



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Examining the text & our hearts:

SUMMARY:

- John emphasizes believers' love for each other. Yet he aims stinging rebukes at 'antichrists and deceivers.' John warns against false prophets, cautioning that not all spirit-inspired preaching comes from God. Preachers are driven either by God's Spirit or the spirit of the Antichrist. In this context, naivety is dangerous. To help believers discern true prophets from false ones, John offers a Christ-centered test: the confession that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh." Rejecting those who deny this truth lays the foundation for later Church Creeds.
- John's second test focuses on the audience's response. A preacher endorsed by the secular world is a false prophet working with the Spirit of Deception. The world opposes God and rejects John's message, while those who know God listen to the preacher fitting this pattern – modelled by John — exhibits the Spirit of Truth.
- Today, pseudo-prophets and deceiving spirits still infiltrate churches, seminaries, and Christian media. Heresy and deception flourish on the Internet, worsened by declining biblical literacy and superficiality. At CIT, we must strengthen our theological foundations, cultivate a deep hunger for Christ-centered preaching, and sharpen our discernment to distinguish God's Spirit from the spirit of the Antichrist, true from false prophets.
- **John 'loved well, because he hated' — Robert Browning (1812-89)**
- John's "epistles... insist... on the primacy of love in the Christian life. John uses the word 'love' 52 times... On the writer... John..., [Robert] Browning wrote ... '*he loved well, because he hated*' ... John never tires of saying[s] ... like, '*Little children love one another,*' but he *also blazes indignantly... against false prophets.* [It is here] that mentions of the Anti-Christ arise in the Johannine" [Stephen J. Vicchio, *Legend of the Anti-Christ*, p. 46]
- *One "way Christians love one another is...to distinguish between true brothers & "* —Matthew Emerson

- The Believers have God's Spirit; test Preachers' spirits (3:24; 4:1)
 - **Believers have God's Spirit (1 3:24b)**
 - "...The way we know that [God] remains in us is from the Spirit he has given" (1 Jn. 3:24b)
 - "1 Jn. 3:24... tells the readers... one of the ways... they may be assured that God 'resides' in them is by the (Holy) Spirit which he has given to believers. Now ... [there's] the need for further qualification because the *Holy Spirit is not the only spirit active in the world*. Thus in 4:1 the readers are warned... 'test the spirits' ..." [W. Hall Harris, *1, 2, 3 John*, p. 173]
 - Don't be gullible; test the spirits of prophets/preachers (4:1)
 - "Don't believe every spirit...test the spirits to see if they are from God... many false prophets ...in the world" (4:1)
 - Do we believe not only God's Spirit, but also other 'spirits' are active? Are we aware there are false prophets?
 - "The apostle John warned, 'Don't believe every spirit' (1 4:1). Has there ever been a generation as gullible as those today who will believe anything they read in the newspaper, radio, TV [or the Internet]?" — A. W. Tozer
 - "The present tense... 'Don't believe every spirit' suggests that John's readers were tending to accept uncritically all teaching which claimed to be inspired ...John urges them to investigate." [J. Stott, *Letters of John*, p. 152]
 - "Test the Don't go by how large of a crowd the teacher is able to attract. Don't be impressed by titles, degrees, & letters after names. Don't be enamored by the beauty of the robe, the sheen of the suit, or the eloquence of the voice. Our standard is the Word of God, the gospel of the person & work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the essential truths of the historic Christian faith." [Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights in 1-3 John*, p. 100]
 - "As Christians ...our faith must be discriminating, discerning, distinguishing faith. To that end, John issues these two commands – the first is negative, the second positive –'Do not believe every spirit' & 'test the ' ... In 1 Jn. 4:1 ...the term 'spirit' signifies a human person who is inspired by the Spirit of truth or the spirit of error [4:6] ...Every human teacher...is motivated & empowered by something... [So, John's] first command is, essentially, '*Don't be gullible.*' *Don't believe everything you hear.* Look before you leap! You need to look beyond the outward & discern the spiritual reality." [Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights in 1-3 John*, p. 100]
 - **'The spirits' – "behind every prophet is a spirit..." – John Stott**
 - "Behind every prophet is a spirit & behind each spirit is either God or the devil" – John Stott
 - "'the spirits': *the root spiritual influence or animating force behind teaching & prophecy* [by a prophet, preacher, or teacher]." [K. Anderson, D. Keating, James, *1st, 2nd, & 3rd John*, p.]
 - "*These 'spirits' John spoke of were not merely disembodied, supernatural beings. John taught that a prophet or teacher was the actual mouthpiece for a spirit.* Spiritual doctrines are promulgated through human spokes- persons. Teachers of truth are filled with the Spirit of God and thus are agents who speak for God. Teachers of falsehood are spreading the 'doctrines of demons'." (1 Tim. 4:1). [*What is the Spirit of the Antichrist?*" org]
 - "In the world view of early Christian & other 1st-century writers, there were *many supernatural spirits* to contend with, good & bad angels, demonic powers, & a host of invisible beings variously named... In this world of spiritual conflict, *the readers must not be naïve & gullible & 'believe every spirit'* (meaning every person claiming to speak by 'the Spirit'); there are other spirits abroad [around]. The same warning is

