

# 1 John 4:6 Commentary

PREVIOUS

NEXT

**1 John 4:6 We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error**

**Greek** hemeis ek tou theou esmen (PAI) o ginoskon (PAP) ton theon akouei (PAI) hemon os ouk estin (PAI) ek tou theou ouk akouei (PAI) hemon ek toutou ginoskomen (PAI) to pneuma tes aletheias kai to pneuma tes planes:

- **are:** 1Jn 4:4 Mic 3:8 Ro 1:1 1Co 2:12-14 2Pe 3:2 Jude 1:17
- **knows** - 1Jn 4:8 Lu 10:22 John 8:19,45-50 Jn 10:27 13:20 18:37 20:21 1Co 14:37 2Co 10:7 2Th 1:8
- **By this** - 1Jn 4:1 Isa 8:20
- **spirit of truth** - John 14:17 Jn 15:26
- **and:** Isa 29:10 Ho 4:12 Mic 2:11 Ro 11:8 2Th 2:9-11
- [1 John 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## HOW TO KNOW THE MESSENGER IS OR IS NOT FROM GOD

**Hiebert** - The world's response to the false teachers leads John to point out a further test (1Jn 4:6), namely, the character of the messenger is revealed by the kind of followers he draws.

**Westcott** - The character of their speech and the character of their hearers are determined by their own character. They draw the spirit and the substance of their teaching **from** (out of) **the world** and therefore it finds acceptance with kindred natures. The apostle has spoken of *Christian hearers* (1Jn 4:4): he now speaks of *Christian teachers*. In each case living dependence upon God produces its full effect. The *hearer* discerns the true message. The *teacher* discovers the true disciple. And this concurrence of experience brings fresh assurance and deeper knowledge. ([1 John 4 Commentary](#))

**Colin Kruse** - A persistent acceptance of the gospel proclaimed by the author and his community marks those who are from God, and a persistent rejection of their gospel marks those who are not from God. ([The Letters of John The Pillar New Testament Commentary](#))

Conversely John also says that if one **listens to** him (if one hears and heeds the Word of God), he **knows God** (we are born from above). By the same token, if one **does not listen** to John (if one refuses to hear and heed the Word of God), they are **not from God**, not born from above.

**Hiebert** gives an overview of 1Jn 4:1-6 - These verses show no close connection with what follows and are best viewed as an elaboration of the reference to “**the Spirit which he hath given us**” in 1Jn 3:24. The conflict now presented forms the final aspect of the conflicts that mark the Christian life which John has been depicting since 1Jn 2:18. He has already dealt with the conflict between truth and falsehood (1Jn 2:18-28), the conflict between the children of God and the children of the Devil (1Jn 2:29-3:12), and the conflict between love and hatred (1Jn 3:13-24). This section points to the supernatural character of this conflict as ultimately involving “the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.” It sets forth the crucial importance of the proclamation of a sound Christology for assurance and victory in the Christian community. ([The Epistles of John- An Expository Commentary](#))

**John MacArthur** - In contrast to the demonic purveyors of falsehood (Acts 13:10; Gal. 1:7; cf. John 8:44), teachers who are from God proclaim His revealed Word as the source of truth (cf. 2 Cor. 6:7; 1 Tim. 2:7; Titus 1:3). The pronoun we primarily refers to John and the other writers of Scripture. Like them, all true teachers accurately proclaim the Word of God, and the person who knows God listens to them (cf. John 8:47; 10:4-5, 16, 26-27; 14:26; 18:37). By contrast, anyone who is not from God does not listen to their teachings. The completed, written revelation of the Old and New Testaments is therefore the sole authority by which Christians must test all spiritual ideologies. ([1-3 John- MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#))

**We are from God - We** is placed at the first of the Greek sentence for emphasis (as John does with the pronouns in 1Jn 4:4-**note [you]** and 1Jn 4:5-**note [they]**). As discussed below, although some interpret **we** as a reference to all believers, more likely John is contrasting himself (and other apostolic writers and writings) with the false prophets who are from the world (1Jn 4:1-**note**, 1Jn 4:5-**note**).

