

1 John 4:1-6

“Learn To Discern”

Distinguishing earmarks that aid our discernment; what are the *fingerprints* of God that are upon the *child* of God? What is the evidence that provides assurance both *to me* (that is with in me) and to others *around* me that I am *of* God, that I belong *to* God? That’s been the topic at hand as of late in our consideration, our contemplation of 1st John. Though we could perhaps list many characteristics and/or qualities to be found in the child of God, John took the time in Ch 3 to highlight 2 of them. In Ch’s 1 and 2 we talked about moral purity, we spoke of doctrinal integrity, we’ve spoken of abiding in Christ specifically; these are various attributes that will be indicative of the child of God. In Ch 3 John highlighted 2 more; do you remember what they were? 2 qualities or characteristics that will be at work in every child of God and they are these; *righteousness*, and *love*. I’m not going to take the time to define them today because we’ve spent considerable time developing the biblical understanding of those attributes over our last couple of gatherings in 1st John (you might pick up a cd if you weren’t here).

As we enter in, and kind of fall back into the flow now that we’re headed into Ch 4 John takes a little time to help develop our discernment concerning the *Spirit* of God. We’ve discussed some of the things that define the *child* of God, how do I discern if something (or more accurately someone) is of the *Spirit* of God? You’ve got to remember that at the time John wrote this the NT (or for that matter the O.T.) hadn’t been compiled like we have it today. They relied all but exclusively upon a teacher, or a prophet to minister *to* them, and share *with them* the word of God. How then can I know that the message that’s being presented to me is from the *heart* of God for the *people* of God having come from the *Spirit* of God?

Perhaps you remember there in Vs 24 of Ch 3 where John said, “...by this we know that He (Christ) abides in us, by the *Spirit* whom He has given us.” And it’s through that statement that John makes the segue (or the transition) from the *people* of God, to the *Spirit* of God; and with that he wants to encourage us, to equip us so as not to be led astray. I don’t know what it is about Christians, perhaps is our tender heart, maybe it’s our desire to think the best of people, but the fact is Christians can be some of the most gullible people on the planet, but it ought not be. Jesus said, “*Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.*” Matt 10:16 That is, use your head, stay sharp, be on point; watch and be ready, don’t be taken in and deceived or somehow damaged because you simply won’t keep your senses about you.

Not everyone is a nice guy with innocent intent, and you should subject every teacher of God's word, everyone who shares with you the word of God or seeks to unveil to you the heart of God to biblical scrutiny. Just because someone stands behind a pulpit, or is clean cut and soft spoken, or has a college degree and uses big words, waxes eloquent and all of that doesn't mean that you simply let down your guard and take in everything they say. Stay sharp, there's a responsibility incumbent upon you as the hearer to place what's being said in the balance of God's word and see how it weighs out. Notice...

Vs1

Now the idea of subjecting people, what they say, the things they share to biblical scrutiny is not at all unique to John. Paul told the Thessalonians, "*Test all things; hold fast what is good.*" 1 Thess 5:21 Jesus said, "*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits.*" Matthew 7:15-16 He saying that it's appropriate to weigh people's words, their actions, the general demeanor of their lives in the balance of God's word. People get on this, "Judge not" kick and they want to use it as a means to sterilize, or paralyze anyone from acknowledging an otherwise sinful situation or circumstance. All Jesus was saying was not to place a standard on someone else that you're not willing to be held to yourself. He was never saying don't draw a line that separates right from wrong. Listen, this "politically correct" mentality is garbage; relativism and what's right for you Vs what's right for me; that's all garbage; the fact of the matter is that there are absolutes in this world and it's either right, or it's wrong, it's either ok or it's not; and like it or not what determines what's right or what's wrong is the word of God. God created everything and it's His prerogative to determine what's acceptable and what's not. Jesus also said, "*Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.*" John 7:24 Here's my point, using God's word to determine right from wrong isn't judging anyone, it's simply agreeing with the word of God; they're not my standards, they're God's, I'm just agreeing with God concerning whatever the particular situation may be.

