

Briefing Document: 1 John Lesson 72-Discernment

Wednesday, August 12, 2026

Executive Summary

This document examines the biblical requirement for spiritual discernment as outlined in 1 John 4:1-6. The central theme is the command for believers to test every spiritual claim against the standard of the Bible. Because many false prophets have entered the world, often appearing as "sheep" within the church, believers must use specific criteria to distinguish the Spirit of Truth from the spirit of error. The primary test of a true teacher is their Christology—specifically, the confession that Jesus Christ is God come in the flesh. To reject the true identity of Jesus as the God-man is to reject God the Father entirely.

The Mandate for Discernment

Believers are given a direct command to exercise discernment. This process is not a one-time event but a continuous responsibility for every Christian.

- **The Command to Test:** 1 John 4:1 commands believers to "test the spirits." This means a person should not believe every spiritual message is from the Holy Spirit.
- **The Standard of Truth:** The only way to test a spirit is against the Bible. If a message or teaching does not align with Scripture, it must be rejected.
- **A Continuous Practice:** The word used for "test" (dokima'zō¹) implies an ongoing, present-tense activity. Believers must constantly examine what they hear to see if it originates from God or other spirits.
- **Metaphor of Leadership:** Historically, this type of testing was used to examine people before they were given positions of responsibility or leadership.

The Need for Testing

The necessity for discernment arises from the widespread presence of deception within the world and the church.

- **Abundance of False Prophets:** Many false teachers have gone out into the world. These individuals act as mouthpieces for "seducing spirits" and "doctrines of demons."
- **Satan's Strategy of Confusion:** In many societies, Satan does not always act as an open enemy of the church. Instead, he seeks to be confused with the church by appearing "pro-Christ" while subtly undermining the truth.
- **Deceptive Appearance:** Jesus warned in *Matthew 7:15*: "*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.*" False prophets often look and dress like true prophets to deceive the gullible.

- **The Will to Discern:** A major problem in the modern church is a lack of will to discern. Many avoid testing teachings because they do not want to say anyone is wrong, which is often a result of psychological movements that prioritize feelings over truth.

The Three Primary Tests of Truth

To determine if a teacher or spirit is from God, John provides three specific areas of evaluation:

1. **Confession of the Divine Lord:** Do they believe in the incarnation and the deity of Jesus Christ?
2. **Possession of the Divine Life:** Do they show the fruit of righteousness in their lives?
3. **Profession of the Divine Law:** Are they submitted to the revelation of God's Word?

The First Test: Christology (The Doctrine of Christ)

The most critical test is what a person believes and teaches about Jesus Christ. Proper Christology is the "litmus test" of spiritual reality.

The Incarnation

A true teacher must confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.

- **God in the Flesh:** This means Jesus is the eternal God who became a human being.
- **The Trinity:** A proper view of Jesus requires a belief in the Trinity. If a teacher denies the Trinity, they cannot correctly confess that Jesus is the Son of God who came from the Father.
- **The Word of Life:** As stated in 1 John 1, Jesus is the "Word of Life" who was with the Father from the beginning and was manifested so humans could see and touch Him.

The Nature of the God-Man

The identity of Jesus involves several key biblical truths:

- **Sinless Advocate:** *"If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1).*
- **Propitiation:** Jesus is the satisfaction for sins. He had to be human to die for men and righteous to satisfy God's judgment (1 John 2:2).
- **Unity of Essence:** One cannot have the Father without the Son. *"Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also" (1 John 2:23).*

Identifying Error

- **Denial of Deity:** Demons and demonic systems will inevitably deny that Jesus is God in human flesh.
- **The Cerinthian Heresy:** This error suggests that a "Christ spirit" merely entered a man named Jesus for a time. However, Scripture says Jesus came *in* the flesh—He was the God-man from the moment of His conception in Mary's womb.
- **Rejection equals Alienation:** Anyone who rejects the true Jesus rejects God. *"He who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me"* (Luke 10:16).

The Role of the Believer

The church needs soldiers who are on the front lines for the truth. In a world where many are unable to engage in spiritual battle due to a lack of knowledge, the premium is on those who are discerning.

- **Privilege of Truth:** Knowing the truth is a glorious privilege that allows a believer to stand firm against deception.
- **Submission to Lordship:** Testing a spirit involves more than just an intellectual agreement that Jesus is God. It requires confessing the "Lord Jesus" (Romans 10:9). Even demons recognize His deity, but they do not submit to His Lordship.

Glossary of Terms

Greek Word	Phonetic Pronunciation	Definition
Dokima'zō	doe-kee-MAD-zo	To test, examine, or prove; used for testing people for leadership or responsibility.
Homologeō	ho-mo-log-EH-oh	To confess or say the same thing; to agree with the reality of God's Word.

¹ Reference to the continuous command to test spirits. ² Reference to the requirement of confessing the same truth about Jesus as found in Scripture