

john 15:4  
**A b i d e** in **ME**



Bible studies for disciples who make disciples

Loudonville Community Church

Volume 4 - Number 15  
The week of March 10, 2019

**Sermon Series: *The Real Thing***  
**Testing the Spirits**  
**1 John 4:1-6**

**THIS WEEK'S CORE STATEMENT**

**Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12***

Reading the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for daily life.

**What Is Discernment?**  
By Sinclair Ferguson<sup>1</sup>

Someone I know recently expressed an opinion that surprised and in some ways disappointed me. I said to myself, "I thought he would have more discernment than that."

The experience caused me to reflect on the importance of discernment and the lack of it in our world. We know that people often do not see issues clearly and are easily misled because they do not think biblically. But, sadly, one cannot help reflecting on how true this is of the church community, too.

Most of us doubtless want to distance ourselves from what might be regarded as "the lunatic fringe" of contemporary Christianity. We are on our guard against being led astray by false teachers. But there is more to discernment than this. True discernment means not only distinguishing the right from the wrong; it means distinguishing the primary from the secondary, the essential from the indifferent, and the permanent from the transient. And, yes, it means distinguishing between the good and the better, and even between the better and the best.

Thus, discernment is like the physical senses; to some it is given in unusual measure as a special grace gift (1 Cor. 12:10), but some measure of it is essential for us all and must be constantly nourished. The Christian must take care to develop his "sixth sense" of spiritual discernment. This is why the psalmist prays, "Teach me good judgment and knowledge" (Ps. 119:66).

**The Nature of Discernment**

But what is this discernment? The word used in Psalm 119:66 means "taste." It is the ability to make discriminating judgments, to distinguish between, and recognize the moral implications of, different situations and courses of action. It includes the ability to "weigh up" and assess the moral and spiritual status of individuals, groups, and even movements. Thus, while warning us against judgmentalism, Jesus urges us to be discerning and discriminating, lest we cast our pearls before pigs (Matt. 7:1, 6).

A remarkable example of such discernment is described in John 2:24-25: "Jesus would not entrust himself to them ... for he knew what was in a man" (NIV). This is discernment without judgmentalism. It involved our Lord's knowledge of God's Word and His observation of God's ways with men (He, supremely, had prayed, "Teach me good judgment ... for I believe Your commandments," Ps. 119:66). Doubtless His discernment grew as He experienced conflict with, and victory over, temptation, and as He assessed every situation in the light of God's Word.

Jesus' discernment penetrated to the deepest reaches of the heart. But the Christian is called to develop similar discernment. For the only worthwhile discernment we possess is that which we receive in union with Christ, by the Spirit, through God's Word.

So discernment is learning to think God's thoughts after Him, practically and spiritually; it means having a sense of how things look in God's eyes and seeing them in some measure "uncovered and laid bare" (Heb. 4:13).

### **The Impact of Discernment**

How does this discernment affect the way we live? In four ways:

*1. It acts as a means of protection, guarding us from being deceived spiritually.* It protects us from being blown away by the winds of teaching that make central an element of the gospel that is peripheral or treat a particular application of Scripture as though it were Scripture's central message.

*2. Discernment also acts as an instrument of healing, when exercised in grace.* I have known a small number of people whose ability to diagnose the spiritual needs of others has been remarkable. Such people seem able to penetrate into the heart issues someone else faces better than the person can do. Of course, this is in some ways a dangerous gift with which God has entrusted them. But when exercised in love, discernment can be the surgical scalpel in spiritual surgery that makes healing possible.

*3. Again, discernment functions as a key to Christian freedom.* The zealous but undiscerning Christian becomes enslaved—to others, to his own uneducated conscience, to an unbiblical pattern of life. Growth in discernment sets us free from such bondage, enabling us to distinguish practices that may be helpful in some circumstances from those that are mandated in all circumstances. But in another way, true discernment enables the free Christian to recognize that the exercise of freedom is not essential to the enjoyment of it.

*4. Finally, discernment serves as a catalyst to spiritual development:* "The mocker seeks wisdom and finds none, but knowledge comes easily to the discerning" (Prov. 14:6, NIV). Why? Because the discerning Christian goes to the heart of the matter. He knows something about everything, namely that all things have their common fountain in God. Increase in knowledge, therefore, does not lead to increased frustration, but to a deeper recognition of the harmony of all God's works and words.

How is such discernment to be obtained? We receive it as did Christ Himself—by the anointing of the Spirit, through our understanding of God's Word, by our experience of God's grace, and by the progressive unfolding to us of the true condition of our own hearts.