**John Stott** - how can it be known that we are from God and are teaching the truth? You can tell that our message is God’s message, John explains, because God’s people listen to it and receive it. ([The Letters of John](#))

**Jackman** - We do not try to see into their hearts. That would be as impossible as it is unnecessary. We need to listen to what they say, what they are confessing about Christ, and then to observe who their followers are. ([The Message of John's Letters - Bible Speaks Today](#))

**Kistemaker** says that "Although the forces of the evil one surround the believers, they need not despair for one moment. John reiterates the truth expressed in 1Jn 4:4-**note** and 1Jn 4:5-**note**. He wants to reassure the readers that they are children of God." ([New Testament Commentary - James, Epistles of John, Peter, and Jude](#))

**Steven Cole** - Some understand the “**we**” of verse 6 to refer to all believers. But it stands in antithesis to the “**they**” of 1Jn 4:5, and so it is better to interpret it as referring to the apostles. “**We [apostles] are from God; the one who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us.**” The one who **knows God** is synonymous

with the one who is **from God**, the one who is born again. These people listen to the apostles, which means that they listen with understanding and obedience. They accept the apostolic witness to Jesus Christ as God in human flesh. As we have seen, the one who is not of God does not hear His word (John 8:47; see 1Cor. 2:14). ([Spiritual Discernment 1 John 4:1-6](#))

**Hiebert** agrees that "The assertion "**we are of God**" (hēmeis ek tou theou esmen) marks the contrast between the **false teachers** of 1Jn 4:5 and the **apostolic messengers**. As Plummer notes, "The opposition here is not between true and false Christians, but between true and false teachers."" ([Ibid](#))

**He who knows God listens to us** - The idea of **listens** is not simply that they *hear* the Word, but that they *heed* (obey) the Word (cp Luke 8:21, Lk 8:15, they welcome the Word = James 1:21-note, they don't delude themselves but they do the Word = James 1:22-note) . **Westcott** observes, "The hearer discerns the true message. The teacher discovers the true disciple. And this concurrence of experience brings fresh assurance and deeper knowledge." "The Holy Spirit in the heart of the speaker witnesses to the heart of the hearer and vitalizes the sense of their mutual fellowship in Christ." ([Hiebert](#)) The group below (**he who is not from God does not listen to us**) can *hear* the sound of the Word, but they do not *heed* the Word and thus they prove they are **not from God**. John's words echo Jesus' words "He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear [them,] because you are not of God." (Jn 8:47) The response to God's Word reveals the nature of the hearer - either positively (**he... knows God**) or negatively (**he who is not from God**).

On a practical level, while we are not apostle's, we do have their word and can speak it to others. How many times have you been speaking with someone (in a winsome, non-confrontational manner) and you shift the conversation to the Word of God or to the Gospel of Jesus, and you begin to perceive a distinct change in their affect and demeanor? Their facial expression changes. They become fidgety. They begin to step away. They do not want to listen to you because they are **not from God**.

**John Trapp** on **listens to us** - Christ's sheep are rational; they can discern His voice from that of a stranger, and will hear it not with that gristle only that grows upon their heads (referring to our ear filled with gristly cartilage!), but with the ear of their soul, which tries doctrines as the mouth doth meat, Job 34:3, and knows the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. ([1 John 4 Commentary](#))

**Westcott** - The readiness to hear springs from a living, growing, knowledge, which welcomes and appropriates the truth. ([1 John 4 Commentary](#))

**Robertson** on **he who knows God listens to us** - This is one reason why sermons are dull (some actually are, others so to dull hearers) or inspiring (**Ed**: I think Robertson means that the one who *always* hears the sermon as dull does so because he has no spiritual ears to hear truth from God = **he is not from God**). There is a touch of mysticism here, to be sure, but the heart of Christianity is mysticism (spiritual contact with God in Christ by the Holy Spirit)... John had felt the cold, indifferent, and hostile stare of the worldling as he

preached Jesus... Rejection of the truth may be due also to our not speaking the truth in love (Eph 4:15-note). ([Robertson](#))

**How do we listen to "us" (the apostles) today?** Clearly we listen to them through their writings - the Scriptures! Are you in the Word daily, taking it in to your heart not just your head? If you are thus holding fast to the faithful (trustworthy) Word, then when the winds of false doctrine begin to blow, you will find that the Word you held fast now holds you fast!

