

Test the spirits!

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[0:00] That we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried away by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes.

That we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried away by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes.

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Let us pray. Amen.

If you remember there, John warns us to beware of Antichrists. Remember that John said to us in those verses that the Antichrists, plural, are already in the world.

[1:30] And more alarming is that, according to John, they went out from among the true believers. Some of them still pretend to be true believers.

Actually, many of them are still pretending to be true believers. I encourage you, if you missed that sermon or where we are, I encourage you actually to go to the church's website and listen to the past sermons in this series, if you've missed any of them.

And if you remember last week, we were in chapter 3, where John tells us that the command of our Lord, it's a command, is that we should love one another.

It seems strange that we should now be interrupted from those passages and enter into this discussion that we have in 1 John 4, verse 1 to 6 this morning.

Because if you notice, it seems like John is making a sort of a diversion, a tangent. And you notice that beginning again in chapter 4, verse 7, he returns to the discourse about love.

[2:39] By the way, you can follow along. I encourage you to open your Bibles to page 12, 1,212 in your pew Bibles. That's where we are going to be in this morning, 1 John 4, 1 to 6.

Now, I don't think that John is making a diversion or a tangent here. I think John means very much to warn us. Here's another command that we have in these verses.

I think he means to warn us, as he does, to not believe. Look there in verse 1. To not believe every spirit, but to test the spirits to see whether they are from God.

These six verses continue to show us, in fact, that love, as we have been told, and we've been told, the kind of love that we are to display as children of God is defined.

It is objective love. It's not left to our imagination to figure out what love is. God tells us what love looks like, what love is. And, furthermore, John is trying to impress upon us that we cannot separate doctrine, or in other words, truth, from love.

[3:54] They are inseparable. You cannot have one without the other. Now, this is especially important in our context, because love has been reinterpreted in our world, in our culture, to mean niceness, to mean agreement, to be nice, to be agreeable, to tell someone what he or she wants to hear.

That is what it means to love, in our culture. To never confront people when they are in error, or in bad behavior. That is what, in our culture, it means to love.

That is not exactly love, as the Bible tells us and shows us. Our culture will tell you that is what love is, but we know that is not what love is.

And if you have ever been around children, you know that to tell them what they want to hear, to be perfectly agreeable with them, will be damaging to them.

In fact, we'll be deadly to them. It might not last a week, if you do everything they want you to do for them, and perfectly agreeable and just say yes to them.

[5:18] Well, what is true for our children is true for all of us, to one extent or the other, and especially as the children of God, created by God in his world. But unfortunately, this view of love has come to characterize the way we operate in the world.

And sometimes even in the church, niceness has become synonymous with love. Now, I'm not saying we ought to be nice to one another. I would actually not use the word niceness. I would use the word kindness. That is a fruit of the Spirit. Right? We ought to be kind toward one another. But the way the world thinks of niceness and agreeability, that's not what love is, and that's not what it ought to be in the church.

We're told in the church to confront one another. In love. Mind you, in love, we are to confront one another, to confront one another's sin, to reconcile with one another.

In love. But love, then, by that very fact, love means that there is an aspect of truth to it. It is objective.

[6:27] But here, John, and John wants us to know that. He wants us to not just be, really, I think the warning here, and John's mind for us, is that we will not be spiritually gullible.

Because he says it, in verse 1, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. He says, beloved, loved ones, he tells us, don't be gullible.

And I think that's one of the things that plagues the church today. It's our gullibility regarding spiritual things. And what happens then is, as Paul says it in Ephesians, we're not grounded, we're blown around by every wind.

Many today will claim to be children of God and not at all children of God. We've seen that in 1 John so far. There are only two kinds of people, children of God and children of the devil.

Children of God, who are they characterized, they obey. Obedience is vital to loving God. And they love one another. And many claim to be children of God.

[7:45] I wonder if you've thought about what the greatest, in fact, as we talk about this, I wonder if you've thought to yourself, what is the greatest danger to the church? What is the greatest danger to the church?