That is why we also should pray, "I am your servant; give me discernment" (Ps. 119:125, NIV).

<sup>1</sup>This excerpt is taken from **In Christ Alone: Living the Gospel Centered Life** by Sinclair Ferguson (2007).

OBSERVATION

What does the text say?

**1 John 4:1-6**

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, <sup>3</sup> 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 now is in the world already. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. <sup>6</sup> 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.

- Place brackets around the word **beloved** (v. 1) and **little children** (v. 4). Above both words write *plural*.
- In the left margin of verse 1 write: *Command: Prove every spirit*.
- Circle all eight occurrences of the words **spirit, spirits, or Spirit**.
- In the left margin of verse 2 write: *The test is Christological* (who Jesus is).
- In the right margin of verse 2 write: *John 1:14*.
- Double underline the name **Jesus Christ** (v. 2).
- In the right margin of verse 3 write: *1 John 2:22-28*.
- In the left margin of v. 4 write: *The response to the confession*.
- Circle the three different pronouns used at the beginning of verses 4, 5 and 6 (**You, They, We**). Above each pronoun indicate whom John has in mind.
- Circle the first occurrence of the pronoun **he** in v. 4 and draw a line to the right margin and write: *The Holy Spirit*.
- Circle the second occurrence of the pronoun **he** in verse 4 draw a line to the right margin and write: *The devil*.
- In the left margin of verse 5 write: *origin, message, audience*.

*In the chart below list the contrasting concepts between the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Antichrist.*

Spirit of God	Spirit of Antichrist

## UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

*What does the text mean?*

The commentary is intended to enhance your own study of the text.

**1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit.** John genuinely loves the people to whom he is writing. Do not believe is a present imperative; a command. The word **spirit** links this passage with what John said in the preceding verses (cf. 3:19-24). John is obviously concerned with the "two spirits" which evoke contrary opinions of Jesus. "Unbelief can be as much a mark of spiritual maturity as belief" (John Stott). **Every spirit** refers to the source behind every prophet or teacher. They are not all from God.

**but test the spirits to see whether they are from God. Test** [*dokimazete*]: A present imperative or command to discern or prove by testing or examination. Every believer has the responsibility to **test the spirits** to determine their source. Discernment (i.e. the process of assessing and weighing a claim) is a function of Christian faith and love. **From God** [*ektheou*]: It means that the spirit or person has their source in God or proceeds from God.

**for many false prophets have gone out into the world. False prophets** [*pseudoprophetai*]: the opponents or rivals of the Apostles and their message. **Have gone out**: the perfect tense indicates that their influence is ongoing. **World** is used six times in five verses. It refers to the system that is under Satan's control and opposed to God.

**2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.** The first phrase may be a command: "By this know (to recognize or perceive) the Spirit of (or "from") God. **Every spirit**, that is, as presented in a human being. The word **every** is comprehensive; it tests all people everywhere. **Jesus Christ**. John uses the full name 8 times in this letter but he employs it here because he wants to emphasize the Incarnation of the God-Man. The doctrine of the Incarnation is standard test of truth and falsehood. To confess [*homologeō*] means to say the same thing, to profess faith in or give allegiance to. It is not merely the acceptance of a proposition about a person but the embrace of the person of whom certain claims are true. The confession of Jesus Christ as Incarnate Deity or not is the test of origin, that is, whether the "spirit" is from God or the devil.

**This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.** The spirit of antichrist does not confess Jesus as the Christ who has come in the flesh (cf. 1 John 2:18-28; 2 John 7). Antichrist means against Christ.

**4 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.** John is again tender toward his readers [*teknia*: little children] and confident that they will not be duped for they are in God. **You (the pronoun is emphatic) are from God**: You belong to Him and find your source in Him since being re-born through Him. **Overcome them**: False prophets and teachers. The indwelling Holy Spirit has assured us of victory over every falsehood, false teacher, and the devil himself. Satan is powerful, but God is infinitely more powerful. Note: John does not say you are greater than the enemy but God is greater. It is God in you that is infinitely more powerful. By His power they have **overcome** the temptation to accept false teaching.

**5 They are from the world (origin); therefore they speak from the world (message), and the world listens to them (audience).** **They**: the false prophets and teachers. **From the world**: they belong to the domain of the enemy, proceed from it, and conform to it. Literally, "They speak out of the world and fit what the world says." There is a correspondence between messengers and hearers.