A practical implication of **he who knows God listens to us** is that we who know God are to speak the truth about Jesus in boldness. As those who are **from God**, we are called to be God's missionaries wherever we are. If those who hear us are Christ's sheep, they will listen for Jesus said "He who is **of God** hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God." (Jn 8:47) And again Jesus said "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." (Jn 10:27) **Kistemaker** asks "Why do God's people listen to preachers? Because preachers proclaim God's Word, and that Word has divine authority. God's people hear His voice when the preacher speaks." ([Ibid](#))

**Boice** on **listens to us** - If this were a mere individual talking, the claim would be presumptuous. But it is not. This is one of the apostles citing the collective testimony of all the apostles and making that testimony the measure of truth and sound doctrine.

**John Piper** - The Test of What People Hear - Verse 6 points us in this same direction. It answers the same question as 1Jn 4:2-note: How can we recognize the spirit of error and the spirit of truth? The difference between 1Jn 4:2-note and 1Jn 4:6 is that in verse 2 the test is what people say and in 1Jn 4:6 the test is what people hear. Or another way to put it is that the test in 1Jn 4:2-note is whether people bring sincere and truthful words out of their heart, while the test in verse 6 is whether they will allow sincere and truthful words go into their heart. Mere Listening Proves Nothing. But the same question arises here that arose in 1Jn 4:2-note: Does mere listening prove anything about a person's spiritual condition? No. No more than mere speaking proves anything in 1Jn 4:2-note. The point of the verses is not merely to give a doctrinal test for recognizing false spirits. The point is to give a test also for recognizing the true Spirit. And therefore the test must be more than doctrinal, because true doctrine by itself is no sure sign of the work of the Spirit. Anybody can say true doctrines with his lips. But only the Spirit can make sinners really listen and really confess the truth of Jesus. So the great lesson that lies just beneath the surface in this text is that none of us will listen to the message of Christ unless the mighty Holy Spirit overcomes our resistance and gives us ears to hear (Acts 16:14; Deuteronomy 29:4). And none of us will confess from the heart that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh unless the mighty Holy Spirit humbles us to accept the authority of Jesus implied in that confession (cf. 1Corinthians 12:3). John's great assumption lying just beneath 1Jn 4:2-note and 1Jn 4:6 is that hearing the gospel with openness and confessing Christ with loyalty is the work and the gift of the Holy Spirit. If this listening and this confessing could be explained in any other way, they would not be a sure sign of the Spirit's presence and power. But they are a sign of his power. For John knows that no one hears and no one confesses apart from the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit. But the answer is the same in both verses: 1Jn 4:2-note

is referring not to mere words but to words from the heart. And verse 6 is referring not to mere listening but to a listening that allows words to go into the heart. Not just any listening proves the presence of the Holy Spirit. But the humble listening that accepts the truth of Christ and submits gladly to it—that listening is a sign of the Spirit of truth at work in the heart. So the testimony of the Spirit that assures us that we are the children of God is the work of the Spirit to make us listen to the gospel submissively (1Jn 4:6) and confess the Christ of the gospel heartily (1Jn 4:2-note). ([Test the Spirits to See Whether They Are of God](#))

**Steven Cole** - John Stott ([The Letters of John](#)) points out that John's claim, "**whoever knows God listens to us,**" would be the height of arrogance if he were speaking as an individual. But the apostles were entrusted with the special authority to lay the foundation of the church through their witness and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 16:16-18; John 14:26; Eph. 2:22; 2Cor. 10:8). We have the apostolic teaching preserved in the New Testament. Thus the standard by which to judge anyone's (including our own) spiritual discernment is, "*What is the person's response to the apostolic teaching about Jesus Christ as found in the New Testament?*" Without that standard, every person becomes his own measure of "truth," filled with pride, and not in submission to Christ as Lord. ([Spiritual Discernment 1 John 4:1-6](#))