- relevant to the church today... with rising interest in the occult & 'new age' religions." [Thomas F. Johnson, *1, 2, 3 John*, p.]
- "Immediately after believers are reminded of the gift of the Holy Spirit (3:24), they are urged to test the truth or falsehood of the opponents' theology (4:2-6) ... Readers must discern the truth or falsehood of the things being taught them [by preachers] ... There are ...two... criteria..." [George Parsenius, *1, 2, 3 John*, pp. 38-9]
 - The Need – "Many False Prophets...in the World" (4:1b)
 - "Don't believe every spirit, ...test the spirits...because many false prophets have gone out into the " (4:1)
 - "The reason for.... Test[ing] the spirits is now given" – many false prophets
 - "1 John considers it important to discern whether or not a spirit is indeed from God (1 Jn. 4:1) & ...whose agent a certain prophets or preacher is (1 Jn. 4:2-3)." [Stanley E. Porter (ed.) *Johannine Christology*, p. 314]
 - "The false prophets are initially described in 4:1 as 'spirits'...suggests that they were claiming 'Spirit' authority for their teaching. ...The Johannine notion [is] that 'behind every prophet is a spirit, & behind every spirit either God or the devil' (Stott). ... The importance of origin [is seen] in the... formula 'to be from God' &... 'of the world' ... Hence the vital importance of 'testing' the spirits... [This is] the only Johannine... use of the verb ['test'] ... The present, plural, imperative implies the *need for continuous, perpetual testing*, in view of ... many false prophets." [Trevor Reynolds, *Reading Scripture...*, p. 259]
 - Conflict between John & the false prophets — both claim the Spirit
 - On "*conflicts... among Christian leaders & prophets...one clear instance ...is reflected in 1 4:1-3*. Here the term 'spirits' refers to the one 'spirit of error' (4:6) who speaks through many false prophets. The test suggested by [John] is based on the...confession... by prophets." [David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity*, p. 218]
 - John presents "the Holy Spirit within the context of [many] spirits...Immediately it becomes clear that the *claim to be spirit-filled is not enough, one may well have the spirit, but that spirit may not be 'of God.'* ...John is confronting a situation in which *both parties claim to possess the Spirit...Both groups believe that the [end-time] outpouring of the Spirit* has taken place, & in this sense can be called 'believers.'... [But they] have different beliefs about the implications of their possession of the Spirit. This isn't a situation where the opponents don't believe that the [end-time] outpouring...has taken place. At the time of 1 John, *both groups claim such an outpouring of the Spirit* but understand it differently... John argues that the spirit these false prophets possess is not that of God. Their prophetic activity...[he] describes in 2 Jn. 9 as 'going beyond & not remaining in the teaching of the Christ'." [Urban C. Von Wahlde, *Gospel & Letters of John*, Vol. 3, p. 148]
 - This is "one of the fiercest conflicts in 1st-century Christianity...The Elder claimed that God '*gave us his Spirit*' (3:24; 4:13), *not them*. Their 'spirit' was not to be They ...are 'false prophets' who 'have gone out into the world.' They do not 'acknowledge Jesus' & they are not 'from God.' On the contrary they represent the... 'spirit of Antichrist'. *They* are 'from the world,' whereas '*we* are from God'. *We* have the 'Spirit of Truth,' *they* have 'the spirit of error'." [Thomas F. Johnson, *1, 2, & 3 John*, pp.]
 - "Spirit" – Which Spirit? – the 'spirit of Antichrist'
 - John "proposes an objective criterion by which one can test the claim to have the Spirit: what confession does the spirit make about Jesus? ...[He] identifies the spirit that does not confess properly as the spirit of the

- 'Antichrist' ... 'that you've heard is coming'." [Urban C. Von Wahlde, *Gospel & Letters of John*, Vol. 3, p. 149]
- "In 4:1-6 *the Antichrist* is presented as the one who *inspires those [false prophets]* who oppose the true Christian confession...this shows...Antichrist has already come... *It is by the influence of his spirit that the Antichrist inspires opponents of Christ.*" [L.J. Lietaert Peerbolte, *Antecedents of Antichrist*, pp. 105, 109]
- 'False Prophets' – Visiting Preachers or Departing Secessionists?
 - "The false prophets are said to '*have gone out into the world*' (4:2) ... In the context of 1 Jn. this is yet another *allusion to those who seceded from the author's community* & were yet seeking to deceive those who remained within it (2:18-27). By saying these people have 'gone out into the world' the author alludes... to their affinity with the unbelieving world ([see]...further in 4:5)." [Colin G. Kruse, *Letters of John*, 147]
 - "The false prophets are described as 'having gone out into the world' In the light of 1 2:18-19... it is tempting to see 4:1 as a reference to those who left the community as well. But this may not be necessary... 4:1 does not clearly indicate that the false prophets are former members of the community who [left]... Here the focus is on *specific false prophets who are likely to pay the community a visit.*" [Daniel Streett, *They Went Out from Us*, 231 & #213]
- Not about spirit/demon-possession or spiritual gifts *per se*
 - John's "concern about the 'spirits' & 'testing the spirits' *does not have to do with possession by spirits or demons, the practice of ecstatic speech, or claims to foresee the future.* Rather, the issues have to do with affirmations about Jesus... specifically on the fact that he has 'come in the flesh'." [M. M. Thompson, "*Paraclete will Teach you all things*," in R. Herms (ed.) *Spirit Says: Inspiration & Interpretation*, p.]
- Applications:
 - Be Aware that False Teachings are Circulating
 - "Know[ing]... false teaching exists will help us be alert. It's all around us. Competing truth claims are nothing new... Satan [is] 'the father of lies,' we should...expect...deceitful truth claims will saturate the world (Jn. 8:44).
 - Jesus braced us for various false messages & messengers by saying things like:
 - "*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous You will recognize them by their fruits.*" (Matt. 7:15–16)
 - Peter [warned] the church: "*But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies...*" (2 Peter 2:1)
 - ...We must know false teaching — messages & messengers — exist. We must be aware...As we scroll Instagram, read the latest headlines, or listen to... popular podcasts, we must be aware the great deceiver is out there, trying to lie to us. We must be on guard." [Nate Holdridge, "*Origin of Truth & Love: 3 Tests*," nateholdridge.com]
 - Testing the spirits behind teachings of false prophets is a Church-matter
 - "*The tests that are actually offered have a more communal function in that they provide the community with criteria by which to determine whether or not to receive a visiting teacher or prophet* (1 Jn. 4:1-6; 2 Jn. 10- 11)." [Daniel R. Streett, *They Went Out from Us*, p. 122 & #34]
 - "*The church is called to be the custodian of the truth.* When John says... 'test the spirits,' he is addressing the corporate body of [Christians]. Throughout 4:1-6 his verbs are plural ('*together all of you test the spirits*'), implying that...

