

1 John 4:1-6

"Detecting Deceivers"

* When you believe on the Lord J.C. God *seals* you, places *w/in* you, His Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is His "gift" to you (if you will), to seal you, to strengthen you, to encourage & aid you in your walk w/J.C. until you stand before Him face to face.

This is what John was talking about when we last left off. ("To keep His commandments is to abide in Him [in Christ] & He abides in us. & By this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.") The Holy Spirit will bear witness w/your spirit that you belong to Jesus. If you don't have the Spirit of God, then you don't belong to God. (Paul says this plainly in Rom Ch 8 Vs 9).

But there can be a bit of a conundrum, sort of a quandary that can confront the Christian & that is this. – The *Holy Spirit*... isn't the *only* spiritual influence in this world. There are *many* spiritual influences in this world. Many of whom seek to masquerade as the Holy Spirit for the purposes of deception, to lead people (including the child of God) astray.

Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, spoke to them of the fact that there would be false apostles, deceitful workers who sought to take on the appearance of apostles of Christ. & He said, "*And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.*"¹ The principle that's being developed here is that there are spiritual influences at work in the world (outside of the Holy Spirit) who will seek to lead people away from the truth. In our present passage, Jn wants to equip us to detect & discern deceivers.

Don't just assume that a "spiritual experience" or a "word from the spirit" out of another individual's mouth must come from the *Holy Spirit*. Again, as Paul instructed the Thessalonians, "*Test all things; hold fast what is good.*"² *

Vs 1

* John says, "Look, not everyone who comes to you w/a word *from* God is necessarily speaking *for* God & you need to stop listening to them like they are! This phrase, "do not believe" is constructed in such a way (in the Greek) that forbids the continuation of an action that's already taking place. "Stop believing every spirit as if it's *divine* because it may well be *demonic*!"

¹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [2 Co 11:14–15]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). [1 Th 5:21]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

It's fairly common that many people automatically presume that demonic influence (or activity) will always manifest itself in some obviously evil or destructive format. But that's not true. I'm not saying it's never true, but sometimes people gathering information w/mal intent from a balloon at 60,000', want you to think it's just a benign, harmless weather balloon that just happened to drift into & cross over your entire nation. (Do you understand what I'm saying? All I'm saying is that it's oftentimes more effective to present yourself in a harmless [perhaps even somewhat positive] fashion, so that [if left unchecked] you can deliver a tremendous amount of damage.)

& W/in this context, there are all kinds of people out there (including but not limited to pastors, teachers & evangelists) who claim to be speaking for God, or to have had a "spiritual" experience by which they want to influence you. But not every word brought into a person's mind is from God, & not every spiritual experience is from the Holy Spirit. *

A good example of this is **Jeremiah 28**, let's look at it together... To set the scene for you, God had told Jeremiah that the kingdom of Judah (along w/basically every other kingdom around them) was going to be given over to Babylon to serve Nebuchadnezzar. He was told to make yokes of wood & bonds, & he was to send them to the surrounding kingdoms & wear one as a visual reminder that God had put the nations under the yoke (or control) of the king of Babylon.

As Ch 28 opens, another guy claiming to be a prophet (by the name of Hananiah) enters the equation. Notice.

Vs 1-9

You get the idea, right? Hananiah comes on the scene claiming to have a word from God. "Thus says the Lord God of Israel! I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon & w/in 2 yrs you're all going to be back in your homes, sipping sweet tea & loving life once again!" & Initially, Jeremiah is like, "Hey buddy, I hope you're right! But I need to remind you all of something & that is this; what I've told you didn't originate w/me. God has been warning you by the mouths of His prophets long before I came along... Now you have this guy saying something different. You'll know which of us is truly speaking for God by seeing what actually comes to pass."

Vs 10-17

* God is not a fan (does not take lightly) when people say, "Thus says the Lord" when the Lord didn't say...

But what Jn is emphasizing in our present passage isn't the *accountability* of the *deceiver*, it's the *responsibility* of the *believer* (every believer) to discern the truth. God makes clear again & again throughout His word that there will be people who seek to deceive you, that doctrines of demons abound more & more... & *all the more* in these last days to which we've been called. We read in 1st Timothy Ch 4, "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,"³

We're not to receive something simply because it presents itself in spiritual rhetoric, or even appeals to what we *want to believe* is true. We're to run what we hear through a "grid" (of sorts) before we're willing to receive it & respond to it. We're to "test" it, to "examine" it. Not critically, or cynically, but carefully because it's our heart to honor the word of God. *

But "many false prophets" have gone out into the world & Satan has an agenda to deceive & destroy your life. Jesus referred to these guys as "wolves in sheep's clothing" (Matt 7:15).

