words are inspired by the spirit of God. In verse 1, John refers to them as false prophets.

Because technically, a prophet is the mouthpiece of some spirit. And there are many frauds among them who are hostile to the truth. It all started back in the garden. Remember, the serpent comes along, attacks the truth of what God was saying.

Then he offered alternatives that were more pleasing to Adam and Eve's ears. And they bit. All mankind has suffered behind their blind acceptance of that ever since.

Lesson learned there is that true faith, it's going to examine its object before it places its trust in it. And one must not believe every prophetic announcement they hear just because that prophet claims they're speaking with divine authority.

[15:51] Such messages are not to be uncritically accepted on their face. Christians must be careful to examine every spiritual message they are coming into contact with. They must be aware demonic activity is always on the prowl.

And like Peter said, it's a roaring lion seeking who he may devour. And it can quickly and easily penetrate where one's spiritual armor is not on. False spirits are experts of deception.

Remember, they've been trained by their master, Satan himself. Very subtle. Because they offer bits and pieces of truth, which are then mixed in with the error. We start with the Bible, we move to something else.

And never forget, Satan disguised himself as an angel of light. He loves those comic book caricatures, you know, that little guy in the red suit with the pitchfork and the horns on his head, that tail that goes out behind him. That's not the real thing.

He's the most beautiful of the angels. And he disguises error as truth. He makes that which is evil look like that which is good. This is not new. It's exactly what was happening with John's flock in Ephesus, which is why he's writing this letter.

[16:55] Due to these spirits of deception, it was necessary to determine ways to test the statements of those who claim to be spiritually enlightened to determine if they really were or not. Problems always come when the false prophets arrive in the scene.

Claiming an authority they do not have. Paul addressed it in many of his epistles, most notably Galatians. Peter and Jude wrote sternly about it in their New Testament letters as well. John's dealing with the same problem here.

And the church as a whole has dealt with the same problem right from the beginning. Folks routinely coming along, claiming they have an anointing. They've got a message from God when they have no such thing.

They claim some new revelation when there's no such thing. They accept without question the lies and deceptions of false teachers and religions, and then we'll hear nothing of the only truth that can save them.

These false prophets, inspired by false spirits, they have this entire world, this evil system under Satan's control. It's in opposition to God. This is their stage.

[17:55] This is their playground where they can run wild and wide open. And if you've studied any history, you notice the devil repackages the same false messages in new rappers from generation to generation. Same thing, just a shinier rapper.

And people continue to swallow them, hook, line, and sinker, because the false spirits are telling them what they want to hear instead of what they need to hear. What they need to hear is coming from the true spirit.

And there's all kinds of powerful voices clamoring for attention. Sadly, some of them are actually within church circles. It should not be paid attention to at all. That's why it's absolutely crucial. Christians learn to practice biblical discernment, dividing the truth from error. And that's not going to happen unless they are in the word. If you're not in here, putting this into your life, absorbing this into your mind, into your heart, it's not going to happen.

You've got to learn that truth. You've got to live in that truth. You've got to be doing it on a daily basis. Unfortunately, what we have is there's way too many people claiming to be Christians who are spiritually lazy.

[18:58] They're not in their word. They're not absorbing the truth into their minds and hearts. They prefer to just have somebody tell them about it. Well, the problem is you have not put together the foundation to be able to discern what it is you're being told.

And the same problem continues. People race forward to hear and embrace the same deceptions over and over again, untold damages left in their wake. And there's a lot of folks who will not have anything to do with God.

They will not even have a conversation about them because they got taken in by one of these false prophets. Someone coming along is claiming they had this message from God when they had no such thing. Now, part of the blame goes to the false spirits and the false prophets, of course, but a lot of it goes back to those who haven't trained themselves to discern truth from error.

Those who take the time to become grounded in the truth of God's word, they don't fall for these things nearly so easily. That's why as Christians, it's our duty to be ready to assess the messages that we hear, recognize which spirit has inspired it.

In verses 2 and 3, John presents what those tests are. It all boils down to what they're teaching about Jesus Christ. Every spirit who is represented by the human teacher with the message that spirit is proclaiming will make what John calls a confession.