- “Many deceivers have gone out into the world; they do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. This is the deceiver & the antichrist.” (2 John 7)
 - In 1 John “God’s Spirit is given to the community (3:24b) to lead its members to discriminate between error and truth, between false prophets and those whose teaching agrees with the apostles (4:1-6) ...[Potential] confusion over ‘the spirits’ [is produced] by the presence of ‘many false prophets in the world’ (1 Jn. 4:1), whose ‘spirit of antichrist’ [inspires] a confession contrary to the apostolic testimony... [expressed] in the community’s public confession that ‘Jesus, Christ in the flesh, has come from God’ (4:2). The ‘test’ ...of faith is whether or not the content of any prophetic speech... agrees with 1 John’s apostolic summary...” [Robert W. Wall,
 - John provides “a yardstick for measuring the Spirit’s The measure is Christological [Christ-centered]. Spirits [of prophets/preachers] from God confess ‘Jesus Christ as having come in the flesh’ ...Christ fully assumed the bodily existence common to humanity.” [Robert W. Yarbrough, 1-3 John, p. 243]
 - Incarnation: “The term incarnation is of Latin origin & literally means ‘becoming flesh’ (Latin, in carne). While the term does not appear in English translations, the original Greek uses its equivalent in 1 John 4:2, ‘Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (en sarki).” [Kenneth R. Samples, 7 Truths That Changed the World, 51]
 - “Christians must judge the Christological correctness of any...[preacher’s] If the incarnate Christ has been theologically removed, if Christology [i.e., Christ’s person & work] is not at the center of what someone says, we are right to be suspicious.” [Gary M. Burge, Letters of John, p. 117]
 - The “affirmation that ‘Jesus Christ has come in the flesh’ [4:2] was the combustion point of Christian Test #1 “is a single practical test: What do the prophets – true or false [prophets] – believe? What do they teach about Jesus? If they acknowledge Jesus Christ come in the flesh [4:2], they are genuine Christians; if they do not, they are false prophets & belong to the world. This test is a clarification of... 2:22: ‘Who is the liar?What does the Preacher teach about Jesus? Whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ.’ The faith statement that ‘Jesus is the Christ’ is nuanced now in 4:2 to insist that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. The emphasis falls on the humanity of Jesus...” [Robert J. Karris, Colledgeville Bible Commentary: NT, pp. 1024-5] confession in the Johannine community (2 Jn. 7; 1 Jn. 4:2). [John’s] letters insist that Jesus was no ghost, no docetic phantasm, but a tangible, truly human being of flesh & blood, who truly suffered & died... ‘Jesus’ is the name of a human being; [its] not merely confession of the Christ, but that the Christ was Jesus, [that] is at the heart of Christian faith.” [M. Eugene Boring, Hearing John’s Voice, p.] “Pneumatology of Johannine Corpus,” D. Castelo (ed.) T&T Clark Handbook of Pneumatology, p. 49]
 - “The importance of acknowledging the role of Jesus in salvation & that he is ‘God’s Son’ & ‘the Christ’ is evident from the numerous statements of 1 John in which...these titles are at stake: 2:22 (‘Who is the liar, if not the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ?’); 2:23 (‘No one who denies the Son has the Father’); 4:2-3 (‘Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.’); 4:15 (‘Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God’) ... [Note] this massive emphasis on the proper confession of [the human,] Jesus as Son & as the Christ ... the very antithesis of the position of the opponents.” [Urban C. Von Wahlde, Gospel & Letters of John, Vol. 3, p. 136]