Not just, well, both our church, Holy Trinity, and the church of God, universal. What is the greatest danger? Do you think it's persecution?

Some might say that. And there are dangers. There are dangers of persecution. Or terrorism. That's a danger. Or government repression of religious rights.

That's a very real danger. Those are all dangers to the church. But that is not, in any way, none of those things are the greatest dangers to the church.

As Christ will have us know. And as his apostles will have us know. The greatest danger to the church is falsehood.

[8:44] Masquerading as truth. That is the greatest danger to the church. And that's why, after all, the reason why we need to examine, according to John, that's why we need to examine, test, that's what that word means, test, examine every spirit.

Because those spirits, every spirit doesn't come along and says, well, yeah, I am satanic. I believe, I am the child of the devil. And I just want you to come with me. If that's the way the antichrists work, we would not have any problems.

But they come masquerading as children of light. Their message comes masquerading as the truth. they are like their father the devil.

Sometimes not willfully, but they are like their father the devil. It doesn't come what owns, but it comes an attractive means to come to us, to deceive us.

And John says, there are many of them, many false prophets in the world. Jesus, what John says that is really echoing the words of his Lord.

[10:06] Jesus himself said in Matthew 7.15, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. And Jesus says in Matthew 7.15, be on your guard against false prophets who come to you.

And how do they come? They come in sheep's clothing. sheep's clothing. But inwardly, they are ravaging wolves.

After all, sheep, you know, we are sheep ourselves, right? And they come as one of us. They come in sheep's clothing. But the language, Jesus, look at the imagery that Jesus uses there.

Inwardly, they are ravaging wolves. Not just any regular wolves. Hungry, starving, wolves that are ready to devour. Jesus again says in Mark 13.22, he says, Jesus says this, for false messiahs and false prophets will arise.

This is Jesus' prophecy regarding the church. False messiahs. When you hear that word, false messiahs, think what John says when he says, antichrist. Jesus is the true messiah.

[11:18] There will be false messiahs that rise up. Jesus is the true Christ. Many antichrists will rise up. So you might as well say, so for many antichrists and false prophets will arise and will perform.

And this is scary. They will perform signs and wonders to lead astray, if possible, the elect. This is why we need to be ready and to be alert and to test and examine every spirit to know whether they are from God.

Because false prophets will always appear to be genuine. But their aim is to lead us astray from the truth by their false teaching.

They will, according to Peter, they will secretly introduce, secretly introduce, this is subversive nature of false teaching and heresy and falsehood.

They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord, the master who bought them. Peter ends up saying that their end is destruction.

[12:31] And that's exactly why we shouldn't follow them. Because if we follow them, we're following them into destruction. But the key here is that it would not always be readily apparent.

That's why we need to be alert and be aware. And John goes on in verse 2 and 3 of the verse where it gives us some doctrinal tests by which we can really measure and gauge truth from falsehood.

He gives us, first, a positive test. The positive test is there in verse 2. Every spirit, every spirit that confesses, he says it here, by this you will know the spirit of God, right?

Because that's really what we're trying to know. Is this from God or from the devil? And he says, by this you will know that it is the spirit of God. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.

The word there and the way it's phrased there is a perfect verb. It means that it conveys that every spirit that testified to Jesus as God in flesh, every spirit that believes in the humanity of Jesus and therefore the truth of his atoning work for our salvation, every spirit that confesses that, as is from God.

[13:55] Because to deny that fundamental truth is to be a false spirit and a false prophet and to be an antichrist.

And there are many, even in our world, it's particularly important that John is writing this to his audience, the original audience, because that's one of the things that is going on in the churches he's writing to.

Many of them are saying, some of them are starting to go the Gnostic heresy and saying, believe in it. Jesus is, yeah, Jesus is all that, but he's not, he's actually not human, because things that are material are bad and wicked and sinful.

So Jesus was never human or variations of that. He never, well, they might say he never actually died on the cross. But every spirit that believes that lie is from the devil.