John says, "Don't believe every spirit," and the way this is phrased it would be more accurate to say, "Stop believing every spirit" the idea being that some were readily subjecting themselves to anyone who said they had a word from God. John says, "quit doing that" don't be so gullible, exercise discernment, just because someone claims to speak under the unction of the spirit doesn't mean that it's the *Holy Spirit* that's moving them or inspiring them. Yes, God is Spirit, but it doesn't therefore follow that every spiritual experience, encounter or insight is from God. There are also demonic spirits, the bible tells us that Satan presents himself as an angel of light. It's his agenda to lure you in, deceive you and destroy you. Don't be ignorant of your enemy's devices. The bible says, "*The simple believes every word, But the prudent considers well his steps.*" Proverbs 14:15

Stay sharp, we find in Acts Ch 17 where Paul was ministering in Berea. Yet everyday when he was finished preaching and teaching we read that the Bereans would search the scriptures to see if the things that he was telling them were so. They subjected Paul the apostle to scriptural scrutiny! How much more than do you need to do that to me, or anyone else who seeks to share the word or ways of God with you?

Because not everyone is seeking to feed you, there are those who will seek to *fleece* you, to rip you off and deceive you for their own personal profit. Peter spoke of the fact that there were false prophets in ancient Israel, even so there will be false teachers today. He said, “*But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.*” 2 Peter 2:1 They’re around, don’t lower your spiritual guard. You see when John speaks of testing the spirits, he’s not necessarily speaking of a spirit manifesting itself to you and speaking with you (though it’s plausible that such things could happen) the context demonstrates that he’s speaking of what kind of spirit inspires the person who’s sharing with you. Is he speaking under the inspiration (or motivation) of the Holy Spirit, or is it ultimately a demonic spirit? How can you tell?

Because the enemy is slick, he’s smooth; he’s a master deceiver; so what are the fingerprints of *his ministers*?

Before we get to that let me say this in passing; sometimes it’s not a matter of people being deceived so much as it is that they themselves look for a teacher who will help them feel better about their sin or justify sin for them. They’ll raise up for themselves men who will scratch their itching ears. We read in Jeremiah 5:31 “*The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule by their own power; And My people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end?*” People will often times seek out a place that will accommodate them in their sin, and they love to be approved and affirmed, that I’m ok, you’re ok, we’re all ok and God knows we’re only human. But what will you do in the end? They don’t stop to consider the eternal perspective, that’s neat that you can go somewhere that gives you warm fuzzies, how does that help you eternally, what does it do for you ultimately? Your heart should hunger for the truth. You should have a “just tell me the truth preacher, and let the chips fall where they may” mentality. If you’re convicted of your sin, and stand before God in such a way as to be broken and in need of repentance, praise God for that... Don’t resist the move of God’s Spirit toward you, receive it.

Ok, so John is saying, “Learn to discern.” To the negative, *don't* believe every spirit; to the positive, *test* the spirits to see whether they be of God. It raises the question then doesn't it? What's the test, what's the litmus test by which I'm able to distinguish and discern whether or not the man's message is of God?

Vs2-3

#1 The confession. One day Jesus was speaking to His disciples wanting to hear what the pulse of the people was concerning Him. “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” “Some think you're J.B., other's perhaps Elijah or one of the prophets...” Jesus looked at them and said, “Who do *you* say that I am?” That's the heartbeat of this passage, these 2 Vs. Peter said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Jesus said, “Blessed are you Simon, son of Jonah, for flesh and blood didn't reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.” The point being that an accurate understanding of who Jesus is comes from God, it's a spiritual revelation not a natural revelation.

John is saying here that a true teacher, a true prophet will present a true Jesus to those whom he is sharing *with* or speaking *to*. Jesus said, “*However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.*” John 16:13-15 It is the express agenda of the Holy Spirit teach us *about*, point us in the direction *of*, and bring glory *to* Jesus Christ Therefore if a man's (or woman's) message in *any way* diminishes the person of Jesus Christ as being both God and Man it's not from the Spirit of God. If what you're being taught doesn't ultimately take you in the direction of dependency *upon* Christ, trusting fully *in* Christ or bringing glory *to* Christ, it's not of the Spirit of God.

