

Week 7: Hear God's Spirit

1 John 4:1-6

Aim: To be discriminating and test those who claim to speak the Word of God on behalf of God. We must discern those who are authentic, speaking the truth about God, from those which are false teachers, deceptive and promote the lies of the world. Be alert not alarmed, suitably sceptical - not gullible or naïve, shaped to hear and discern. We know what is true by whether it is consistent with God's word in the Bible, and we know God as we read and listen to it.

Getting Started:

How do you decide whether to trust something someone tells you?

Pray for understanding as we read God's word.

What is God saying?

Read 1 John 3:24-4:6

What must we do when spirits claim to bring a message from God (v1)?

And why?

Test them, and check it's true, don't just accept anything anyone says about or in the name of God.

Why? Many false prophets have gone out into the world. I expect he's thinking here first about the antichrists he mentioned earlier in chapter 2

How do we discern which to listen to (v2-3)?

Do listen if the spirit/person's conviction and teaching treats Jesus the way he should be treated – as the Christ - God come in the flesh - who lived and died and rose again and rules over all. Don't otherwise, they are counted among the antichrists (against Christ)

What does John say for our benefit about the spiritual power struggle in which we are participants (v4)?

Don't fear or be overwhelmed by such false teachers and their teaching. What they say may sound persuasive but as Christ has overcome his

enemies, so we who are his children, in relationship with God, and have his spirit can stand firm against them knowing we are secure in him

What reminder are we given about the two realms, and those who belong to each, and the truth of who listens to whom (5-6)?

Those from the world speak from the falsehood of the world and get an enthusiastic hearing from the world

Those from God speak the truth from God and his children listen to him (but the world does not. It's another 'reality check' - If the world isn't listening to God, then why would we who know God listen to the world)

Why is God saying this?

Who are people who claim to speak to us on God's behalf?

There are plenty – fellow Christians in our church as we speak the word of God into each other's lives, our leaders and teachers, Christians from other churches and denominations, people who aren't Christians not in church or in church who have opinions and promote ways they think others should know and think about God.

Some we encounter personally, others via media.

Remember, the most dangerous false teachers don't have an LED sign flashing over them to warn us, but say things that are true while adding or subtracting from them

The main thrust of this passage is – be alert not alarmed, suitably sceptical - not gullible or naïve, shaped to hear and discern

How can we get better at testing the spirits?

Know God through his word and test what we hear and think against his Word in the Bible. Read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the Bible (as the Cranmer wrote in the Anglican prayer book)

What is the benefit of having one another as we test the spirits, and how may we serve one another to listen wisely?

We are a gift from God so that we may test the spirits together, warn each other, speak the truth to one another, sharpen one another.

That should be an encouragement to church with one another in order to love and be loved in this critical responsibility.

Consider your diet of people here and elsewhere who teach and shape your view of God, yourself and the gospel. Are there ways in which you need to change which spirits you listen to?

As mentioned above there numerous face to face and media avenues through which we may be strengthened in knowing God, or led astray.

This question invites people to think through what these are for them, and whether they are helpful or unhelpful.

People ought to consider not only what is said, but other things people say and whether they have proved trustworthy in handling God's word (their track record). Also how much they are listening to others to be shaped by God's word and how much they are exposing themselves to and thinking about it directly.

Prayer Starters

- Thank God that we may know him by his Spirit, through his word in the Bible
- Ask God to give discernment to test the spirits and so listen to him and not the world

Growing Growth Group Suggestion

Consider an end of term meal or prayer focus or other activity together as a group or with another group

Are there any people I should follow up this week?