**John Stott** - "But how can it be known that we are of God and are teaching the truth? John answers, in effect, that you can tell that our message is God's message because God's people listen to it and receive it. These statements sound the height of arrogance. So they would be if uttered by an individual Christian. No private believer could presume to say: 'whoever knows God agrees with me; only those who are not of God disagree with me.' But this is what John says. The fact is that he is not speaking in his own name, nor even in the name of the Church, but as one of the apostles, who were conscious of the special authority bestowed upon them by Jesus Christ. He is carrying a stage further the argument of the first three verses. There the test of doctrine was whether it acknowledged the divine-human Person of Jesus Christ; here the test is whether it is accepted by Christians and rejected by non-Christians. There is a certain affinity between God's Word and God's people. Jesus had taught that His sheep hear His voice (Jn. 10:4, 5, 8, 16, 26, 27), that everyone who is of the truth listens to His witness to the truth (Jn. 18:37), and that 'he who is of God hears the words of God' (Jn. 8:47RSV). In the same way John asserts that since we are of God (1Jn 4:6) and ye are of God (1Jn 4:4), you listen to us. There is a correspondence between message and hearers. The Spirit who is in you (1Jn 4:4) enables you to discern His own voice speaking through us (1Jn 4:2). So you can recognize God's Word because God's people listen to it, just as you can recognize God's people because they listen to God's Word. Those who do not listen to apostolic teaching, but prefer to absorb the teaching of the world, not only pass judgment on themselves but thereby also on the message to which they do give attention." ([The Letters of John](#))

**He who knows God** - Who is getting to know Him more and more, better and better. Indeed, surely this will in some sense continue throughout eternity, for our Father is infinite!

**He who knows** ([1097](#))(**ginosko**) is in the **present tense** which describes "one who keeps on getting acquainted with God, growing in his knowledge of God." ([Robertson](#)), growing experientially in the knowledge of God. **Vine** adds that John is saying "'*you know by experience of facts*' and so are able to recognize. The experience is comprehensive and belongs to all true believers." As **Lenski** says this person's relationship with God is "no mere intellectual knowing but a living apprehension with full effect on mind, heart, and life."

**Vincent** on **he who knows** - he who is habitually and ever more clearly perceiving and recognizing God as his Christian life unfolds. The knowledge is regarded as progressive and not complete. Compare Phil 3:12. ([Vincent's Word Studies](#))

## **HOW TO KNOW YOU ARE NOT FROM GOD**

**He who is not from God does not listen to us** - The verb **listen** is in the **active voice** signifying that these non-listeners are continually (**present tense**) making a conscious choice, a choice of their will to reject the talk of truth tellers (the apostles or their writings ~ the Scriptures)! They can *hear* sounds but they cannot understand what they *hear* and thus they do not *heed* (obey) what they hear! Their inability to listen to God's Word reveals them to be **not from God** and by default to be from the world.

To reiterate, their not listening **to us** (the teaching of the apostles) indicates that they are **not from God**. In other words they are not born again. Only those who are born again have ears to (habitually) listen to (hear and heed) God's Word. As **Hiebert** concludes "Spirit-empowered preaching of the Word not only confirms the true nature of the speaker but also serves to lay bare the spiritual state of the hearer." ([Ibid](#))

**William Barclay** on why they do **not listen to us** - John returns to his favorite antithesis, the opposition between the **world** and **God**. The **world**, as we have seen before, is human nature apart from, and in opposition to, God. The man whose source is God ("**from God**") will welcome the truth; the man whose source is the world ("**from the world**") will reject it. When we come to think of it, that is an obvious truth. How can a man whose watchword is *competition* even begin to understand an ethic whose key-note is *service*? How can a man whose aim is the *exaltation of the self* and who holds that the weakest must go to the wall, even begin to understand a teaching whose principle for living is *love*? How can a man who believes that this is the only world and that, therefore, material things are the only ones which matter, even begin to understand life lived in the light of eternity, where the unseen things are the greatest values? A man can hear only what he has fitted himself to hear and he can utterly unfit himself to hear the Christian message. That is what John is saying. We have seen again and again that it is characteristic of him to see things in terms of black and white. His thinking does not deal in shades. **On the one side there is the man whose source and origin is God and who can hear the truth; on the other side there is the man whose source and origin is the world and who is incapable of hearing the truth.** There emerges a problem, which very likely John did not even think of. Are there people to whom all preaching is quite useless? Are there people whose

