

Test the Spirits

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- [0 : 00] Well, good morning, church. Allow me to begin just by thanking the many of you who have opened your heart to us, supporting us with the birth of our son, Owen.
- It has meant a lot to us to know that this church is our family in Christ. So before we read God's Word, let's go to the Lord for help this morning.
- Let's pray. Oh, Lord, would your Word find a home in our hearts? Father, draw us by your Spirit to declare that Jesus is Lord of all.
- Father, give me love. Without love, I am just a resounding gong and a clanging cymbal. Without love, I am nothing. Help me to speak the truth in love.
- And Lord, would your people be like those noble Bereans who would test the things I say this morning to see if they accord with your Word. If it accords, would there be joyful obedience to your Word?
- [1 : 06] If it does not accord, would they discard it? Gracious Master and my God, assist me to proclaim the honor and glory of your great name. Praise in Christ's name.
- Amen. Well, our text this morning is 1 John 4, verses 1 to 6. That can be found on page 960 of the Pew Bible. 1 John 4, verses 1 to 6.
- Let's read God's Word together. Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God.
- For many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.
- And every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the Spirit of the Antichrist, which you heard was coming and is now in the world already.
- [2 : 10] Little children, you are from God and have overcome them. For he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are from the world, therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them.
- We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us. Whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the Spirit of error.
- During the second century, a Christian named Irenaeus became an early defender of the faith. Irenaeus was the spiritual grandson of the Apostle John.
- And Irenaeus was frequently heard disturbing reports. Not of persecution coming from the outside, but of peddlers of God's Word coming from within.
- Reports of churches welcoming wolves with open arms. The greatest threat to the church did not come from the outside of the camp, but came from deception from within.
- [3 : 26] And like the recent wildfires, false teaching spread rapidly. And the smoke from the false teaching created a fog, making it hard to see. Many voices were claiming to speak for God.
- And sadly, false guides were leading people astray. Irenaeus contended not against doubters, but deceivers. It is the same in our day.

Who can you trust? Who is a safe guide through life's wilderness? And who is a deceiver? What a pressing question.

And the answer is not immediately obvious, right? It's not like we live in a world where deceivers make it easy to spot them. It's not like a person's name is Pastor Paul Palpatine.

That raises a red flag. Or you walk into a church where deceivers wear a red name tag, introducing themselves as false teachers. No.

[4 : 31] No, rather they camouflage themselves, don't they? Kind of like an airport security guard who wears an official security badge. And the guard tells you urgently that the gates of your flight has changed and you need to follow them right away.

And you start following, but then you realize you've been lied to. But it's too late. You're on the wrong plane going in the wrong direction. It was actually an imposter who led you astray.

In the text before us, John will give a much needed warning. And we need this warning for our spiritual safety. And up until now in the book of John, John has just finished giving us this glorious chapter on the nature of love.

In the previous chapter, in verse 16, you recall, he said, By this we know love, that Jesus laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay our lives down for the brothers.

And right after our text, John picks up this theme again of love. In chapter 4, verse 7, he says, Beloved, let us love one another. And the text before us is almost a parenthesis.

[5 : 42] Sandwiched between two sections on love. Why is John taking a detour to warn us against deceivers and false teachers? Well, two things.

On one level, John knows that our love is shaped and fueled by the truth. The fire of our love needs the fuel of truth to burn hot and bright.

High views of God lead to high worship and love for others. Low views of God lead to cold, dead hearts. And so to guard our love, we must guard the truth.

But on another level, John has just introduced us to the Holy Spirit in that last verse of chapter 3. Remember he said, And by this we know that he abides in us.

By the spirit whom he has given us. John wants us to follow the Holy Spirit. But then he turns a sharp corner. And it seems John is quick to add, but don't trust every spirit.

[6 : 44] He wants them to know which spirits are safe and which are dangerous. And this is John's pastoral heart in our text this morning. Warning the church of spiritual danger.

So we will look at this text in three parts. The warning against false teachers. Point number two, the weighing of all teaching. And point number three, the work of the spirit.

So the warning, the weighing, and the work. And the last point is the shortest point. So point number one, the warning in verse one. Who should you trust? John's answer to that is not everyone.

John. The passage begins with a warning. Verse one. Beloved, do not believe every spirit. Now don't miss that first word. John says, beloved.

John loves this church as a pastor loves his flock. He says, beloved, beware of the danger of being deceived. Don't be gullible. Rather, sift it out.