- What is John's theology about Jesus Christ?
 - In his letters "John defends (1.) the dual confession that Jesus is both Christ (2:22) & the Son of God (2:22-3) & (2.) the incarnation... that God the Father 'sent' his Son into the world (4:9-10) & that, having been 'sent', the Son was 'sent' in such a way that he 'came in the flesh' (4:2) & thus was 'manifested' to men (1:2) in such a way that, while still 'the Eternal Life which was with the Father' from the beginning (1:1-2), he could be heard, seen with...human eye[s], gazed upon, & touched by human hands. So intense is John's conviction regarding the necessity of a real incarnation that he makes the confession 'Jesus Christ has come in the flesh,' a test of orthodoxy – to confess [this] is to be 'of God'; to deny it is to be 'not of God' but 'of Antichrist' (4:2-3)." [Robert Reymond, *New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, (2nd ed.) p.]
- John's Creedal Statements – 'Jesus Christ has come in the flesh' (2 7)
 - "The NT gives evidence of the early church's use of confessions & credos... For e.g. the expression 'Jesus Christ has come in the flesh' [4:2] appears to be a credo designed to refute the false teaching that Jesus Christ only appeared to be a human being (1 4:2; 2 Jn. 7)." [C. Brand, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, pp. 328-9]
 - "The background of 1 John is...division & conflict over false teaching (1 2:19). Short creedal criteria are cited throughout the letter: 'Jesus is the Christ' (2:22; 5:1), 'Jesus is the Son of God' (4:15; 5:5) & 'Jesus Christ has come in the flesh' (4:2; 2 Jn. 7). They serve to [condemn doctrines] ...that split the human Jesus from the divine Christ... [Such] creedal...elements...illustrate how the core content of Christian teaching was summarized ...to draw unambiguous lines between... heresy & orthodoxy ('the teaching of Christ' 2 Jn. 9)." [DF. Wright, "Creeds," in RP. Martin (ed.) *Dictionary of the Later NT*, p.]
- Interpreting 'Jesus Christ has come in the flesh'
 - "The first test relates to theology or doctrine: "Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God" (4:2). We can ask, does the content of the person's teaching acknowledge that Jesus Christ— fully God & fully human — has come in the flesh? If the answer is yes, then we know the Spirit of God inspires that if not, his entire teaching ought to be rejected. This particular test was especially apropos in John's day, as the heresy of ['Docetism'] was becoming prevalent; ['Docetism'] taught that Jesus only appeared to have a human body but was not actually a flesh-&-blood person.). ["What is the Spirit of the Antichrist?" Op. cit.]
 - "Scholars have identified several ways that the denial that Jesus Christ 'has come in the flesh' [1 John 4:2] would be an anti-orthodox understanding of the identity & mission of Jesus Christ. There are two elements in the claim; the meaning of 'has come' and that of 'in ' Notably 'flesh' in John's writings is not as negative as in Paul's for the Word has become flesh (Jn. 1:14)." [Karen H. Jobes, 1, 2, & 3 John, p. 180]
 - God's Pre-existent Son permanently took on flesh
 - "Smalley... understand[s] 'has come' to refer to the 'coming' of the pre-existent Son of God into the world permanently united with human flesh (rather than merely inhabiting a human body temporarily, as an adoptionist view held by Cerinthus suggested). This view that the 'coming' is a reference to the incarnation is supported when the perfect tense participle translated in 4:2 as 'has come' is read against the background of John's Gospel, where the same tense of the same verb 'has come' is found 11 times... [e.g. in] John 18:37 'I was born for this, & I have come into the world for this: to testify to the truth'." [Karen H. Jobes, 1-3 John, p. 180]
 - Jesus' human flesh has Saving Significance

- Raymond “Brown argues that the issue at stake is soteriology [salvation], not Christology [Christ’s person/ work] ... ‘The issue is not that the secessionists are denying the incarnation or the physical reality of Jesus’ humanity; they are denying that what Jesus was & did in the flesh was related to his being the Christ, i.e., was salvific’ [had saving significance] (Brown).” [Karen H. Jobes, 1-3 John, p. 180]
 - “The perfect tense of the verb ‘has come’ in 4:2 indicates that the point being made about Jesus Christ has a present significance resulting from the past action of his coming (i.e., his earthly life). The difference between understanding the ‘coming’ as a reference to the incarnation & understanding it as referring to Christ’s salvific mission is slight, since both the incarnation of the pre-existent Christ and the redemptive purpose of the incarnation are taught... throughout the NT.” [Karen H. Jobes, 1-3 John, p. 181]
 - “Another aspect of John’s dispute with the secessionists is about who has the authority to interpret the significance of Jesus. Jesus commissioned men who personally knew him to be his witnesses... His close circle of disciples... bear authoritative testimony to the gospel & not ant subsequent Christian. The completed NT was not available to John’s original readers as it is to us today. To believe the NT is to believe not only the historical facts about Jesus, but [also] the divinely-inspired NT writers’ interpretation of the significance of those facts. John argues here that to know God truly is... [via] the life, death & resurrection of Jesus Christ as John & other apostolic witnesses attest to it. The... Holy Spirit coheres with that testimony & claims to [the Spirit’s] authority cannot justify ‘(going) beyond... the teaching of Christ’ (2 Jn. 9).” [Karen H. Jobes, 1-3 John, p. 182]
 - False Prophets animated/energized by the ‘Spirit of Antichrist (4:3)
 - “Every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from This is the spirit of the antichrist...” (4:3)
 - “In 4:3 the false prophets are identified as manifestations of the Antichrist because every spirit that does not confess Jesus (in terms acceptable to [John]) is the Spirit of Antichrist and evidently the Spirit of Error [deception].” [John Painter, 1, 2 & 3 John, 256]
 - “The spirit of antichrist was already in the world & it was energizing the many false ” –Karen Jobes
- What was the teaching of John’s Opponents?
 - “There is simply not enough information in the text to allow a specific reconstruction of the antichrists’ beliefs that put them at odds with John. We may never know [specifics].” [Karen H. Jobes, 1-3 John, p. 181]
 - Daniel Streett argues 4:2 is imprecise so “When... we read in 1 4:2 that the false prophets do not confess that [‘Jesus Christ has come in the flesh’], we should not read into that statement an involved docetic ... deviation... 1 Jn. 4:2 says no more than that the antichrists refuse to abide by the foundational confessions which demarcate the ‘children of God’ who fellowship with God & his Son.” [Daniel Streett, Op. cit., pp. 217-8]
 - Some scholars suggest “1 4:2 indicates that the opponents were... denying the ‘flesh’ of Jesus Christ, but not in the sense of denying his incarnation or human physicality. Rather, the term ‘flesh’ [refers] to Jesus’ earthly life, his human career. To deny Jesus Christ as having come in the flesh was to hold that [Jesus’] human career... from birth to crucifixion, carried little or no salvific significance. Against this, 1 John declares that ... we must speak about Jesus’ career in the flesh – it is essential; without it there is no fellowship & no message of eternal life... [In this view] 1 Jn. 4:2