& Jn is going to speak to that means by which we discern, but I want to give you a few more tools that the Bible gives us along w/what Jn shares w/us (though they all ultimately reside w/in the same kind of context). – * One way to affirm a word is from God is to wait & see if it even comes to pass. God told Moses (& Jeremiah reiterated before the leaders he was speaking to) that they would know which man was the true prophet by simply waiting/watching & seeing whose word came to pass. If someone says that God gave them a word for you, & the thing which they say doesn't come to pass, then God didn't give them a word, you can reject it.

But even if it comes to pass, that in & of itself isn't enough to necessarily affirm a word as from the Lord. The next thing we look at is, "What's the message of the person who gave the word"? Does their message line up w/the written, revealed word of God? In Deut 13, God tells Moses that even if a sign or wonder comes to pass, but the person proceeds to lead you in a direction contrary to the Word of God, or after a "god" who isn't the revealed God of the Bible, don't follow them. The proof isn't in the miracle, it's in the message.

Isaiah said it this way. "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."^{4*}

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Ti 4:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Is 8:20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

* We want to be in the habit of the Bereans in Acts 17. It says, “...they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.”⁵ They received the word readily, just readily made sure it was the word of God! How? By measuring what they were hearing up against the written word. God isn’t going to contradict Himself...

Something else we might add is that there should be confirmation. Peter tells us (2 Pet 1:20-21) that true prophecy is never of any private interpretation. It would be more than likely that by the time someone comes to you w/a word, that if it’s from the Lord, God has already been speaking that to your heart & now they’re bearing witness. Or perhaps they share something, you tuck it away, & then someone, somewhere completely different (not even knowing of the other person) shares the same kind of thing w/you. Then we look to see if it’s rooted in biblical principles. If so, God has my attention on the matter.

So, we run the message through the grid of God’s word. * Btw, it’s never a bad thing to evaluate & re-evaluate what we believe in the same manner. Sometimes, as your knowledge of God’s word grows, you realize that what you’ve believed before perhaps wasn’t spot on. That’s ok (we’re not talking about matters of salvation), it’s called growing, maturing. We’ll probably never have everything exactly right this side of heaven. Be open to God continuing His transforming work in your life by the renewing of your mind through the washing of the water by His word... What else is critical to discerning or detecting a true message (or messenger) from the Lord?

Vs 2-3

We run the message through the grid of God’s word. Examine it to ensure it’s biblically based before we receive it. John wants to give us yet *another* tool to help us discern the spirit of truth from the spirit of error & that is this. What is the person’s position on who (exactly) *is* J.C.?

* True prophecy, true teaching will present a true Jesus. This word “confesses” in Vs 2 is the Greek word, “Homologeo” meaning, “to say the same thing”. Meaning, the person who agrees w/scripture, says the same things about Jesus as does the Bible, is of God.

What’s interesting about our text is that in Jn’s day, it wasn’t the *deity* of Jesus that was in question. It was the *humanity* of Jesus. He was dealing w/a sect known as the Gnostics who essentially claimed that everything material was innately/intrinsically evil.

⁵ The New King James Version. (1982). (Ac 17:11). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Therefore Jesus couldn't have had a physical body, He couldn't have become a "flesh & blood" human being, because God wouldn't "join Himself" or have any kind of partnership w/impure, evil material things. – They taught that Jesus was a spirit, that He didn't leave footprints when He walked...

Today, 2,000+ yrs removed, it's not the humanity people question, it's the deity! In his gospel, Jn dealt with both. He said, **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."**⁶ There's the deity. In Vs 14 he says, **"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."**⁷ There's the humanity. God, became a Man & dwelt among us. He was fully God, & He was fully Man. But the simple, plain principle behind what John is saying here is that a true *man of God*, a true *message from God* will present the truth about Jesus. *

Many of you know that a man by the name of Joseph Smith, claimed a "spiritual experience". He had visions, was visited by angels (according to his own testimony) ... But the message that resulted from this "encounter" led him in a way contrary to scripture. Today his branch belief is known as the Mormons. They believe that Jesus isn't the only begotten Son of God (though they'll use the term, "Son of God"), but they believe that Jesus is Lucifer's brother. They have all kinds of beliefs that are completely contrary to scripture.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Jesus is actually Michael, the arc angel. Christian Science states that Jesus wasn't *God*, but an *emanation from God*. Muslims believe that Jesus was a prophet. Unitarianism teaches Jesus as a great man, perhaps a prophet or maybe even supernatural, but not the Son of God.