[7 : 47] Don't have color blindness where you cannot distinguish right and wrong. Do not believe every spirit. And this idea of spirit is not referring to some deeply mystical practice where you're some demon hunter.

No, he was referring to the spirit behind a person. He is talking about people. Not all that glitters it is gold. And likewise, not every pastor or teacher who cites a Bible verse to you should be trusted.

Discern if what you are hearing is genuine gold or fool's gold. But in a sense, John is also saying there is a spirit behind a person motivating their ministry.

The two are inseparably connected. At the end of verse six, John calls it the spirit of error and the spirit of truth. And that word error can literally be translated as deception.

A spirit of deceiving behind the false teacher. You know, they use the right Christian lingo. They talk about loving Jesus. They seem so sincere. But they are deceivers.

[8 : 58] As you'll see, they present a false Jesus to us. Have you ever considered that you can be deceived? You can deceive yourself and others about your relationship with God.

Jesus warns many deceived people will say to him on that final day, Lord, Lord, did we not do all these things in your name? And what does Jesus say to them? I never knew you.

Depart from me. You can be deceived. There's a lot at stake here. The difference between the real Jesus and a false Jesus is the difference between truth and deception.

It's the difference between salvation and judgment. According to Jesus, it's the difference between heaven and hell. And you'll remember Jesus said of false teachers in John 8, verse 44, You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires.

He was a murderer from the beginning. He is a liar and the father of lies. Rather than speaking truth, they bring lies. Rather than bringing light, they bring in darkness.

[10 : 08] Rather than giving life, they destroy. They are thieves who have come to steal, kill, and destroy. And when false teachers are believed, they create counterfeit Christians, leading to eternal destruction.

Deceivers are not just wrong. They are dangerous. Like when a building is burning down and a person reverses the direction of the arrow on the exit sign. People are led astray to the dead end of destruction.

False teachers commit spiritual murder. Now, some of us get a little uncomfortable when we talk about false teachers.

You might say, can't we all just get along? Isn't the church already too divided? Doesn't Jesus say, do not judge others? Well, friend, on the one hand, we understand there are areas where Christians in good conscience can disagree.

And we can still affirm each other's faith in Christ. Not every difference is the basis of an accusation of false teaching. We can be, we can charitably disagree with things like the mode of baptism, our church government, the end times.

[11 : 24] And the apostle Peter would even write, you know, some things Paul writes are difficult to understand. Many small group leaders are like, yes, amen. Amen. We call these secondary or tertiary issues.

We need to be charitable with each other. Although all subjects in God's word are important, we can still affirm each other and our faith in Christ if we disagree. But on the other hand, friends, there are certain truths that are absolutely clear.

Truths that Paul said were of first importance. Truths that are at the heartbeat of our faith. Truths that Christians have been prepared to die for. And when Jesus said, do not judge, what Jesus means is don't have a judgmental spirit and judge hypocritically.

In the next verse, he says, before you pull the speck out of your brother's eye, take the log out of your own eye first. But in that same chapter, just ten verses later, Jesus warns, beware of false prophets.

You will recognize them by their fruits. If you look close enough under the sheep's clothing, you'll notice they have sharp teeth. Be discerning, church.

[12 : 34] You know, in fact, false teachers were a constant warning that the apostles and Jesus kept coming back to over and over again in the early church. Paul warned the elders in Ephesus in Acts 20, verse 29.

I know that after my departure, fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw the disciples away from them.

The fierce wolves would sneak into the eldership and twist the truth. In fact, we think John is speaking to the churches in Ephesus here. The very place where Paul warned that false teachers would arise out of.

You will recall in the book of Galatians, false teachers injected law-keeping into the gospel of free grace. And Paul warned that even if he or an angel came to you preaching a different gospel, Paul says, let that person be accursed.

Damned. That's serious business. In the book of Colossians, false teachers combine mysticism and legalism, creating a deadly mix. False teachers are saying, Jesus is prominent, but you need more than Jesus.

[13 : 44] Paul says, absolutely not. Jesus is not prominent. He is preeminent in all things. The book of Jude is dedicated to contending for the faith once and for all delivered to the saints.

And Peter warns in 2 Peter that false teachers would secretly bring in destructive heresies, and in their greed will exploit you with false words. The you being the church.

The whole New Testament bears witness. Church history bears witness to be discerning about what you are hearing. And John explains why this warning to test the spirits is so urgent at the end of verse 1.