We have some of that in our day too. Some of them are open, knock on your door, I want to tell you about Jesus Christ. I'm speaking of Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses.

[15:07] They're great at proselytizing. We can learn from them in that regard, about being bold to preach the gospel. But, we ought to be aware, examine, test, because they do not believe that Jesus is man and God.

Right? In their, in their, they don't believe that he's, he's truly God. There are many such as, such as them in our world today that deny this truth about who Jesus is.

and to deny it is to be outside the faith, to have no fellowship with God. John goes on and gives us a negative test. Right? The positive test is they need to confess that Jesus Christ is God in flesh.

The negative test is that every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. Notice here that it's broader than just Jesus as being in flesh. The negative test is every spirit that does not acknowledge that Jesus is not from God.

Such spirits are Antichrist. Such is the spirit of the Antichrist. And, and there, and that's broader in a way because there are many heiresses that have infiltrated the church that might not necessarily have to do with the humanity of Jesus Christ but might have to do with his divinity or might have to do with his work, his person and his work, his atoning work for us.

[16 : 38] all of these spirits are of the devil. Now, I just, tangentially, I want to say to us this is why it is important as, and I value that we are a confessional church.

That is, we confess we have standards of faith that we believe in. In order to have someone as a minister of the church, they need to confess and ascribe to that standard of faith.

Do you even know that even people on vestry have to submit to the authority of God's word? And, we do that every Sunday as well when we gather. We do it in the words of the Nicene Creed.

I invite you to examine what it is that you confess every Sunday when you gather. You're confessing God, the triune God, you're confessing Jesus Christ as both God and man, and you're confessing and affirming what he has done in his atoning work for you.

And you're confessing that he will come again. Now, all those confessing, you're confessing about the Holy Spirit that he is God himself, all of these things you're confessing are vital.

[17 : 51] And it is good not just to confess them with our words but to actually not only confess them but to imbibe them in our hearts. They are a shield for us.

It helps us to discern falsehood from truth. I want to say a few more things about the and why is it that we believe the Nicene Creed by the way?

Why is it that we confess it? It's not because we think that the people who crafted it are infallible in themselves is because the authority of the Nicene Creed, the authority of all the confessions that we make are derivative authorities.

They are based in God's Holy Word. They conform to God's Holy Word. That is the final authority for us as believers, as children of God.

And that's why we believe it. That's why we confess it. And that's why we form our lives around it. It is God's Word, authoritatively. And this is important, because I think we need to understand that Scripture, as is given to us, is the plumb line.

[19 : 11] Now, if you are into construction or you're Andy, you might know what a plumb line is. Well, we don't have a plumb line anymore.

We have spirit level. You know what a spirit level is? It's to measure that everything is straight, either horizontally or vertically, especially plumb line, as you used to determine if something is straight vertically and it's straight and it's great corners.

That's what Scripture is to us. It allows us to measure rightly what truth is. This is important. We are not the plumb line.

In fact, I am not, as your pastor, the plumb line. our bishop is in the plumb line. The church institutionally, it's not the plumb line.

It is God's holy word. And all of those things that I've named, you, me, our bishop, the church of God universal, sits under the authority of God's word.

[20 : 17] And that's how we determine what is truth and what is falsehood. when we step outside of those boundaries, we lay ourselves open to falsehood, to the antichrist, to heresy.

And this is a problem that is not new to us. It has always been there for the people of God, even in the Old Testament. Moses warned the people, there will be false prophets who will come among you.

Deuteronomy chapter 13, Moses says this, if a prophet or someone who has dreams arises among you, and where are they coming from? They're not coming from the Gentile nations, otherwise you will, yeah, we're not going to take you, they will come from among you.

When they come, they will come among you and they will proclaim a sign, Moses tells them, and they will proclaim wonders, and that sign of wonder, he has promised you, comes about, and they will indeed do those wonders and signs, and it will come about, and when they do that, they will say to you then, let's follow other gods, which you have not known, and let's worship them.