The bottom line is that if someone teaches that Jesus was *anyone* other than what Scripture states, they're not from God, they're of a different spirit, the spirit of error which ultimately leads back to the demonic, not the Divine.

* "This is the spirit of Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, & is now already in the world." To deny the true Jesus (according to scripture) is the basis of the spirit of the A.C. It's readily at work in the world today, not only opposing the *true* Jesus, but offering a substitute Jesus. Listen, the devil doesn't care if you use the word "Jesus", if you believe in a person named "Jesus" or pray *to* Jesus... as long as it's not the *true* Jesus.

⁶ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Jn 1:1-2]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁷ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Jn 1:14]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

To believe in a false Jesus is to believe in a Jesus who isn't even there & cannot save you. – I mentioned to you a couple weeks ago (it bears repeating), sometimes people can use the same words, but have different meanings. *When you say “Son of God”. You’re thinking, “The Jesus of the Bible, God wrapped in humanity. Fully God, fully Man.”* When a Mormon or J.W. says, “Son of God” they aren't thinking that at all... So, sometimes we've got to get beyond the words & search out what a person *means* by the words they use. *

Vs 4

* The spirit of the A.C. is at work in the world, but as a child of God, though we need the warning, we don't need to worry. Christ dwells *in you* by the power of the Holy Spirit, & Christ in you is greater (stronger) than he (that is Satan or any demonic entity) who is in the world.

Does that mean you'll never struggle, never stumble? No. There are battles we will lose, but the war is already won. You might write it down & read it later, Col 2:11-15. The power that lives in you is greater than any power/pressure that surrounds you... *

Vs 5-6

* The false prophets/preachers & teachers are of the world. They use language that resonates *in* the world & the world hears them. – Now, as believers we have a mandate to bring the message of the gospel to the world. We want to reach the world, but we're not going to use the language *of* the world. *Faith comes by hearing & hearing by the word of God. It's the uncompromising, unadulterated truth of God's Word that ignites faith in the human heart. We're to be salt & light, open & honest about the truth of God's Word.* *

“He who knows God hears *us*”. Jesus said that like this, *“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.”*⁸ Deceivers will utilize worldly wisdom & rationale. The true *man* of God will depend upon & give to you the *word* of God. The “us” in view in Vs 6 is a specific reference to the apostles. The Roman Catholic Church laid claim to this & said that *they* were the official “us” that those who know God would hear...

That is not an appropriate interpretation nor application of this Vs. John is speaking (ultimately) of the authority of scripture. He's essentially saying, “When we know God, and are of God, we'll hear what the Bible says.”

“He who is not of God does not hear us.” You find someone who doesn't receive scripture, has positions contrary *to* scripture, they're not of God. **Close**

⁸ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Jn 10:27). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

The one who receives God's word is of the spirit of truth. The one who rejects God's word is of the spirit of error. & Btw let's note that error has a *spiritual* dynamic to it. It's not about being educated or smart. There are some incredibly intelligent, educated individuals out there who are radically influenced by the spirit of error.

Truth has a spiritual dynamic as well. & To abide in truth, we cling to J.C. who said, "I am the truth" (Jn 14:6).

Run what you hear through the grid of God's Word. Does it meet the criteria of contextual support. What's the person's position on who Jesus is (exactly)? Do they receive & teach the authority of scripture. These things will aid you in discerning deceivers.

God has given you his Holy Spirit, He's begun a good work in you & He will complete it. & He will lead you, guide you & grow you along the way. You will be edified & He will be glorified.

Prayer Points:

God, we thank You for Your Word. That You haven't left us to figure things out on our own. You've given us practical resources to keep us moving forward in a manner well pleasing to You. May Your word, Your wisdom be at work in our lives.

Who is Jesus? He's the sinless Son of God who came to seek & to save that which was lost. Fully Man, fully God who gave His life for the sins of the world. He was delivered up to the cross for our transgression & He was raised to life for our justification. Believe on the Lord J.C. & you will be saved.