For many false prophets have gone out into the world. Know with me the number of false prophets here. He doesn't say a couple of them have gone out.

Or they're limited to a certain geography or certain parts of the world. He says many have gone out into the world. The world is inundated with false teachers.

[14 : 45] The world is saturated with them. Know there is a shortage of supply that can't meet the demand. And false teaching is aggressive. It's on so-called Christian television, on the radio.

It's on YouTube. It's on blog sites. It's on podcasts. It's on Instagram. It's in New Haven, Hamden, Guilford, Milford. It's everywhere. Conrad Baywee, a pastor in Zambia, illustrated this truth.

Imagine, he says, the president of the country holds a press conference and says this. It's come to our attention that much counterfeit currency has gone out into the marketplace. Beware of these counterfeits.

They're everywhere. It's a great illustration. And pause and think for a moment. What would you do in light of that warning? Well, I'll tell you what you wouldn't do.

You would not be naive or gullible. You would not be careless when someone smoothly slides you a \$20 bill across the counter. Every time someone hands you a bill, you would put it to a test.

[15 : 48] Putting it up to the sun to see if there's a security strip on it. In fact, you would become an expert at identifying the genuine article versus fake counterfeits in the marketplace. In fact, some of you right now would fumble out your wallets and purses and see if you have the genuine thing in your wallet right now.

Friend, should we not do that for teaching in the church as well? Your soul is worth more than pocket change. Your soul is worth more than a \$20 bill. We must be vigilant.

That's what John is saying. False currency and forged checks will not be accepted in the bank of heaven. You will be turned away. Jesus will say to you, depart from me. I never knew you.

The best defense to identify counterfeits is to know what the genuine article looks like. Amen? So, friend, you must be well taught in the scriptures. You allow your Bible to collect dust at the peril of your own soul.

Fill your soul with the word of God. Let it saturate your heart and your veins. Or if someone pricks you, you start bleeding the Bible. As Spurgeon once said of John Bunyan, he couldn't speak without quoting a text because his soul was full with the word of God.

[17 : 03] He bled the Bible. You too, friend. Eat of it. Drink it in. Meditate on it. God's word is your north star at night. It's your compass in the storm.

It's your lamp that gives light in the darkness. God's word is perfect in every single way. When scripture speaks, God speaks. And God is perfect in all that he does and says.

And notice with me in verse 1 who John is telling to test the spirits. Don't miss this. He's not talking to the elders here or the deacons. Who is he speaking to?

He's speaking to you, the congregation. This is all hands on deck. This is not a one or two man show. The best defense against deception is a congregation that knows the word of God.

All believers are expected to test the spirits to read, interpret, and rightly divide the scriptures. This is known as a priesthood of all believers.

[18 : 02] Every single believer can learn directly from the word by the help of the Holy Spirit. You might say, well, who am I to discern these things? I never went to seminary.

I can't read the Bible in the original Hebrew or Greek. Who am I? But John is addressing you, friend. All believers at all times in every continent.

Of course we can get things wrong. Right? We need to listen to each other. Just because the spirit is in us doesn't mean we recognize the spirit is in other people too. We need faithful teachers.

We need good commentaries to humbly listen to church history. And we all have the same Holy Spirit by our union with Christ. Christians all share in that one spirit who is guiding us into all truth.

So testing the spirits is not just an elder's role. It's your responsibility, Christian. And the church is stronger when there are men and women who can rightly divide the word of God.

[19 : 00] So be attentive. You know, don't be afraid to ask questions after the sermon. Study systematic theology. Read good books. If you need recommendations, come ask one of the elders.

Attend Sunday school. Learn church history. You know, Paul rebuked the Galatian congregation for failing to defend the gospel. In contrast, Paul commended the Bereans who would search the scriptures to see if what Paul said aligned with the word of God.

You know, if Paul wasn't exempt, neither are the teachers here in this pulpit. No matter who is in this pulpit, examine what we are telling you to see if it accords with the scriptures.

If it's not in the Bible, don't believe it. Remember, Paul said even he came to them preaching a different gospel. He told the Galatian congregation, don't believe it. You know, as a quick aside, we need to beware of the temptation toward false teaching.

You know, again, it's not like a false teacher comes up to you and says, have I got a great lie for you today? Are you ready for it? Here it goes. It's going to deceive you, dishonor Christ, and destroy your relationships.

[20 : 09] Here it goes. No, no, no. They don't do that. Rather, when Satan goes fishing, he brings the bait. Any good lie has a half-truth. Instead, false teachers know a little sugar makes the poison go down.