defenses can never be penetrated, whose deafness can never hear, and whose minds are forever shut to the invitation and command of Jesus Christ? (**Ed comment:** Paul writes that God our Savior "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." 1Ti 2:4; The Lord "is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." 2Pe 3:9-**note**) The answer must be that there are no limits to the grace of God and that there is such a person as the Holy Spirit. It is the lesson of life that the love of God can break every barrier down. It is true that a man can resist (**Ed:** cp Acts 7:51); it is, maybe, true that a man can resist even to the end. But what is also true is that Christ is always knocking at the door of every heart (Rev 3:20-**note**; = Jesus' offer is thought by many to be an offer of salvation but others disagree!), and it is possible for any man to hear the voice of Christ (**Ed:** John 5:24), even above the many voices of the world. ([1 John 4 Commentary - William Barclay's Daily Study Bible](#))

## **TESTING OF SPIRITS SUMMARIZED**

**By this** (ek toutou = more literally "from this") - **By what?** While this phrase can refer to what precedes or what follows, in this context it clearly refers to what precedes. **David Smith** feels it is "from their hearkening or not hearkening ( **Ed:** whether they listen or don't listen)." Others are not so sure to which aspects of the preceding section John is referring (see NET Note below).

**NET Note** - There is still a question, however, of what in the preceding context the phrase refers to. Interpreters have suggested a reference (1) only to 1Jn 4:6; (2) to 1Jn 4:4-6; or (3) to all of 1Jn 4:1-6. The last is most likely, because the present phrase forms an inclusion with the phrase en touto in 1Jn 3:24 which introduces the present section. Thus "by this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of deceit" refers to all of 1Jn 4:1-6 with its "test" of the spirits by the Christological confession made by their adherents in 1Jn 4:1-3-**note** and with its emphasis on the authoritative (apostolic) eyewitness testimony to the significance of Jesus' earthly life and ministry in 1Jn 4:4-6-**note**.

**Vincent** distinguishes **by this** (en touto) in 1Jn 4:2-**note** versus **by this** (ek touto) in 1Jn 4:6 - The former (en touto) marks the residing or consisting of the essence or truth of a thing in something the apprehension of which conveys to us the essential nature of the thing itself. The latter (ek touto) marks the inference or deduction of the truth from something, as contrasted with its immediate perception in that something. ([Vincent's Word Studies](#))

**We know (ginosko)** by personal recognition by all believers. As **Hiebert** says "all true believers this ability to recognize or distinguish the true nature of the spirits. This ability was not limited to the apostolic messengers, nor is it restricted to the official leaders of the Church; but clearly some believers are more gifted to discern the spirits than others."

**David Smith** - Men's attitude to the message of the Incarnate Saviour ranks them on this side or on that—on God's side or the world's. Of course St. John does not ignore St. Paul's "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). The message may be the truth and be rejected,

not because of the hearers' worldliness, but because it is wrongly delivered—not graciously and winsomely. Cf. Rowland Hill's anecdote of the preaching barber who had made a wig for one of his hearers—badly made and nearly double the usual price. When anything particularly profitable escaped the lips of the preacher, the hearer would observe to himself: "Excellent! This should touch my heart; but oh, the wig!" ([1 John 3 - Expositor's Greek Testament Commentary](#))

**Hiebert on the spirit of truth and the spirit of error** - These two spirits represent two distinct moral realms competing for control over the masses of humanity.

In 1Cor 12:10 Paul describes that some believers have the gift of "distinguishing (discerning - **diakrisis**) of spirits" and in Heb 5:14-**note** we see that "solid food is for the mature who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil." Here in 1Jn 4:6 John says all Christians possess the ability to **know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error**.

I like what **Kistemaker** says on this verse - We are able to recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of the lie by observing a listener's reaction to the preaching of God's Word." And then he quotes Paul...

But thanks be to God, Who always leads us in His triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For (**term of explanation** - What's Paul explaining?) we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing (cp **the spirit of truth and the spirit of error**); to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things? (2Cor 2:14-16)

As **Jesus** instructed His disciples...