[20:14] The confession means to say the same as the message is. And so if that spirit's true, that message is going to confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. That is what determines the legitimacy of the prophet.

Because it is upon this truth that the Christian faith stands. This is not negotiable. This is essential. Jesus Christ came as God incarnate. He was fully God as well as fully man.

Jesus proclaimed and proceeded from the Father as the living word of God who became flesh and dwelt among us. To be saved, you must believe in Jesus' deity. Because if he's not the Lord, then he can't save you.

If he's not God, he doesn't have that power. And if he doesn't have that power, you've got a problem. You're still in your sins. Your faith is without hope. Jesus is the only source of eternal life as he alone reveals the Father to us.

Jesus being fully divine while fully human is what makes him the perfect sacrifice that can make atonement for our sins. And that means Jesus Christ is not a created being, nor could he be.

[21 : 18] No created being can be our atoning sacrifice as no created being can be deity. He is the creator and Lord of all. He is not one way among others.

Jesus himself said he is the way, the truth, and the life and no one comes to the Father except through him. That means Jesus himself made it clear there is no other way. Now even the demons, the promoters of these false spirits, they understand Jesus' deity.

Now they haven't submitted to it. They steadfastly refuse to submit to Jesus' lordship. They continue to foster and stir up rebellion against him worldwide when they know who he is. Read through the Gospels.

Who are the ones who recognize Jesus immediately? No identification, no introduction needed. The demons. Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, Sunday night, whoa, whoa, time out. Wait a minute. You're not supposed to be here yet. James 2.19 tells us the demons believe in Jesus full well.

Yeah, they have faith. You bet they do. But their mere intellectual understanding of that fact, that doesn't bring salvation. To be saved, one must acknowledge Jesus as Lord.

[22 : 23] So you've got to understand something. These silly notions of his being a good man, good teacher, good prophet, great teachings he's left to mankind, those don't cut it.

Jesus Christ claimed deity. And if that claim is not true, then he's not a good anything. Rather, that would mean he was guilty of knowingly perpetrating the greatest hoax in the history of mankind. Either that or to be a complete and total madman. Those would be your choices. So one cannot claim they've accepted Jesus without accepting the most foundational claim that he made regarding his identity.

Therefore, John declares, without reservation, a legitimate prophet, with a legitimate message that truly comes from God, will without hesitation testify, Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.

true spirit of God always gives honor and glory to Jesus Christ. And the one who is serving is the mouthpiece for the spirit. He is the one to be received and heard. Now, any spirit that does not testify to that is a false spirit.

[23 : 28] And the prophet who is being used as a mouthpiece for that spirit is to be entirely disregarded. The truth of any spiritual message lies in the recognition of who Jesus Christ is.

Any message that denies Jesus Christ as God having come in the flesh is false. No matter how eloquent the speaker may be, no matter how convincing the deception might be, they, along with their messages, must be judged by what their confession of Christ is.

If Jesus Christ is not their personal Lord and Savior, it's going to affect every other aspect of their theology, and it's going to affect every other aspect of their view of the world. And regardless of how passionately they may make their claims, to be wrong about who Jesus Christ is, that's to be wrong about everything else in the spiritual realm as well.

They are mouthpieces for false spirits who, once they've led their victims away from the true God, they will then proceed to lead them astray and everything else as well. Better to confess Jesus Christ as Lord, that's the acid test.

That proves whether one is of God or if they're not. No matter what they may claim, how persuasive they might be, whatever appearance of expertise they may provide, if they proclaim something other than Jesus Christ having come in the flesh, they are not expert at all.

[24 : 46] It means they've missed the most basic point, and it renders any other spiritual claims on their part to be false as well. Remember in Romans 1.22, the Apostle Paul wrote of those in the world that were professing to be wise became foolish.

Such is the one who refused to confess Jesus Christ. Now we can have disagreement on other minor things and other various theological issues. There can be debates on some of those things, but not here. Not on this one.