**6 We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us.** John makes a very bold claim, speaking as an Apostle, with the full authority and inspiration of the Holy Spirit behind His words. The same correspondence mentioned in the previous verse applies with faithful teachers and believing hearers. The Holy Spirit who is in you enables you to discern His voice speaking through John and faithful teachers.

**By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.** The clarity that results by testing every spirit is invaluable.

## Complementary Passage

## 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22

<sup>16</sup> Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing, <sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. <sup>19</sup> Do not quench the Spirit.

<sup>20</sup> Do not despise prophecies, <sup>21</sup> but test everything; hold fast what is good.

<sup>22</sup> Abstain from every form of evil.



### STEP THREE . . .

#### EXPLORING the passage through discussion

##### Questions

1. How do you determine whether something you are being taught is true or not?  
Is it enough to trust your gut feelings about what is being said?
2. Read 1 John 4:1-6. What is John's warning in this paragraph?
3. Why does John command us in verse 1 to "test the spirits" rather than the preacher or the doctrine itself?
4. How does John say we should discern whether a message is true? What is the test?
5. Read John 1:14. How does this verse agree with 1 John 4:1-6?  
Why is this so important?
6. Many teachers might say, "I believe in Jesus." Is this adequate by itself?
7. In verses 4–6, how are we told to distinguish between those who know the truth and those who do not? What do these verses tell us about the different audiences that both truth and falsehood gather? Why are false teachers capable of drawing large crowds?
8. How does John encourage all true Christians in this passage? How does this change the perception of who you are in Christ?
9. How would you share about Jesus Christ with someone who only thought he was a great teacher or followed another religion?

10. How does this passage apply to the church around the world and our own local church today?

11. Since this passage is sandwiched between John's two great passages on love, how does this text help us to love one another?

12. As Christians, we confess that we are often weak in knowing what we ought to believe. What do you need to know more about for your own faith? In what areas does your faith in the truth need to be strengthened? What steps can you take to study the Bible more diligently and consistently?

#### STEP FOUR . . .

##### APPLYING

How is the text lived out?

*Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the Word but doers ~ James 1:22*

You're encouraged to journal your answers to the following questions in order to apply what you've learned this week.

1. How is God making Himself known to you?
2. What is going on beneath the surface of your life that Jesus is trying to change?
3. How is God calling you to serve your family, community, and world?

#### STEP FIVE . . .

##### PRAYER

*Holy Father,*

*There are many voices demanding my attention today.  
They are dispensing ideas and advice that sound appealing,  
so I want to be sure that what I hear is what You are saying.*

*By Your command,*

*Help me to discern in every message I hear,  
what it says about Jesus Christ,  
as measured by the lens of Your Word.*

*Give me diligence to test and examine all claims to truth,  
holding fast to the good,  
and rejecting all that is false.*

*I praise You that You are my shield and victory against deception.*

*Thank You for the presence of Your indwelling Spirit  
Who guards me and keeps me in the way of Your truth.*

*In Jesus' Powerful Name, Amen.*

## A Bible Reading Plan for 2019

(on LCC website)

Sunday, March 10 thru Saturday, March 16, 2019  
Joshua 16-18; Joshua 19-21; Joshua 22-24; Judges 1-3;  
Judges 4-6; Judges 7-9; Judges 10-12

### THE MISSION OF LOUDONVILLE COMMUNITY CHURCH

We are committed to reaching and teaching people to become devoted followers of Jesus Christ, connecting them to one another and sending them to serve their families, communities and world.

#### 10 CORE PRACTICES OF A DISCIPLE

**Undiluted Worship** *Matthew 22:37-40*

Loving the Lord God with all of our physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual vigor, and my neighbor as myself.

**Constant Abiding** *John 15:1-11*

Abiding in Christ in order to be faithful and bear fruit.

**Bible Study** *Hebrews 4:12*

Reading the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for daily life.

**Desperate Prayer** *Psalms 66:16-20*

Praying to God to know Him, laying requests before Him, and finding direction for daily life.

**Biblical Community** *Acts 2:44-47*

Fellowshipping with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, other people's lives, and in the world.

**Spiritual Gifts** *Romans 12:4-6*

Using my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

**Total Forgiveness** *Ephesians 4:30*

Practicing forgiving others as God has forgiven me in Christ.

**Tangible Compassion** *Matthew 25:31-46*

Showing compassion to those in need and so minister to Jesus Himself.

**Generous Giving** *2 Corinthians 8:7*

Giving away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

**God Space** *Ephesians 6:19-20*

Increasing the quantity and quality of our gospel conversations.

### Memory Verse

~1 John 4:2~

"By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God."