Moses says to God's people, do not listen to that prophet's words, or to that dreamer, but the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, you must follow the Lord your God and fear him, you must keep his commands, and listen to him, false prophets will arise, they will do wonders, they will be charismatic, they will have a following, they will arise, they will have a following, they will be charismatic, they might even do miracles, but the measuring line that John gives us is, don't look at what they do, don't look at their charisma, don't look at their following, look and examine what they say, and what they preach, the doctrinal test is important, now,

[22:45] I want to just make a word of caution for us, this doesn't mean then that we go around building walls unnecessarily in the church of Christ, right, you know, well, this is our wall, we're going to build it insular, and those people are outside the bonds, it's not an excuse or license to do that, we're not to make lines of division in the church, where we exclude people, and oftentimes when we do that, and this is the cautionary tale, we're not to do that because often we do it based on our feelings and our preferences, right, well, that person needs to dress differently in order to come to my church, or that person needs to, I'm not talking about us particularly here in Holy Train, but I'm talking about this happens in the church, this person needs to be in this social bracket in order to really be respected in my church, that person needs to believe this politically, or that, or that must be their lifestyle, that is, those are all walls that are based on our preferences and our sins, mind you, the plumb line is not us, remember, the plumb line is God's holy word, and the confession of

Jesus is God come in flesh, a savior, redeemer, who died and was buried, and is now reasoned and exalted, that is the measuring line of the truth, and that's why John goes on in verse 4 of this, to tell us, it's sort of a comforting, remember that when John, in this letter, it's largely to comfort the true believers, to give them assurance, and so he says it in verse 4, little children, you are from God, little children, dear children, you are from God, and you have overcome them, for he who is in you, is greater than he who is in the world, you might have been listening so far, and you're like, well this is kind of scary, how do I then be able to tell who are false prophets, how am I able to not go the wrong way, or believe in falsehoods, do I need to read a lot more, do I need to maybe go to seminary, get an MDiv, get a doctorate, stop buying a lot of more

Christian doctrinal books, I would say yes to those things if God so leads you to, but that is not what will keep you from error, there are many in our seminaries today, who are themselves antichrist, it's not the knowledge that keeps you from error, here is what John says, you are from God, and you have overcome them, John refers to his, whenever he refers to us as little children in his letters, he's trying to tell us something important, and to assure us, so press in, he says to us, you have overcome them, as children of God, as joint heirs with Christ, we believers are overcomers, just like our Lord is an overcomer in the world, and the sign of our victory, the sign of our overcoming, is that we have indeed rejected the teaching of the antichrist, we've rejected the lie, so every Sunday morning when you gather here, and you say the Nicene Creed, and you believe it with not only your mouth, but with your heart, and you trust

God's word, when you read God's word, and you say, this is, God says the Lord from his word, even though my heart does not agree with it, even though it might be hard to conform to it, this is God's word, I must submit to it, every time you do that, you're showing that you are of God, and you are from God, and you have indeed by that very action of rejecting the lie, and believing God, you have overcome.

There's the assurance, the means of our victory is not our superior power of intellect, it's not our extensive knowledge of theology, of philosophy, the means of our victory is that we are in Christ, we remain in him, we abide in him, and he, the God himself, remains in us, and he abides in us, that's the means of our victory against falsehood, against the world, God the Holy Spirit bears witness to the truth about Jesus Christ within us, he is at work in you and in me, through the Holy Spirit, and he is the one that enables us to reject falsehood, he gives us eyes, he illuminates our eyes to see God's word, and brings it alive in our hearts, so that we may be convicted of our sins, and conform our lives to God's word, that is God in you and in me, working, and that's the sign of your victory over the world,

[27:46] John says, they are from the world, he's talking about the false, the false people who the antichrist, they are from the world, therefore, they speak from the world, and here's the thing, the world listens to them, they are part of the world that is passing away, they have aligned themselves with the world that is passing away, they have tongues that drips lies about Jesus, they have tongues that deny his word, they have aligned themselves with the evil one, and so they are destined for destruction, but the world will listen to them, here's the key thing to note, oftentimes we see, sometimes, I'm not saying, I'm going to say it first and then make the warning, oftentimes we see the size of churches, or the number of following that someone has, as proof that they must be speaking from