Now specifically John draws attention to the humanity of Christ. It's interesting that today we have a tendency to defend the *deity* of Christ, the fact that Jesus was/is God. In John's day the fact that Jesus was God wasn't really up for debate.

He worked countless miracles, opened blind eyes and deaf ears, He healed the sick, made whole the hurting, He raised the dead and raised Himself from the dead. No one really took issue with the fact that He was God (post resurrection and ascension) (outside perhaps of a few religious leaders, there will always be those guys around), the issue that arose was whether or not He was truly *a Man...*

John is here pointing out that both the deity and the humanity of Jesus is equally important to us and apart from either being 100% true we can't be saved. So if someone doesn't present the truth of who Jesus is according to the scripture, then they're not of God. That's what it means to *confess*, it means to speak the same thing as, to agree with. "with what?" with the word of God. "In the beginning was the Word, the word was with God and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him and with out Him nothing was made that was made...and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." God's word is very clear regarding the deity of Jesus and the humanity of Jesus. Paul told Timothy, "*And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh,*" 1 Timothy 3:16 The humanity of Jesus is critical to you and me because if Jesus wasn't a Man He couldn't die, because as God He can't die, yet if He's not God He's not perfect therefore He's unable to atone for our sin. So it's not that Jesus was God masquerading as a Man, Jesus was a Man, yet He wasn't a Man who had God in Him, He was God. 100% God, 100% Man. You say, "I don't get it." That's ok God doesn't ask us to get it, only to believe it.

G. Campbell Morgan in the "The Crises of Christ" said, "He was the God-man. Not God indwelling a man. Of such there have been many. Not a man deified. Of such there have been none saved (or accept) in the myths of pagan systems of thought; but God and man, combining in one personality the two natures, a perpetual enigma and mystery, baffling the possibility of explanation." The true teacher of the word of God will teach the fact that God was incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ (the 2nd Person of the Triune God) God in human flesh, that He died upon the cross to satisfy the righteous demands of the law which man broke and He raised Himself from the dead in the same body in which He died and is now at the right hand of God as the living Savior of anyone who will place his/her faith in Him in response to that which He did for them upon the cross. The person who in anyway denies that isn't actuated or motivated by the Spirit of God but rather by the spirit of antichrist which is at work even now in the world.

Now as I mentioned the debate in John's day was whether or not Jesus was really Man, there were those who taught that He was a phantom, or an emanation from God, that He didn't leave footprints when He walked on the beach and all of that. But when you're over 2,000 yrs removed from the scene the debate seems to have gone topsy-turvy. Now the question people debate isn't the humanity of Jesus, but was He really God? If you're a Jehovah's Witness you say, "No, He was Michael the arc angel." If you're a Mormon you say, "No, He was a created being the brother of Lucifer (Satan)." If you're Muslim you believe that Jesus was a Servant of God, but by no means the Son of God, or God in the flesh. So again the confession of both really needs to be there, Jesus was 100% Man, and 100% God.

But the broader fact that is in view here is that a true teacher will present a true Jesus, one that accords accurately with the teachings of scripture.

Vs4

Here's the idea. Are there opponents to the gospel? Yes. Are there spiritual forces at work in the world in order to both deceive and destroy you? Yes, should you then fear or be afraid because of that fact? No, why? Because Christ is in you by the power of the Holy Spirit and He who is in you is greater than he (that is Satan and/or his spiritual forces) who is in the world. Paul the apostle put it this way, "*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: 'For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.' Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" Rom 8:35-39 Which is to say that the enemy may at times be allowed to do damage to you personally, or somehow even destroy you physically, but he can do nothing to in anyway thwart you eternally. He can't touch you with regard to eternity. Jesus said, "*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.*" John 10:27-28

You might note those 3 words here in Vs 4 that were stated previously in Vs 20 of Ch 3, "He...is greater." God is greater, He's greater than any need, any trial, any trauma or temptation, He's greater that any dilemma or difficulty that we might have. He is greater, and as a believer He's in you, the resource of victory dwells in you; Christ in you the hope of glory, rely *on* Him, draw *from* Him.