Because false prophets, they're always going to deny that salvation comes through Christ alone. There's going to be something else. They're going to be proclaiming alternative ways of salvation. It's usually going to evolve work, something that we supposedly can do. Because in their false view, the cross isn't enough. Shed blood of Jesus Christ, it isn't enough. There's something else that's got to be added to the equation to seal the deal, so to speak. And that identifies the teaching and the teacher as false on its face. There is no adding to the cross. There is no substitute for the shed blood of Jesus Christ. To suggest there is is to introduce another way of salvation when in fact there is no other way.

[25 : 57] Now at the end of verse 3, John states where those false spirits come from. None other than the spirit of the Antichrist. John had addressed that back in chapter 2 of this letter. They're in direct and hostile opposition to God, the spirits that he sends out preceding him.

And he reiterates how they'd heard of the coming of the Antichrist in the world. He speaks again how his spirit is already here. For that reason, we shouldn't be surprised or caught off guard by the false spirits that he sends out ahead of him.

The spirit of the arch enemy of Christ is in the world. And the evidences of his presence are seen in the false religious doctrines and the deviant philosophies that are running rampant in this world.

They are the product of false teachers that are sent forward by false spirits into the world peddling the doctrines of demons. The Antichrist spirit was very active in John's day.

Love to tell you he's gone away but he's plenty active today too. Alive and well and ripping and roaring. And their false statements and positions regarding the identity of Jesus Christ then just as now.

[27 : 01] That's what will quickly expose and identify those spirits of deception. They failed the test of the spirits. Continue in chapter 4 at verse 4.

Here's some good news. You are of God little children and have overcome them because he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world therefore they speak as of the world and the world hears them.

We are of God. He who knows God hears us. He who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. Christians become partakers of the divine nature when they give their lives to Jesus Christ.

At that point the Holy Spirit comes to live in us. That's the built in check that we now have against false teaching. John emphasizes this is what gives us the victory in the spiritual realm.

It's a victory that's won for all eternity. See for regards to all the mess that's going on in this world God loves this world. He created it. That's why he sent his son to save it. However the world from the start was openly hostile toward him refusing that offer of salvation.

[28 : 08] And John understands the spiritual forces of evil and deception that fill this world they're leading that rebellion. Yet we have overcome we are victorious over all those forces because he who is in us is greater than all those antichrist spirits in the world.

That's a good spot for an amen. Victory is secure and John is reminding his readers of the true source of that victory because it comes from God it is a victory that continues in our present and continues forward into the future.

Nothing of this world can ever reverse that. The highest court has already spoken. The spirits of deception are defeated once and for all. there is not going to be any rematches.

And the false spirits know this. They know it full well. That's why they're determined to take as many down with them as they can with the short time they have left. And since they're of the world the world listens to them.

Well go figure. What do you expect? Their messages come from the viewpoint of that world. That's why they have so much appeal. They tell people what they want to hear.

[29 : 16] Which is why those with worldly mindsets so easily accept them. But those who belong to God should not be hearing them. They should be paying attention to what it is they need to hear.

The world's a devil's domain. Therefore it should be no surprise that its philosophy is an expression of the devil's agenda. His job is to promote the seeds of destruction which is what the false spirits of the world are doing.

They will eagerly lead one too. Remember who they're serving. The one who comes to steal, kill, and destroy. He's quite good at it when he gets his talents into something as we've all learned the hard way. Those are things the children of God should not be paying any attention to.

As we now walk in the light we understand where that darkness goes regardless of the promises it makes. Those promises are fool's gold being promoted by false spirits.

We have the true promises of God. After all said and done spirits of the enemy are all rendered powerless before the true spirit of God who lives in us. Never forget that.

[30 : 20] And don't go chasing after the false promises that lead down these roads of spiritual darkness. Jesus himself said wide is the gate and broad is the path that leads to destruction and there are many who go there.

Well they go because they're blindly following what they're being told by a godless world. And that message is going to be attractive to those who are thinking like the world. People lean toward those of like mind.

The old saying goes birds of a feather flock together. If you want to get a little uglier and nastier you might say turkeys breed turkeys. But those of the world are inclined to receive messages that come from that world.

Those messages are from the spirits of error. They are intentionally hostile toward Jesus. But the one who receives the truth of Jesus coming to earth as God in the flesh is of God.