God, we do that in the church today, can you believe how big that guy's church is, he's a celebrity, can you believe how many people follow him online, do you know how many followers he has on

social media, that man, obviously he has the spirit, he has a gift, we look and we think God, the sign of someone being from God is their giftedness, or their following, or the size of their church, church, but look at what John says here, they are from the world, they speak from the world, and the world listens to them, so, and I'm not saying, this is the question, I'm not saying that every mega church is church of enterprise, there are many faithful big churches, we hope that God will increase our size, when we start to increase and more people will come because they hear the gospel of Jesus Christ, that doesn't mean that we're going towards falsehood, but we ought to know that the line of truth and being from God is not size, or the number of following, or influence, that should be something that we impress on our minds, we,

I want to return back to verse one here, John tells us to test, to examine every spirit to see they're from God, it's a command, and it's a command that is not just for me as a pastor, it's a sober and awful, I mean awesome command for someone who is a shepherd, that is why one of my awesome responsibilities and sacred responsibilities is to make sure that not just anybody stands behind this pulpit to minister the word of God, I am ultimately responsible before God, before the bishop, and before more than that, before God Almighty, that whoever stands here proclaims God's word, believes God's word, affirms God's word, both in their life and godliness and the truth that they proclaim, but it's not just my responsibility, because John isn't writing just to ministers here, he's writing to the beloved, all of us who are in Christ, you have the same responsibility, and have you ever thought that you have the responsibility towards whoever stands here as the people of God? do you know that you have that responsibility towards me as I stand here, whenever I deliver God's word? This is why it's important when I invite you to open your Bibles, look, so make sure I'm not making things up, this is why it's important for you yourself to be students of God's word, it is your responsibility to examine and to test, it's not an invitation to be cynical, no, but it is an invitation to be, to exercise discernment, to exercise Christian maturity, John ends by saying we are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us, whoever is not from God does not listen to us, by the way, us there is not us, us there is the apostolic message, remember in chapter 1 when he begins this letter he says, they've departed from us, it's not, it's the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world, gave himself, revealed God to us supremely, and then appointed supremely and authoritatively the apostles, and it is a conformity to the apostles' message, what is the apostles' message?

[32:23] The Holy Bible, right? It's a conformity to the apostles' message, that an obedience to it, that means that we are in the family of God, so when John says here, wherever we are from God, he's referring to what he has said before, I am an eyewitness, I am an apostle of Jesus Christ, I'm an eyewitness, me and my fellow apostles, we are eyewitnesses, and we bear faithful, authoritative witness to who Jesus Christ is, and so if you want to follow Jesus, you must listen to our apostolic message, what have these people done?

they've left the apostolic message, but John is saying those who are, listen to us, whoever is not from God, does not listen to us, that is the measuring line, by this then, we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error, Jesus says, my sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, Jesus also says, a stranger they will not follow, regarding his sheep, a stranger they will not follow, they will flee from that stranger, for they do not know the voice of strangers, brothers and sisters, you are Christ's sheep, you are his children, you hear his voice, follow his voice, follow it, you have the Holy

Spirit in you, who bears witness to the truth about Jesus Christ, we've so bastardized the function and the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the church today, we think it's about us, when the Holy Spirit works, it's to show us what gifts we have, to make us super Christians, that is not the primary function of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit's function, and ministry, is to bear witness to Jesus Christ, so anytime you see a move of the Spirit, but does not conform doctrinally to who Jesus says he is, or starts to propagate heuracies and falsehood, you can know, without a shadow of a doubt, that it is not from God, because the Holy Spirit will never say anything that is not in keeping with God's word and Holy Scripture, that it's not in keeping with who Jesus Christ is, in his person and his works, and we have the

Holy Spirit, and we have the Holy Scriptures, my sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.