Vs5-6

The 1st element in learning to discern who is and who isn't from God was the *confession*, who is Christ? The 2nd is this, "The *conversation*" "They are of the world, therefore they *speak* as the world." The influence of the world is evident in their speech, in Matt Ch 12 Jesus told us that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. How does a person handle themselves in their day to day living? I realize that here at church everybody puts on their "Sunday best." I never hear any foul language, any hateful, derogatory, or lewd conversations around the fellowship, over doughnuts or whatever. I just don't hear it, but I hope that it's not just a church that you refrain from a foul mouth, or derogatory speech, or lewd conversations, I hope that you don't speak as the world speaks. From selfish motives and a self seeking agenda, tearing others down to exalt yourself in the sight of others, motivating others through carnal manipulation and so on. The influence of the world is evident in their speech.

Not only will their confession and their conversation give them away, but also their *crowd*, “the world hears them.” They’re popular guys, they don’t feel or face the rejection that the child of God feels and faces from the world because they’re loved *by* the world which tells us that they are *of* the world. Jesus said, “*If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.*” John 15:19 It’s true that we’re to take the gospel to the world, and there will be times when the world hears and responds in a positive way and we rejoice when that happens.

But just because the world is responding to a man’s message that doesn’t mean that it’s God’s message, sometimes worldly people respond because the message is worldly, not godly, it’s what they *want* to hear, not what they *need* to hear.

Vs6

The final tool that John gives us that we might learn to discern is *conformity*. The confession, the conversation, the crowd, and the conformity. “He who knows God hears us.” The word “hears” means to “believe it and respond affirmatively or positively to it” the one who *knows* God will *hear* the word of God and *obey* it. When John says that the one who knows God will hear “us” the “us” is a reference to the apostles, that is those who’ve given to us the inspired word of God. To put it plainly the child of God will conform to the word of God, they will walk in obedience to the authority of God’s word in their lives. As I mentioned a moment ago Jesus said that His sheep will hear His voice and they will *follow* Him; that is they will be *obedient* to Him.

So if someone hears and *adheres* to the word of God, we know that they have the spirit of truth, if they don’t hear it and conform to it (being transformed by it) they have the spirit of error.

Notice John makes it clear that theological error has a *spiritual* dynamic to it, it’s not about being intellectual, or educated per se, you can be incredibly intelligent, greatly educated and still be under the influence of the spirit of error. It’s a spiritual dynamic, not an academic dynamic, therefore I need to recognize that if I’m to keep in the “spirit of truth” I need to realize it’s a spiritual issue.

Now; Jesus said, “I am the way, the *truth*, and the life, no one comes to the Father except *through* Me.” So if you and I are to keep in the spirit of truth we’re *to* cling to and abide *in*... Christ.

It’s all about Jesus, recognize Who He is; draw nearer *to* Him, abide *in* Him, and lead your life in a manner that rather leaves no doubt that you are the sheep of His hand, that you hear His voice and that you follow Him...

Prayer Points:

Lord may there be no doubt, be it by our confession, our conversations, our crowd and/or our eagerness to be transformed and conformed to Your Word, that we belong to You. That we abide in the Spirit of truth and that the Spirit of truth abides in us; glorify Yourself through us and have Your way in us. Help us to learn to discern, give us ears to hear You, may we recognize Your voice and follow after You, and we give You praise that You are in us and You are greater than he who is of this world, that in You we're more than conquerors and that nothing will separate us from Your love.

Maybe as we've been going through God's word today something has been resonating in you, or really speaking to you about your need to be in the truth. You're done with the deception, or self justification, but you want to be right with the Lord, clean before Him and forgiven by Him. Christ has laid down His life for you, if you will but believe *in* Him and surrender your life completely *to* Him, forgiveness and the wholeness of heart can be yours today. If God is seeking to deal with you, just cry out to Him, believe upon Him and be saved.