The lie is plausible. The teacher may even have a gold and silver tongue. Rather, a false teaching goes something like this. Look, I didn't want to say anything, but the Holy Spirit is compelling me to speak out on the situation.

The church is meant to be a place of love, compassion, humility, grace. Jesus calls us to radical love for the outcast. But Christians care more about definitions of Jesus' humanity than feeding the hungry.

We care more about systematic theology than service. What's important is not our definitions, but our devotion to God. We need to embrace all perspectives. A little sugar makes the poison go down.

Christian morality without Christology is a counterfeit. As John will say in the next section, this person is against Jesus. This person is against Christ, what John will call the Antichrist.

[21 : 21] This leads us to our second point. Point number one is the warning, and point number two is the weighing. We must weigh all teaching by testing the spirits. And that word test is a metallurgy term.

It's to critically examine metal to see if it's the genuine article. Is it genuine gold or fool's gold? And it's in the present imperative. Meaning John is saying, always be testing.

Morning, noon, and night, church, make this your consistent practice. Always be testing the spirits. Okay, how do we do this? If verse one tells us why, verse two tells us how.

And John will give two tests. The first test is to test them to see who they say Jesus is in verses two to three. And the second test is who do they listen to in verses five to six?

Let's look at the first test. Look at the way he puts it in verse two. By this you know the spirit of God. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.

[22 : 27] And every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you heard was coming. It is now in the world already.

John doesn't say, hey, look at their academic credentials. Their ability to perform signs and wonders. Not how winsome they are, not how bold they are. Rather, he says, listen carefully to who they say Jesus is.

John uses a Christological test. Now, this is not the only test. Right? Jesus told us to test teachers by the fruit of their lives. But this was a test that was needed in John's day.

Because in John's day, which continued through the times of Irenaeus, as best we can tell, there was a widespread heresy surrounding the humanity of our Lord Jesus.

What we call the Gnostic heresy. The Gnostic heresy comes from the word gnosis, which means knowledge. A secret esoteric knowledge. A knowledge that separated insiders and outsiders.

[23 : 31] And Gnosticism taught that the body was a prison to be escaped from. So, of course, Jesus wouldn't actually come in the flesh. He only appeared to come in the flesh. The mind was good, Gnostics taught, and the body was bad.

The problem with the world wasn't sin. It was ignorance. It was a special knowledge that only the Gnostics could give the people. But when applied to Christianity, it was devastating. Christ's person work became irrelevant.

Gnostics denied the importance of the incarnation. Denied the importance of the resurrection. Denied the importance of the cross. And denied the importance of the humanity of Jesus. Gnostic teachers were not messengers from heaven, but of hell.

They are not from the Holy Spirit. They have a spirit of deception. And it was hard for Christians to pin down this heresy. Because what do you think the Gnostics responded with every time there was criticism?

Well, of course you would say that. You're still in ignorance. They could preempt any criticism. And much of the spirituality in our day is just recycled Gnosticism.

[24 : 37] Finding your true authentic identity. Even if it's at odds with your physical body. Obsessing over conspiracy theories. Needing specialized degrees just to begin to read your Bible. Feeling the church has been deceived.

For its entire history and only you and a few people have the truth. The secret truth. What goes for new spirituality is just old heresy. But John here aims his sight and takes a shot right across the Gnostics.

You must confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. Now, that doesn't really sound like much of a test. You don't have to be a Christian to acknowledge that Jesus came in the flesh, do you?

But if you look a little closer, notice the test is we must confess that Jesus, the Christ, has come in the flesh. We must confess that Jesus has come as the Christ.

Christ is a title. Christ is the Greek version of the Hebrew word, the Messiah. Jesus as the Christ fulfills all the promises of the Old Testament of a future king. A king who would come and bring the people out of darkness and into light.

[25 : 42] The king who would reign in righteousness from shore to shore. The king that we've been waiting for. He's the long-awaited king. And he is the one whom the prophets look forward to and rejoice to see.

He is the bread that's come down from heaven. He is the water from the fountain of life and gives water to the thirsty soul. And we confess this is all true. Now, parents, you know that sometimes you can ask your kids to apologize for wronging their siblings.

And they just kind of mumble, I'm sorry. But this is not like that. He does not mean confessing as going through the motions. As just mouthing the words. You know, training a parent to repeat certain phrases.