- refers not to Jesus' coming into the world (i.e., birth & incarnation [per se (as such)]), so much as his salvific mission, his coming as the one sent by God to be the messianic Redeemer." [Daniel Streett, *They Went Out from Us*, pp. 218-9]
- Larry Hurtado asserts that 1 Jn. 4:2 "reflects the author's polemical judgment about the teaching of the secessionists, not a simple quotation of their teaching. The secessionists could well have referred to Jesus' 'flesh,' but if so, their interpretation of it was unsatisfactory to the author [John], & he judged it to be, to all intents & purposes, a denial of Jesus' real fleshly existence." [Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, p. 547]
 - John's Test #1 not comprehensive; it addresses the contested issue
 - John writes, 'This is how you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; but every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God (1 Jn. 4:2-3). Did the author really mean that a spirit from God would not have to believe that Jesus also rose from the dead, or that he was also God 'in the beginning' (Jn. 1:1)? Of course not. There was an issue at hand, the issue of Jesus Christ's true humanity – 'in the flesh' — & the author is specifically addressing that What the spirits must confess here is just one abbreviated summary of a portion of what [John's] community believed about Jesus." [Charles E. Hill, "Paradox Pushers...", in Michael F. Bird (ed.) *How God Became Jesus*, p. 182]
 - John's Test #1 based on his historical context
 - "John's two tests...were designed for a particular historical context... Those tests may be useful for us, but its an open question whether they serve as a universal arbiter in questions of orthodoxy. For instance, some doctrinal errors would pass John's test. Mormons for e.g., agree that Jesus was human & divine, but his divinity was not unique to him... Because John's tests are limited to one historical setting, they also tend to be limited in scope. Other essential beliefs about Jesus that go beyond his incarnation, such as ...his resurrection & second coming, might be included. John mentions none of these because they were not issues [in his era] ... Each generation... must forge its beliefs, anchored to doctrines laid out in the Scriptures with an eye on contemporary challenges ... The historic creeds (Nicaea, Chalcedon) did precisely this." [Gary M. Burge, *Letters of John*, p. 178]
 - Applying John's Test to the World's Major Abrahamic Religions
 - The World's major "monotheistic faiths (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) – take positions that logically clash with one another. The world's largest religion, Christianity, affirms that Jesus Christ is God incarnate (God in human flesh). But the world's second larges religion, Islam, asserts that Jesus was merely a human being.
 - Traditional Judaism also denies the deity of Jesus of Nazareth." [Kenneth R. Samples, *7 Truths That Changed the World*, pp. 49-50]
 - "Jesus Christ cannot be both God incarnate (Christianity) & not God incarnate (Judaism, Islam) at the same time & in the same respect (Law of Noncontradiction). Contradictory religious claims have opposite truth value...they negate or deny each other. Therefore, [at most,] exactly one can be true & the other false. Accordingly, Jesus Christ must either be God incarnate or not God incarnate, there is no middle position possible... A [composite,] all-inclusive religion offers no hope." [Kenneth R. Samples, *7 Truths*, p. 50] Note: Islam & Judaism don't confess 'Jesus Christ came in the flesh' [4:2a]; they deny it. John says the 'spirit' operating in Islam & Judaism is not the Spirit 'from God' (God's Holy Spirit). It's the 'spirit of Antichrist' (4:3).
 - The Church's Response – to Receive or Not Receive? (2 Jn. 7, 10)
 - "Many deceivers have gone out into the world; they do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the This is the deceiver & the antichrist... If anyone comes to you &

