Testing the Spirits

(1 John 4:1–6)

I. The Call to Discern (v. 1)

John starts with a firm command: “Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (v. 1).The world teems with false teachers—people claiming God’s authority but spreading error, whether they mean to or not. False teachings aren’t harmless—they’re like poison mislabeled as medicine.

II. The Standards for Discernment (vv. 2–4)

Affirmation of Christ (vv. 2-3). “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.” The key test is what a teaching says about Jesus. If a teaching redefines Jesus, it fails.

Signs of Spiritual Transformation (vv. 4-5). “You are from God, little children, and have overcome them, because greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world.” Look at a teacher’s life: Do they show the Spirit’s work—love for God, repentance, bold interaction with the world, a commitment to Christ?

Commitment to God’s Word (v. 6). “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.” Do they submit to its authority, or twist it to fit their ideas? True teachers root their message in Scripture, letting it shape beliefs and actions.

III. The Blessed Assurance in Christ (v. 6b)

We’re not alone—the Holy Spirit, stronger than any deceptive influence, lives in us. This identity protects us from being swept away by falsehood. As we discern, we become lights in a confused world, pointing to the true Jesus.

Let’s be a Word-saturated community, discerning every spirit, lifting up Christ, and trusting the Spirit to guide us.