They are receiving their information from the spirit of truth. And so John declares in verse 6 we are of God and whoever knows God listens to us. Whoever is not of God will not listen to us.

[31 : 24] He makes reference back in chapter 2 he talked about those who had left the congregation those who went out from us because they were not of us. Because he's merely demonstrated they were never truly part of the congregation in the first place.

They followed the false spirits into the world because the world is where they were always from. They never left it. That world was their home. But for the child of God this world is not our home.

Nothing's changed in the almost 2,000 years since John wrote this.

God's people know his voice which is why the community judgment of the church should be trusted over the voice of the world all the time. And there should be harmony between the Holy Spirit who lives in us and the same Holy Spirit who lives in the true prophet.

And when the Spirit of God inspires the true prophet his people will discern God's truth. But you must realize if the incarnate Christ is not presented in the message if Jesus Christ is not at the center of what is being said then we have every right if not even the obligation to be highly suspicious of the speaker.

If a particular church is supposed to be a guardian of this truth they're stepping away from it and accommodating the world a red flag should be going up. The test of the spirits has been failed.

[32 : 39] It's a message you don't need to be hearing and certainly not one to be taking to heart. Sadly there are far too many of those messages coming from the pulpits of self-proclaimed Christian churches these days.

And if the message of that particular church if it's too easily accepted by the world that's out there around it well it may well be because that message has been tainted by the false spirits of that world. Darkness is always repelled by the light because the light challenges it.

If the forces of that darkness accept the religious message too eagerly it's likely because the false spirits the inspiration behind it appealing to those itching ears. As the church we are to be that light. Now it's not a license to be obnoxious but our job is to challenge the darkness not provide accommodation for it or meet it halfway down a road somewhere. John's challenge to test the spirits it's relevant to all ages because there are more false spirits at work today than perhaps there have ever been before.

False messages are swirling around us all the time and with the technology we have today oh brother I mean the problem is going to get a whole lot worse wherever it gets better. I mean the push of a button you can be worldwide and like that.

[33 : 49] And more and more of these messages are coming from places that were traditionally considered to be safe. Sadly that includes so called Christian and TV and radio whose air time when you get right down to it is for sale to the highest bidder.

Now there's a lot of good preachers on the TV and radio I'm not condemning everybody but you've got to be discerning. You've got to be ready to discern which spirit is inspiring this speaker. And even more tragically you have false teachers are giving being pulpits in large churches to speak in the name of some type of outreach or understanding.

John would be very upset by what he'd see today if he were with us because those are things we do not need to be understanding or accepting. John makes it clear there is to be no community with false teachers who advocate false messages inspired by false spirits.

To let them in the door and to give them a platform is to shed legitimacy on something that is not legitimate at all and we're to reject that not make a combination for it.

But the result has been we've wound up listening to far too many things we shouldn't be listening to at all. Oh it happens in the prison every day. I mean guys get lugged up and drug into things they never would have touched with a 10 foot pole if they'd ever tested the spirits that were behind it.

[35 : 05] Now we know full well that doesn't just happen in the prison setting either. It's going on all around this world. It's going on in buildings this morning right now. Test the spirits that are behind it.

You've got to test them properly. John at length tells his audience through this letter they need to be focused on what was from the beginning. That's how this letter opened. That which we have seen that which we have heard that which we have touched that was from the beginning.

You know people continually fall for things that came along way after the fact every day because they're impressed by the way some speaker presents it. And while it may sound better to them that something coming from false spirits they should be testing not hearing and certainly not accepting. I mean lies can always be made to sound more appealing than the truth there's no trick to that. but the bottom line of all of them is they deny the deity of Jesus Christ as the excuse to refuse to submit to his lordship.

And they will offer us ways to save ourselves by the so-called good things we can do. And that conveniently overlooks the lie that Isaiah 64 6 exposes which tells us our righteousness is as filthy rags before the Lord.

[36 : 18] There is no way to save ourselves. There is no salvation apart from the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Any message to the contrary any message leading somewhere else is coming from a false spirit of error.

So as we wrap up today take John's advice as your command. Test the spirits. Test the spirits and you will not fall prey to them.

Thank you.