

1 John Lesson 9 Articles

John begins with a warning about the false spirits in the world. Keep in mind that the NT was not yet completed and what had been written was not widely known; until the completion of the NT, the local churches depended on the ministry of people with spiritual gifts to teach them truth. How could a believer know when a preacher was from God and that his message could be trusted? (1 Thes. 5:19–21.) After all, Satan is an imitator. John states that the false spirits will not confess that Jesus is the Christ (see 1 Cor. 12:3). The false cults today deny the deity of Christ and make Him a mere man or an inspired teacher. But the Christian has the Spirit within, the new nature, and this gives overcoming power.

There are two spirits in the world today: God's Spirit of Truth, who speaks through the inspired Word, and Satan's spirit of error that teaches lies (1 Tim. 4:1ff). Teachers sent by God will speak from God, and God's children will recognize them. Satan's workers will speak from and depend on worldly wisdom (1 Cor. 1:7–2:16). The true sheep recognize the voice of the Shepherd (John 10:1–5, 27–28). True sheep also recognize and love one another. Satan is a divider and destroyer; Christ unites people in love.¹

John returned briefly to the theme of many late New Testament letters. How can we test for counterfeits and false prophets? First, doctrinally. Jesus, God's Son, has come in the flesh. This confession will never be made by false teachers. And second, by lifestyle. The world, with its "cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has" (2:16), is put away by the mature believer. When a teacher speaks from the viewpoint of the world, we know he is not from God.

The true believer will also recognize John's writings as God's truth. The Holy Spirit will confirm it. When teaching is out of harmony with the written Word, the Spirit Himself will bring disquiet within the believer.²

I take the word **spirit** to mean someone who boasts that he is endowed with the gift of the Spirit to perform his office as a prophet. It was not permitted for anyone to speak in his own name, nor was credit given to speakers except insofar as they were the organs of the Holy Spirit, in order that prophets might have more authority. God honored them with his name as though he had separated them from mankind in general. So then, the people who were called "spirits" were those who represented the Holy Spirit by putting his oracles into words. They brought nothing of their own, nor did they speak on their own authority. But the point of this honorable title was that God's Word should not lose the respect due to it through the humble condition of the minister. For God wanted his Word always to be received from human mouths just as if he himself had appeared from heaven.³

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). *Wiersbe's expository outlines on the New Testament* (p. 774). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

² Richards, L., & Richards, L. O. (1987). *The teacher's commentary* (p. 1056). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

³ Calvin, J., & Henry, M. (1998). *1, 2, & 3 John* (pp. 72–73). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.