- does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your home, & do not greet him.” (2 John 7, 10 CSB)
- “2 John [is] emphasizing that the way Christians love one another is... to distinguish between true brothers [& sisters] and deceivers [or ‘antichrists’].” [Matthew Y. Emerson, *Christ & the New Creation*, p.]
 - “A group of deceivers had left John’s church, & were roving Asia Minor becoming parasites on healthy churches and evangelizing for their deviant doctrines. John wrote a sharp letter to slam the door on such dangerous persons: ‘do not receive him into your home, & do not greet him’.” [Don Carson, *Message of the Church*, p.]
- Can Non-Christian Religions experience God’s Spirit apart from confessing Jesus Christ?
 - John’s ‘spirit-test’ is Christological, Christ-centered; in contrast some scholars sever the Spirit from Christ
 - “... Many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 This is how you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 but every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist...” (1 John 4:1-3)
 - Modern Scholars who argue God’s Spirit is independent of Christ: Two Examples:
 - Clark Pinnock (1937-2010); “Post-conservative Christian;” Prof. McMaster Divinity College.
 - “God’s breath [Spirit] flows in the world at large, not just within the confines of Christian movements ... We see his activity in human culture and even in the religions of humanity.” –Clark Pinnock
 - “The Spirit... overcome[s] the historical particularity of the Son & becomes the Savior of all people” –C Pinnock
 - Amos Yong (1965-) Pentecostal; Dean of Theology, Fuller Seminary, CA., USA
 - “God’s Spirit is the life-breath of [God’s image] in every human being and the presupposition of all human relationships & communities.” –Amos Yong
 - “Everything that exists, including all religions, are providentially sustained by the Spirit of God for divine purposes.” –Amos Yong [Graham Cole asks if Dr. Yong would say this of religions condoning child sacrifice]
 - We, Christians, should “ask if there are others, those outside the pale of who we... think are... the elect, whom God may nevertheless count as his own.” –Amos Yong
 - A. “Yong’s framework, while... derived from... Pentecost, ignores its... Christological basis. It seems untenable to apply the benefits of the Spirit of Christ in a universal fashion without Christ himself.” –Carolyn EL. Tan
 - Prof. Amos “Yong admits that 1 Cor. 12:3 and 1 John 4:2-3 might appear to establish a [Christ-centered] Christological criteria for discerning the spirits... [Yet Dr. Yong] proposes [his own] specific criteria for discerning ‘greater or lesser divine presence & activity’ in religious others. Divine presence is marked by ‘truth, goodness, beauty, & holiness,’ while divine absence is marked by the ‘destructive, false, evil, ugly, & profane existence of the fallen & demonic world’.” [Todd Miles, *God of Many Understandings?* p. 241 & #158]
 - Dr. Amos Yong’s position runs counter to most Pentecostal & Evangelical Christians
 - “In general, Pentecostals have been very cautious about speaking of any salvific role of the Spirit among [non- Christian] religions outside of the work of the Spirit in preparing people for hearing the gospel.” [Allan Anderson (ed.) *Studying Global Pentecostalism*, p. 234]
 - “On the whole, Pentecostals do not acknowledge the presence of salvific elements in non-Christian religions because they view this as contrary to the teaching of the Bible. The church is called to discern the spirits through... the Holy Spirit informed by the Word of

God (1 Cor. 12:10; 14:29; 1 Thess. 5:19-21; 1 John 4:2-3) ["Word & Spirit, Church & World" Final Report of the Int. Pentecostal-Reformed Dialogue, (200) p. 12]

- The Second Test – Who listens to John & who does not? (1 Jn. 4:4-6)
 - “4 You are from God... 5 They are from the world. Therefore, what they say is from the world, & the world listens to them. 6 We are from God. Anyone who knows God listens to us; anyone who is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of deception.” (1 John 4:4-6)
 - Test #2: John’s audacious assertions (4:6)
 - John’s assertion “sounds like the height of arrogance...” –John Stott
 - He “assert[s] ... whoever knows God agrees with me & those who don’t know God disagree with me” — G. Knight
 - For “John every teaching finds its origin in either the Spirit of Truth or the spirit of [deception]” –George Knight
 - “We are from God. Anyone who knows God listens to us; anyone who isn’t from God does not listen to us.” (4:6)
 - “The second test... contrasts the faithful & the secessionists based on the sign of who listens to the faithful & the Elder and who does not (4:4-6).” [Duane F. Watson, Letters of John, pp. 110-1]
 - John’s assertion “sounds like ‘the height of arrogance’ (J. Stott) And so it would be... if an individual Christian said it. After all, it’s a pretty heady remark to assert that whoever knows God agrees with me & those who don’t know God disagree with me. But John is not writing as an individual. He has a message from God that the other apostles & writers of the NT share with him. His statement in 1 Jn. 4:5-6 ‘is consistent with John’s repeated emphasis that safety from error is to be found in loyalty to that which his readers ‘had’ or ‘heard’ ‘from the beginning’ (John Stott) ... Being loving in 1 John doesn’t mean accepting... doctrines ... that happen to be in vogue in the larger world or even the church ... That’s not a popular message in [today’s] world that sees everything in shades of gray... [But for] John... every teaching... finds its origin in either the ‘Spirit of Truth’ or the ‘spirit of error [deception]’... That ...spiritual insight...is in danger of being lost in the 21st-century.” [George R. Knight, Exploring the Letters of John..., pp. 128-9]
 - “We are from God. Anyone who knows God listens to us’ (4:6) –a powerful statement regarding John’s apostolic authority.” — Paul Copan, How Do You Know You’re Not Wrong? p. 224]
 - John’s Message is the basis for Test #2
 - “John offers a 2nd test to help believers distinguish the ‘Spirit of Truth,’ God’s Spirit (Jn. 14:16-17) from the ‘spirit of deceit’... John himself is the basis for this test. [His assertion,] ‘We are from God’ establishes John’s faith & practice, which proceed from the Spirit’s power, as the measure of all spiritual experience. This being the case, if someone ‘listens to us,’ then that person ‘knows God.’ On the other hand, if someone ‘does not listen to us,’ then that person is ‘not from God.’ The referent... ‘whoever.’ is important here.... John is categorizing all individuals on the basis of their response to his message – ‘whoever is of God’ vs. ‘whoever is not of God’ ...It is... likely that this test... is aimed specifically at the Antichrists & is not making a general statement ... Those teachers who do not obey John’s commands ... & who do not remain within the confines of John’s doctrine [‘who go beyond’ (2 Jn. 9)] ... prove that they are actually inspired by ‘the spirit of falsehood [deception]’. True Christians should ...avoid them, recognizing they don’t speak with John’s authorization.” [David E. Garland, Hebrews-Revelation, p.]
 - John represents the Apostolic Tradition