To confess is to acknowledge that something is true. It's a wholehearted allegiance to something from the heart. And this is the story we must confess our allegiance to. It begins in Genesis 1.

God created the heavens and the earth. He created you and me to bear his image. Because he made us, he has authority over us. To love him above all else as our creator.

[26 : 49] And to reflect his image by loving others. But we have sinned against this good God. And your own conscience bears witness to this fact. By ourselves, we are under God's just condemnation and wrath because of our sin.

Because he is holy, he will not let sin go unpunished. Not because he is harsh, but because he is good and he loves what is good. You have an appointment, friend, where you cannot cancel.

And which you will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Where every secret will be exposed. Standing on your own merits. You will be condemned.

Think about it. Imagine if you or I had a camera. And we recorded your life just for the past week. We recorded every thought.

Every unspoken word. What you do when you think no one is around. And we just played it on the projector. For all to see. Every secret is uncovered.

[27 : 54] Every evil thought exposed. Could you stand in the presence of this congregation? Or would you hide your head in shame? If we cannot stand before others. How will you stand before a just and righteous God?

How could you stand naked and exposed to the eyes of him who has given an account? Will you plead your own righteousness? When all the secret sins come to light before his all-seeing eyes.

But praise God. Hallelujah. Amen. Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. God's heart is full of mercy and grace. Toward you. The Father, out of his great love, sent his own son, Jesus.

Fully God and fully man to rescue us. Jesus, in his compassion, takes on the weakness of human flesh. And unlike you and I, he never sinned.

But despite never sinning, he goes to a cross to be condemned. To be our substitute. He not only took our flesh, he took our guilt, our griefs, our punishments upon himself.

[29 : 00] As Paul says, for our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin. So that in him, that in Jesus, we might become the righteousness of God.

And God raised him on that third day. And Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father. And he now commands everyone everywhere to turn from their sin and trust in him alone.

And Jesus will never turn you away. He not only is willing to save, he is able. Just come, come today.

Cast yourselves like a leper before his feet and beg that he would make you clean. Come to Jesus and find rest. If you are a Christian, go to him again.

There is complete forgiveness. You know, this is not like a mistrial where the charges could be retried down the line. Or a probation sentence. Christ took the sentence of judgment in our place.

[30 : 00] And there is now a dismissal of every charge with extreme prejudice. Never to be brought up again. If God who justifies, who is going to condemn? Nobody. The kingdom of God is like a castle with the words emblazoned on a flag.

Whoever comes to me, I will never cast out. But there's a catch. Jesus is the only door to get in. But not only that, the door is unique. Because the door is low.

You must stoop yourself down and bow your knees, humbling yourself before Jesus. You must bow the knee before the king of the kingdom. Can you say this is the story of your life?

That Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. If this is true of you, then you've confessed biblical faith. And all true teachers must make this confession.

And here's a spiritual principle that John is putting down. If the teacher confesses an allegiance to Jesus Christ, that is how you know the true spirit of God. True spirit-filled teaching exalts Christ.

[31 : 08] I'll say that again. True spirit-filled teaching exalts Christ. The office of the spirit is to glorify the person and work of Christ.

The spirit shines the spotlight on Jesus. Although being fully God, the spirit doesn't put the spotlight on himself. Jesus in John 16 would say, When the spirit of truth comes, he will glorify me.

For he will take what is mine and declare it to you. He puts your attention on Christ. The spirit makes Christ like the sun. The S-U-N. Everything in your life revolves around him.

The spirit shows you the loveliness and beauty of Christ. In Ephesians 3.16, Paul prays for the church in Ephesus. That God may grant you to be strengthened with power through his spirit in your inner being.

So that, and here's what the spirit is going to do for you. That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. To know the height, the width, the length of Christ's love for you.

[32 : 11] So friend, if you're looking for a church, let me give you some advice. Find a church that is obsessed with the person and work of Jesus. That church is filled with the Holy Spirit.

Show me a church who is obsessed with anything else. Experiences, feelings, politics, social issues, therapy.

And the message of Christ crucified is absent than is counterfeit Christianity. The true Holy Spirit puts the spotlight on Jesus. So the first test was to see who they say Jesus is.

And the second test in verse 5 is who do they listen to? Look at verse 5 again. They are from the world, therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them.

We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us. Whoever is not from God does not listen to us. Verse 5 explains why false teachers get a following in the first place.

[33 : 13] They are from the world, therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. That's why false teachers get noticed by all the right publications. They get crowds filling stadiums to hear them.

