Series: That You May Know

Inductive Bible Study Guide: 1 John

Inductive Bible Study of 1 John 4:1-6

John tells believers not to accept every spiritual claim without examination. Even in the early church, false prophets were already spreading distorted teaching about Jesus, so Christians must test every message against the truth of the real Jesus and the apostles' witness. This discernment is not driven by fear: the God who lives in His people is greater than the spirit at work in the world.

Step 1 – Observation: *What does the passage say?*

Read 1 John 4:1-6 slowly at least three times, using more than one translation if possible. Pay attention to commands, repeated words, contrasts, and the different ways John describes God's Spirit, false spirits, believers, false prophets, the apostles, and the world.

Observation Prompts

- What commands are given?
- What words or ideas are repeated?
- What contrasts do you notice?
- What does each spirit confess?
- What is said about the world?
- How are truth and error recognized?

Read the Passage and Record What You See

1. What does John command believers not to do, and what does he command them to do?

2. What reason does verse 1 give for testing the spirits?

3. How does verse 2 identify the Spirit of God?

4. What does verse 3 say about a spirit that does not confess Jesus?

5. What had John's readers heard about the spirit of the antichrist, and where was it already?

6. How does John describe the believers and what have they overcome?

7. What reason does verse 4 give for their victory?

8. How are the false teachers described in verse 5, and who listens to them?

9. Who does the word we refer to in verse 6, and who listens or refuses to listen?

10. According to verse 6, how can the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error be recognized?

Step 2 – Interpretation: *What does the passage mean?*

To test the spirits is to evaluate the spiritual source and truth of a message rather than accepting it because it sounds confident, supernatural, or popular. John directs believers back to the apostolic gospel. A true message agrees with the truth that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh; a false message distorts or rejects the real Jesus.

John's use of “we” points to the apostles and eyewitnesses who proclaimed Christ. Listening to their testimony is not blind loyalty to any modern leader; it means receiving the truth God gave through Christ's authorized witnesses and now preserves in Scripture. Believers can test teaching without panic because the Holy Spirit within them is greater than every deceiving spirit in the world.

Questions to Explore

1. Why does John say not to believe every spirit? How can Christians remain open to God's work without becoming gullible or cynical?

2. What relationship does this passage show between a prophet, the message being taught, and the spirit behind that message?

3. Why is the confession that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh essential to the gospel? What would be lost if Jesus were not truly divine and truly human?

4. What does John mean by the spirit of the antichrist? How does 1 John 2:18-27 help explain it without turning the passage into speculation?

5. What have believers overcome, and how does the truth that God is greater provide confidence without encouraging carelessness?

6. Why does the world listen to messages that come from the world? Why are popularity, influence, and large audiences unreliable tests of truth?

7. Who is the we in verse 6? Why is listening to the apostles' testimony an important test of whether someone knows God?

8. How does verse 6 guard against a leader demanding unquestioned loyalty? Where should every Christian teacher's message be tested?

9. Using this passage and the rest of 1 John, what doctrinal and practical signs help distinguish the Spirit of truth from the spirit of error?

Word Study Suggestions

- **Test:** Greek dokimazo - to examine, prove, or evaluate whether something is genuine.
- **Spirit:** Greek pneuma - spirit, breath, or wind; here the spiritual source behind a message.
- **Confess:** Greek homologeo - to acknowledge, agree with, or openly declare as true.
- **Antichrist:** Greek antichristos - one who opposes Christ or presents a substitute for Him.
- **Overcome:** Greek nikao - to conquer, prevail, or gain victory.
- **Error:** Greek plane - wandering, deception, or departure from truth.

Step 3 – Application: *How should I respond?*

John calls us to thoughtful discernment. A sincere tone, spiritual language, dramatic story, large following, or supernatural claim does not prove that a message comes from God. We must ask what is being taught about Jesus and whether it agrees with the apostles' witness in Scripture.

Discernment should produce confidence and faithfulness, not fear or contempt. God is greater than every deceiving spirit, and His Spirit helps His people recognize truth. We can reject error while continuing to love the people who have been influenced by it.

Personal Reflection

1. What voices, teachers, podcasts, videos, or social media accounts have you trusted mainly because they sound spiritual or confident?

2. What does each voice you regularly follow teach about who Jesus is, what He accomplished, and how we are saved?

3. Have you ever treated popularity, emotional impact, miracles, or personal experience as proof that a message is true?

4. Where are you tempted to fear instead of trusting that God in you is greater?

5. How can you reject a teaching shaped by the world while still showing Christ's love to the person who believes it?

6. What practical habit will help you test teaching against Scripture, depend on the Holy Spirit, and seek wise Christian counsel?

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Summary Truths

- Christians are commanded to test spiritual claims rather than believe every voice.
- A message may sound spiritual and still be false; many false prophets have gone into the world.
- The Spirit of God agrees with the truth that Jesus Christ has truly come in the flesh.
- The spirit of antichrist opposes or replaces the real Jesus and was already active in John's day.
- Believers need not fear deception because the God who lives in them is greater than the one in the world.
- The apostles' witness, preserved in Scripture, helps distinguish the Spirit of truth from the spirit of error.

Optional Memory Verse

"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." **1 John 4:4 ESV**

Prayer Prompt

"Father, give me wisdom to test every voice and humility to submit my beliefs to Your Word. Keep me anchored in the real Jesus, who came in the flesh. Protect me from deception, fear, and pride. Thank You that Your Spirit lives in me and that You are greater than every power in the world. Help me recognize truth, reject error, and love people well. Amen."

For Further Study

- **Deuteronomy 13:1-4**
  - Why must even impressive signs be tested by faithfulness to the true God?
- **Matthew 7:15-23**
  - What warnings and tests does Jesus give concerning false prophets?
- **John 1:1-18**
  - What does this passage reveal about the identity of the Word who became flesh?
- **2 John 7-11**
  - How does John again connect deception, antichrist, and the coming of Jesus in the flesh?

Homework for next week

Read 1 John again

- Notice every test John gives for recognizing genuine faith and knowing that we belong to God.

Prepare for the next lesson

- Read 1 John 4:7-5:5 and watch for love, born, know, Son, abide, Spirit, fear, and perfect.