- “This test [Test #2] along with the one in 4:1-2, uses orthodox doctrine to set the boundary for the Spirit’s activity... John cannot prove that the Antichrists’ teaching does not have a [divine] spiritual origin, he can point out that what they say is inconsistent with received [apostolic] tradition ... Either the Antichrists or the tradition must be wrong, & since John knows that the tradition is based on a genuine witness (1:1-3), the tradition must be preserved. 4:6 portrays the conflict between John & the Antichrists as a struggle between established belief & personal religious experience.” [David E. Garland, Hebrews-Revelation, p.]
- The Secessionists’ Success doesn’t validate their Heresy (4:5)
 - “They are from the world. Therefore, what they say is from the world, & the world listens to them.” (4:5)
 - “This is the only mention in 1 John [that] the secessionists... have success in attracting followers.” –D. Watson
 - The Secessionists’ Success (4:5)
 - “That the world listens to the opponents, to the false prophets with the spirit of antichrist indicates that the opposition is having considerable success. Is our author’s group in danger of becoming a minority among what had been called the Johannine community?” [Robert J. Karris, Colledgeville Bible Commentary: NT, p. 1025]
 - “The world – the human system alienated from God & energized by Satan –accepts the ‘spirit of deceit,’ who guides the secessionists. There’s a hint that the secessionists were successful in propagating their docetic message, drawing a larger following than those who remained in the Johannine community.” [C. Marvin Pate, Writings of John, p.]
 - Numerical Success doesn’t Validate Heresy
 - “‘The world listens to them’ (4:5) ... probably means that they were engaged in a successful mission to non- Christians... [The opponents’] attractiveness to the world is not an unambiguous sign of faithfulness to God’s mission, but calls their means [methods] into question: ‘what they say is from the world’... The opponents may have thought that their numerical success confirmed the validity of their Christological message. [John] feared ...they were in danger of losing the truly Christian character of the message altogether.” [David Rensberger, 1-3 John, pp. 114-5]
 - “The opponents may have thought that their numerical success confirmed the validity & divine inspiration of their Christological message. [John] feared that they were in danger of losing the truly Christian character of the Gospel altogether... [His] point is that if those who hear the message are ‘of God,’ they will listen to the gospel of the incarnation. Its not open to the evangelist to sugarcoat the message with popular spirituality that might cut it lose from ... the flesh –of the human life, of Jesus...” [David Rensberger, 1-3 John, p. 115]
 - “We do well to remember that the opponents & their claims & apparent success (1 Jn. 4:4-6) are never far from the discussion... Could the opponents be right? This letter insists that we who continue in the Son and in true belief and practice are God’s children and will face God with confidence at Christ’s coming [3:28].” [Robert Berg, “1 John,” FL. Arrington (ed.) Life in the Spirit NT Commentary, p.]
- Reassuring the Faithful –“the one...in you is greater than the one who’s in the world.” (4:4)
 - The Faithful’s Victory over the False Prophets
 - “...You have conquered them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.” (4:4)
 - “In 4:4, overcoming is explained with reference to the fact that God (or Christ, or God’s Spirit) is within them & that he is greater than Antichrist (or the spirit of

Antichrist), who is in the false teachers.... The context... favor[s] a comparison between God & God's ...opponent in the end-time... Satan, the devil, the Evil One, Antichrist." [Birger Olsson, Letters of John, p.]