The world hears their message and says, I like that. I can get behind that. False teachers in the world have the same values. But in stark contrast, verse 6 is shocking.

John says, we are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us. John is saying, if you're with God, you're with us.

If you're not with us, God is not with you. For him, it's black and white. If you're with God, you'll listen to me. If you're not with God, you will not listen to me.

John doesn't want to be cool. He wants to be faithful to his master. He knows he doesn't write the mail. He just delivers it. But like the first part of the test, it's not passive listening.

[34 : 14] It's an actively, it's active listening, leading in receiving the gospel. But lest we misunderstand John, the apostolic authority he is claiming isn't bound up with the apostles themselves.

Remember, Paul said that even if he came to the Galatian congregation and preached a different gospel, let him be anathema. Rather, the authority is bound up with the apostolic deposit they were entrusted to steward.

This is a statement of John's allegiance to the scriptures. The apostles are like Olympic athletes, heading off the baton. What they received, they're delivering to the church.

Beloved, who can you trust? Those who listen to the apostles. In other words, look carefully to see if they submit themselves to the scriptures.

Trust those who listen to the apostolic witness. The Holy Spirit doesn't just put the spotlight on Jesus. He puts the spotlight on the scriptures. So if there's a professor who denies part of the New Testament, you know, they do their morning devotions in the original Greek and the original Hebrew.

[35 : 24] But they deny the apostolic witness. Don't listen to them. They are not from God. If you run into someone who claims to be a Christian but discards certain parts of the scriptures, then don't believe them.

The Spirit puts the sword of truth into your hands and the Satan wants to take it away. Jesus used the word as a sword in the wilderness. To every assault and temptation he counters, it is written.

Jonathan Edwards commenting on this verse says, Would the prince of darkness, in order to promote his kingdom of darkness, lead men to the sun, the S-U-N? He knows it to be that light which the kingdom of darkness is overthrown.

God's word overthrows the kingdom of darkness. Would Satan bring you to the word? No. God's word is like a fire and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces.

As has been said, the Bible is alive. It speaks to me. It has feet. It runs after me. It has hands. It lays hold of me. The scriptures are alive. And they are a living sword in our fight of faith.

[36 : 38] Going to our last point, the first point was the warning. The second is the weighing. The last is the work of the Holy Spirit. You know, we can become proud.

You know, we've discerned false teaching for 50 years. But John wants us to know something. Discernment is fundamentally a work of the Holy Spirit.

John makes that clear in verse 4. If you look down, John wrote to a church that some members had drifted away. They rejected Jesus. They look like Christians, but then prove they never were.

And if you remain, you would be wary. My friends have left. I'm alone. I'm heartbroken. My loved ones have departed from the truth.

It's heartbreaking. In verse 4, John is like a wise parent, reassuring a child after a midnight nightmare. He says, you are from God and have overcome them.

[37 : 42] John is so confident, he puts it in the past tense. You already have overcome them. But if you were in this church, you'd be thinking, what? John, how could you possibly say that?

John, you're ready to run the victory lap and we can't even get to the finish line. Don't you see the trials, the persecution, the false teaching? Our loved ones have left and we are like sheep to be slaughtered.

How am I going to make it? I'm not going to make it. Maybe you have asked that question. Am I going to make it? But John, like a wise parent, comes to the bedside and gives his reason.

Little child, remember this. That he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. Christian, our hope is not in the strength of our faith.

But our hope is on our hold. It's not in our hold of Christ. It's on his hold of us. God will hold you fast.

[38 : 49] John 10, Jesus says, no one can snatch you out of his hand. Jesus gives you eternal life and no one can break the grip of the good shepherds hold on you.

As someone once said, the saints in heaven may be more sanctified, but they are not more secure. Even in a true Christian's darkest hour, the spirit of God has already triumphantly worked out your salvation.

So beloved, why are you a Christian to begin with? It's because the spirit in you is greater than he who is in the world. And if you've been following Christ for 40 years, while friends have departed from the truth, why is that?

It's not because you are smarter. It's because the spirit in you is greater than he who is in the world. And one day you and I and all Christians will give God glory before that great white throne.

And our eternal song will be the spirit in us was greater than he who is in the world. Christian, you can sing that song now and for all eternity.

[40 : 02] Let's pray. O spirit of God, dwell in our hearts by faith to exalt the name of Christ in this church. Would Christ be your all in all.

Would we rejoice by faith to behold the wonderful face of our Savior. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Amen.