



## NG Study Guide: 1 Jn 3:24-4:6 "Spiritual Discernment" [4.29.18]

### Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. *Leader note: Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.*

### The Study

**Thesis:** When it comes to spiritual discernment we can either respond out of fear, anger or with a critical heart. John wants us to learn how to love without compromise. Let us test the spirits that we may discover what is true and reject what is false.

### The Bible Test [1]

John starts with "Beloved", which is God the Father's love for His children as he lays before them a warning. Just as a parent out of love warns their child to stay away from something in order to protect him/her from danger. God the Father warns us to stay away from false spirits. We as God's children are not supposed to believe everything we read, hear or watch but to test and see if it is from God.

John goes on to show us that first test saying, "many prophets have gone out into the world." There are true and false prophets. True prophets received revelation from God and would communicate on behalf of God to God's people. You see things like "the word of the Lord came to them" [1 Kings 17:2, Jeremiah 1:4, Ezekiel 12:26] or the "Spirit of the Lord came upon them" [Judges 3:10, Isaiah 61:1, Ezekiel 11:5]. The true prophets have spoke and their words are found in the bible.

A false prophet then is someone who brings a counterfeit message. Their message is a message that contradicts what has already been written in the word of God. A false prophet is not someone who said something in error, but rather meant what they said. A false prophet is someone who disagrees on essential issues (Jesus is God who became flesh, we are sinners by nature and by choice, Jesus died on the cross for our sins, Jesus rose bodily on the 3rd day, etc.).

We must ask the question then, Do they agree with the bible?

## The Jesus Test [2-3]:

The second test that John lays out for us is the Jesus test. “By this you know the Spirit of God: Every Spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God” [2]. In other words John says that if someone is of God and has the Spirit of God then they will testify of Jesus. Truly having the Spirit of God will point you to the unshakable truth of Jesus. That Jesus was God, had always been God and came down in the form of a man; that he lived a perfect sinless life, died a physical death, raised from the dead in a physical resurrection. Those who are of the Spirit of God will give a genuine confession of Jesus Christ.

This sort of creates a problem for us. What does it mean to confess? Is it only merely words? Jesus says in Matthew 7:21 “Not everyone who says to be, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.” It is not just merely words, but a disposition, a way of living that reflects and portrays the nature and character of Christ.

“And every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God” [3]. What do they believe about Jesus? If they do not confess Jesus then John says they have the, “spirit of the Antichrist”. They are in direct opposition to Christ. They want to take Jesus out of everything and put him on the sidelines. They want to take Christ out of the center of everything and replace Him with something or someone else. Now in John's time he had some opposition from the gnostics. To the gnostics the physical realm or anything that was material or matter was considered evil, so they would have rejected the truth claim that Jesus is God in the flesh.

We must ask the question then, What do they think of Jesus?

## The Holy Spirit [4-6]

Spiritual discernment comes down to the bible and Jesus. And we trust/know the bible to be true and trust/know Jesus to be true by the Holy Spirit. John once again calls us “little children” to remind us that we are susceptible to believing false prophets, false teachers, or false doctrine. We cannot think we are anything other than God's children. Depending on him, trusting in him, looking to him to protect us. Then John goes on to encourage us saying, “you are of God...and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” [4] We have the Holy Spirit within us, who is greater than all the dark, demonic, evil forces of this world.

“They are of the world” [5] That is the culture that opposes God. The culture that is resistant to God and so all who are of the world listen to and agree with what the world has to say, but does not listen to God [6]. They agree with the world's definition of marriage. They agree with the world's definition of sexuality. They agree with the world's view that everyone should seek their own happiness. They reject the bible, they reject Jesus and so therefore are not of God. On the contrary, those who are of God not only “hear” God [6] but live for God [3:24].

## Study Guide Qs

**Q1. Why does John encourage us to “test the spirits”? How does this change the way we accept or reject the things we hear, watch or read?**

**Q2. Why might false prophets and teachers be able to draw large crowds and grow in popularity?**

**Q3. Why is it important for us to be rooted in solid Christ-centered teachings?**

**Q4. Our church's vision is the "love God & love our neighbors." How might this week's passage be applied with our vision in mind?**

**"Digging Deeper" (optional or alternative study)**

- 1. Study some other worldviews that are popular in today's culture. Examine and discern whether what they say aligns or disagrees with scripture.**
- 2. Examine other Christian teachers and preachers with whom you may not agree with on every point, but are Christian. How does this passage change the way you think and or talk about them?**

**Love your neighbor *outside* the group better:**

- 1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors where they live, work, study, or play this past week?**
- 2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor outside the group?**
- 3. Here is a neighboring idea(s) for us to consider for the week(s) ahead:**

**Sit down with a neighbor where you work, study, or play and find out what they believe about life and why. Create a loving conversation and ask them what they believe about Jesus and the bible.**

**Love your neighbor *inside* the group better:**

1. Are there some needs in our group that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor within the group?
2. What might we do about that need to help?

### **Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:**

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

### **Leader Notes:**

1. **Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.
2. **Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on** in case there isn't enough time to answer them all.
3. **The "Digging Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities.** As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Digging Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.
4. **Every time you meet consider asking:**
  - a. **What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?** If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.