And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is] **the Spirit of truth, Whom the world cannot receive**, because it does not behold Him or know Him, [but] you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you. (John 14:16-17)

**Robertson on truth and... error** - There is no reason for Christians being duped by "the spirit of error." (**Ed: Why?** Because we possess the Spirit of Truth! Jn 14:17, 15:26)

**NET Note on the spirit of truth... error** - Who or what is the spirit of truth and the spirit of deceit in 1 John 4:6? (1) Some interpreters regard the "**spirits**" in 1Jn 4:6 as human spirits. Although 1Jn 4:1a-**note** is ambiguous and might refer either to human spirits or spiritual beings who influence people, it is clear in the context that (2) the author sees behind the secessionist opponents with their false Christology the spirit of the antichrist, that is, Satan (1Jn 4:3b-**note**), and behind the true believers of the community to which he is writing, the Spirit of God (1Jn 4:2-**note**). This is made clear in 1Jn 4:4 by the reference to the respective spirits as the One who is in you and the one who is in the world.



## THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH

It is interesting that the Bible translations differ on their interpretation of **the spirit of truth**. Some (NET, CSB, ESV, NIV, NLT, Good News Bible) capitalize **Spirit** indicating they believe John is speaking of the Holy Spirit, whereas others do not see it as a reference to the Spirit (NAS, RSV, NJB, YLT, KJV). This difference of translation makes the point that EVERY Bible translation (no matter how literal), has SOME DEGREE of "interpretative bias" in the English translation. This is why I think it is so important for saints to become familiar with the original languages (and there are now many wonderful Bible software programs make it relatively easy!)

**Hiebert** - The genitive "**of truth**" seems best understood as descriptive, setting forth the nature of the Spirit Himself as the embodiment of "the truth" (cf. John 14:6) and as actively communicating and interpreting God's truth. Those who proclaim the truth of God do so under the inspiration of the Spirit of truth.

### Related resource -

- Bible Versions compared for how literal they translate Hebrew and Greek
- [What does it mean to test the spirits?](#)

**Guzik** - If someone hears what God has said in the Bible, we know he has the spirit of truth. If he does not hear it, he has the spirit of error... We keep in **the spirit of truth** by clinging to Jesus, the One who said I am the truth (John 14:6).

**Spirit of truth** - The noun **aletheia** is genitive and this could be either *possessive* genitive = belonging to the truth or *subjective* genitive = uttering the truth. Practically speaking, both would be applicable, for we need both!

**Truth** ([225](#))(**aletheia** from **a** = indicates following word has the opposite meaning ~ without + **lanthano** = to be hidden or concealed, to escape notice, cp our English "latent" from Latin = to lie hidden) is used by John in his letter 9x in 8v (1Jn 1:6, 8, 1Jn 2:4, 21, 1Jn 3:18, 19, 1Jn 4:6, 5:6) and has the literal sense of that which contains nothing hidden, so that which is not concealed and thus that which that is expressed as it really is. Truth is the correspondence between a reality and a declaration which professes to set forth or describe the reality. To say it another way, words spoken or written are true when they correspond with objective reality. Persons and things are true when they correspond with their profession.

**John Stott** sums up this section - This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood, John concludes. We can test the spirits, and 'get to know' which is which (ginōskomen, present tense), by examining both the message they proclaim through their human instruments and the character of the audience which listens to them. ([The Letters of John](#))

**Daniel Akin** - John summarizes his intentions and claims that this is how we know the

Spirit of truth from the spirit of falsehood. The spirits may be tested by first examining their confession, which comes through human instruments, and then by examining the character of their audience, who would give them credence. We can know the true from the false, the Spirit of God from the spirit of the antichrist. ([1, 2, 3 John- An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture The New American Commentary](#))

## THE SPIRIT OF ERROR

**The spirit of error** - "The genitive "**of error**" again is best viewed as descriptive of the relentless activities of the Devil and his cohorts." ([Hiebert](#)) Clearly the **spirit of error** is the antithesis of **the Spirit of truth** and they are continually in opposition.