- 4:4b "the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world."
 - "The use of the masculine definite article to signify 'the one' in you & 'the one' in the world rules out identifying the Spirit of Truth & the spirit of Error. Rather, the reference must be to God & the Antichrist (Strecker)." [John Painter, 1, 2, 3 John, p. 255]
 - "The community's 'built-in spiritual instinct' gave them the knowledge to define & resist error. 'John's readers were not more learned, more skilled in philosophical debate, than the false teachers; yet by refusing to be persuaded by the false teachers they had overcome them.'" [FF. Bruce, Epistles of John, p. 106]
 - "John cannot allow a peaceful coexistence. In his view, the struggle between true believers & Antichrists [/false prophets] is the visible expression of a cosmic, [end-time] conflict between good & evil [God & Satan] ... Real believers must inevitably defeat the Antichrists because the Spirit that drives them is inherently stronger than the spirit of Antichrist." [David E. Garland, Hebrews-Revelation, p.]
 - "The spirit of deception [4:6] is the spirit of the Antichrist present in the false prophets; it is the spirit that leads people away from the truth about Christ." [Philip Comfort, Gospel of John, 1-3 John, p. 359]
 - The "spiritual battle between good & evil unfolds in this material world... The spirits of error work in false prophets as the Spirit of truth works in the believers, impacting their lives & actions... The Johannine group concretely experienced the destructive presence of the antichrists... & the deception of the false prophets who act under the influence of the spirits of error." [Jan G. van der Watt, Grammar of Ethics of John, Vol., 2, p. 248]
- "You" & "We" are from God
 - 4:4-6 "are connected by ...parallelism in their emphatic beginnings: 'You are from God (4:4), 'they are from the world' (4:5), & 'we are from God' (4:6). This construction distinguishes the faithful & the Elder from the false prophets & others from the world... The Elder joins himself with the faithful as being from God." –D. Watson
 - 4:4 "You (plural) are of God, little children" "This emphatic statement has a parallel in 4:6. There is [only] one change ... the plural pronoun 'we': "We are of God." (4:6)." [John Painter, 1, 2, 3 John, p. 261]
- "They" are from the World vs. "We"— "You" & "Us"
 - "4:5-6...refer to 'we' & 'they', i.e., the false preachers & 'we'. It is easiest to interpret 'we' as the true preachers, i.e., as the interpreters of the Johannine tradition represented by the Elder... The false teachers belong to the world & speak in in the world's terms... The true teachers belong to God & therefore they speak words from God. Both categories have their listeners & followers. The boundary runs between those who know God & those who do not know God." [Birger Olsson, Letters of John, p.]
- Test #2: Who's listening – the world or those who know God?
 - Audience's Response: Who's listening, appreciating the Preacher's Message?
 - Q1: Does the world listen to the Preacher? Yes? Negative/ Spirit of Error; No? Positive
 - Q2: Do you listen to John? Yes? 'You know God/Spirit of Truth'; No? 'You're not from God'
 - "They are from the world. Therefore... the world listens to them. 6 We are from God. Anyone who knows God listens to us; anyone who is not from God does not listen to

- us..." (1 John 4:5-6)
- "John's Second test: What the world thinks about them (4:4-6). John's second test has to do with audiences. Who celebrates this teaching? Where does it find a ready following? ... The false prophecies ([e.g.] those from the schismatics) ... will find a ready reception in the world... It is the response of the church, the community of true believers, that can test the veracity of a word from the Lord (4:6). God's people know his voice –like sheep with a shepherd (Jn. 10:4ff.) — & their corporate judgment should be trusted... When God's Spirit inspires a prophet, his people can discern God's truth." [Gary M. Burge, Letters of John, p. 176]
 - The "sharp contrast between those who listen to & those who don't listen to God through his people is the marker by which to discern the spirits 'by this we know ('we can discern') the Spirit of truth & the spirit of error'... The Holy Spirit [of truth] ... stands over against the spirit of error/falsehood/deceit/deception'." [Trevor Reynolds, Reading Scripture..., p. 263]
 - "The second test of the spirits involves hearing/listening... [This] grounds the Elder's message in the revelation of Jesus Christ as heard by the Johannine tradition-bearers (1 Jn. 1:1, 5) & the proclamation of that message by the Elder & the tradition-bearers... Now listening to this message is made a test of knowing God or not knowing the Spirit of truth." [Duane F. Watson, Letters of John, p. 112]
- Applications:
- Q: Is this Preacher 'of the World'? Do they receive the world's praise/endorsement?
 - "The 2nd test...has to do with the audience & the origination of the message. If the messenger comes from the world system, then they are false messengers (4:5). If 'the world...listens to them,' they are false messengers (4:5) ... Notice how the false teaching was known: The world listens to them (4:5). This helps us understand that popularity & praise are not the best measures of legitimacy. Truth claims are not a democracy. The highest vote-getter doesn't win. Just because the world went along with their message, didn't mean it was true... The message's popularity helped demonstrate how demonic & worldly it was." – Nate Holdridge
 - Q: "Does this preacher hear the Apostles? This question [was] alluded to at the beginning of the letter:
 - "That which we have seen & heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; & indeed our fellowship is with the Father & with His Son Jesus Christ." (1 John 1:3, ESV)
 - The 'we' John referred to there, & refers to in ['us' 4:6], are the original Apostles (4:6). So, 'whoever knows God listens to' the Apostles [like John] (4:6). 'Whoever is not from God does not listen to' the Apostles [like John] (4:6). Q: Do they hear the Apostles? That's how we know the Spirit of truth & the spirit of error (4:6).
 - How does one "hear the Apostles"? ...The Word of the Apostles... is the Word of God. The Apostles...wrote the NT word of God, just as Jesus had promised. To hear them is to hear God. "Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you don't hear them is that you're not of God." (Jn. 8:47) – Nate Holdridge
 - "If the [Christian] community we have always trusted, if the Church as the historic custodian of truth, refuses this prophesy [teaching], we should be warned. Moreover, if [this teaching] finds a ready reception in the world, we should flee because it may be a message that has originated with the evil spirit that dominates the world [the 'spirit of deception']." [Gary M. Burge, Letters of John, p. 177]
 - "The Spirit of God works through our proclamation to open the ears of those in the world that are open to hearing the truth & make the confession that Jesus is the Christ come in the flesh. In our increasingly secular age ... the Church is often reluctant to proclaim its message or all too ready to accommodate the message to

the world's expectations. There's hesitation to offend a particular group or a lowering of the gospel to... promises of health & affluence [prosperity]. This is the time to unapologetically proclaim the full message of sin, redemption, abiding in God, & expectantly awaiting the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. It's also time to be sure our proclamation conformed to the truths [we heard from the beginning]." [Duane F. Watson, Op. cit., pp. 113-4]