

Faith Talk - July 26, 2026

Series: 1 John- Life in the Light and Love of God

Sermon: Don't Be Deceived: Test the Spirits

Scripture: 1 John 4:1-2

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.

Summary

In a world with over 4,200 religions and countless teachers competing for our trust, John's warning to test the spirits is not a relic of the ancient world; it is urgently relevant today.

False teaching doesn't always look evil; wolves come in sheep's clothing, and Satan disguises himself as an angel of light (Matt. 7:15; 2 Cor. 11:14). What exposes a false teacher is not bad behavior but the substance of their teaching, specifically, what they teach about Jesus Christ. John gives us three reliable tests to determine whether a teacher or teaching is from God.

The first and most foundational test: does the teacher confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, fully God and fully human? Any religion or teacher that denies the full deity and full humanity of Jesus, as well as His substitutionary death on the cross, His bodily resurrection, or salvation by grace through faith in Jesus, is not from God, regardless of how appealing, sincere, or popular they appear.

The second test is whether the teaching is accurately grounded in Scripture, not in agreement with the world but agreement with the Word, not self-help dressed as preaching, not ear-tickling messages designed to draw a crowd, but faithful exposition of God's Word.

The third test is whether the teacher leads people deeper into fellowship with the authentic body of Christ or pulls them away into a separate, special group.

The good news is that believers are not defenseless against deception; the Spirit of God who dwells in us is greater than the spirit of error in the world. We have already overcome positionally in Christ; our task is to remain walking in the Spirit of truth, faithful to confess the gospel of Jesus Christ, and remain in fellowship with God's people, the church.

Discussion Questions

Conversations with Adults

- John says two-thirds of Americans believe God accepts the worship of all religions. Where do you think that idea comes from, and how would you lovingly but clearly respond to someone in your life who holds that view?
- Of the three tests John gives — confession about Jesus, grounding in Scripture, and leading into fellowship — which one do you think is most commonly ignored when people choose who to follow or listen to spiritually, and why?
- Think about the teachers, podcasts, books, or voices you regularly allow to shape how you think about God and the Christian life. How do they hold up against John's three tests?

Conversations with Students

- John says false teachers often look good, draw big crowds, and say things people want to hear. What are some ways you can tell the difference between someone who is popular and someone who is actually trustworthy?
- Have you ever heard something about Jesus or Christianity that sounded kind of Christian but felt a little off? What was it, and what made you question it?
- John says the Spirit in us is already greater than the lies in front of us; we don't fight the darkness by staring it down; we flip on the light switch. What does it look like practically to "flip on the light" when you're being pressured to doubt what you believe?

Conversations with Kids

- Have you ever been tricked into thinking something was real when it wasn't, like a prank or a magic trick? How did you figure out it wasn't real?
- John says we can test whether a teacher is from God by what they say about Jesus. What are some true things you know about Jesus that everyone who follows God should believe?
- If someone told you there were lots of different ways to get to God and Jesus was just one of them, what would you say back to them?

Closing Prayer

Father, **thank You** that You have not left us without truth; You gave us Your Son, Your Word, and Your Spirit so that we would never have to be without an anchor in a world full of confusing voices. Thank You that the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead lives in us, and that we have already overcome in Christ.

We ask You to sharpen our discernment, to help us love the people caught in false teaching while remaining clear and uncompromising about the truth of who Jesus is. Protect us from being deceived by what sounds good, feels comfortable, or draws a crowd.

We commit to testing what we hear against Your Word, holding fast to the confession that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, and remaining in fellowship with Your people and Your truth. In Jesus' name, Amen.