**Error** ([4106](#))(**plane** from **planos** = deceitful, with idea of wandering; see also **planao**) in it's original literal sense describes a roaming or a wandering and then figuratively a going astray or a wandering out of the right way. In the active sense it means the leading astray or deceit of someone. In the passive sense it depicts one as being led astray. The context favors the active meaning, for the false prophets (1Jn 4:1-**note**) clearly seek to actively deceive. In 1Jn 2:26-**note** John uses the related verb **planao** to describe those who are actively trying to lead others astray. Similarly, in 1Jn 3:7-**note** John issues a command using **planao**, telling them "**let no one (actively) deceive** you."

**Hiebert** on the actively deceptive aspect of **the spirit of error** - Satan here is not characterized as "the spirit of error" because he is the victim of error and deception; rather, he actively promotes error or deception and is deceptive by his very nature. Satan and his demonic forces are engaged in a relentless effort to lead believers into spiritual error and deception, working in and through their human agents. This warfare between "the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error," contending for control over the life and destiny of mankind, is indeed the climactic aspect of the conflicts of the Christian life. ([The Epistles of John- An Expositional Commentary](#))

**Vincent** says **plane** is an "error which shows itself in action... It may imply deceit as accompanying or causing error." **Plane** is a wandering from the path of truth, orthodoxy or piety and into error, delusion or deceit. **Plane** is used repeatedly in letters that deal with spiritual error - 2Pe 2:18; 2Peter 3:17-**note**; 1Jn. 4:6; Jude 1:11-**note**.

Peter warned the saints "You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand (What? See 2Pe 3:16 - "untaught and unstable distort... the Scriptures to their own destruction"), **be on your guard** (**present imperative** - command for us to continually be on high spiritual alert [only possible as we surrendered to and enabled by the indwelling Spirit], suggesting the danger of deception is always "just around the corner!") lest, being carried away by the **error** (**plane**) of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness. (2Pe 3:17-**note**)

**Jackman** - In our relativistic age, we constantly need to be reminded that some things are always true and others always false. Truth is not just the present consensus of opinion; it is defined by the character of God. Today's false prophets are just as persuasive and just as lethal as those of the first century. They will say the Bible has authority, but is not the

supreme authority. They will affirm belief in the resurrection, but not that the body of Christ was actually raised on the third day. The spirit of falsehood is a spirit of deceit. It is only by receiving the apostles' teaching and living a life that accords with this truth that we can know God. We are not to accept substitutes. ([The Message of John's Letters - Bible Speaks Today](#))

**John Piper** - For believers the lesson is twofold. 1. Do not take credit for your listening ear or your confessing heart or your correct view of Christ. Give credit to the Spirit who is in you, and give God the glory. 2. When you are threatened by any deception of the evil one—any temptation, or discouragement, or anxiety, or cowardice—remind yourself that "he who is in you is greater than he that is in the world." Almighty God abides within you. Trust him. For this is the victory that overcomes the world, your faith (1Jn 5:4) in the sovereign indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. ([Test the Spirits to See Whether They Are of God](#))

The late **A. W. Tozer** had some wise counsel on "**How to Try the Spirits**" (adapted from, Moody Monthly [12/79], pp. 51-55 - [Read an elaboration on the 7 principles in Chapter 29 of Tozer's book "Man the Dwelling Place of God"](#)). He posed seven tests to apply to any teaching:

(1) How does the teaching affect my relationship with God? Is He magnified and glorified, or diminished?

(2) How does the teaching affect my attitude toward the Lord Jesus Christ? Does it magnify Him and give Him first place? Or, does it subtly shift my focus onto myself or some experience?

(3) How does the teaching affect my attitude toward Scripture? Did the teaching come from and agree with the Word? Does it increase my love for the Word?

(4) How does the teaching affect my self-life? Does it feed self or crucify it? Does it feed pride or humility?

(5) How does the teaching affect my relationships to other Christians? Does it cause me to withdraw, find fault, and exalt myself in superiority? Or, does it lead me to genuine love for all that truly know Christ?

(6) How does the teaching affect my relationship to the world system? Does it lead me to pursue the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life? Does it lead me to pursue worldly riches, reputation, and pleasures? Or, does it crucify the world to me?

(7) How does the teaching affect my attitude toward sin? Does it cause me to tolerate sin in my life or to turn from it and grow in holiness? Any teaching that makes holiness more acceptable and sin more intolerable is genuine. ([Spiritual Discernment 1 John 4:1-6](#))