

1 John 3:2-4:6

Discerning the Truth

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

Romans 8:15-16

And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us. Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.

1 John 3:24-4:6

This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

1 John 3:24-4:6

1. All Christians have a responsibility to test the message of those who claim to speak for God (3:24-4:1)
 - This command is spoken to all believers: “Beloved...”
 - Testing the spirits means examining teachers or prophets: “test the spirits... for many false prophets have gone out into the world.”
 - There are spiritual forces at work behind every religious teacher

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2. The test: Does this teacher/prophet confess the incarnation of Jesus? (4:2-3)
 - Using Jesus as the basis of theology and faith is not enough - more theological precision is necessary.
 - Incarnation: “The Word was with God, and the Word was God... [and] the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:1,14).

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3. John's goal is to reassure these Christians in the midst of conflict (4:4-6)
 - John is optimistic: all who believe in Jesus will be victorious
 - Do not second guess the truth of the gospel when you see the success of false teaching (v.5)