



Discernment in a Word of Deception Leader Guide – July 19, 2020

Dear friends, 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. ² This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. ⁴ You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. ⁵ They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶ We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood. (1 John 4:1-6 NIV)

ICE BREAKER

Share funny stories as a group of when you've been deceived.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1) John shares in verse 1 that spiritual discernment is necessary because there are spirits and false prophets that stand against God. Where are some places you have seen this during your life?

- Group leaders, share how you've encountered this in your life. It could be personal experiences or other religions/cults. (We'll really get into those in question 3.)

2) In verses 2-3, John shares with us how we discern the spirits – we see what they say about the person/work of Jesus. Why is this the starting point? Why is the person and work of Jesus so important?

- The person of Jesus -> includes His being fully God and fully human. If either of these is removed/changed, then Jesus was not a sufficient sacrifice for our sin.
- The work of Jesus -> primarily means His perfect life, death, burial, and resurrection; but can also extend to His treatment (love of others) that was demonstrated in both His life and death.

3) The main place evil spirits and false prophets attack Christianity is the incarnation of Jesus (Him coming in the flesh). Why is this case? What are some examples of religions/cults who have done this?

- If people can undermine Jesus (especially His coming as the God-man to die in our place) then all of Christianity falls apart).
- Examples -> Islam, Jehovah's Witness, Christian Scientists, Mormonism, etc.

4) Pastor Kevin gave three cautions/concerns for us to heed when testing the spirits.

What were they? Which ones are easy for you? Which ones are difficult?

- Don't be paranoid or afraid -> The One living in us is greater than the one in the world. We can move forward knowing Jesus has overcome the world.
- Be concerned about the things of first importance -> In short, major on the majors and minor on the minors. Keep the main thing the main thing. Start with what someone (or group) says/ believes about the person/work of Jesus and then into other areas, not vice-versa.
- Judge the claims of Christ with humble confidence -> Be confident in what you believe, but not in a condemning way. Don't expect non-followers of Jesus to act like followers of Jesus. Always start with the question -> how do you understand the person/work of Jesus?

5) There is a tension to manage between being discerning and being critical. How do we distinguish between the two?

- It is easy to drift from discernment into being critical. We must always check the motives of our heart when asking a question or pressing into someone else's belief/behavior.
 - I (Andrew) check my motives by asking "why am I questioning/why do I care?" Is it for *reconciliation* (helping the other person, helping my understanding of the issue, etc.), *recognition* (wanting to be recognized for being right or to make a point), or to *roast* someone (wanting to look good at the expense of someone else).

PERSONAL REFLECTION

1) Kevin posed a great question in his message – "What would happen if we were as attentive to spiritual things as we are with our smart phone?" How can you shift in this area of your life this week?

2) How can your group begin to work together to become aware of deception around you and supporting each other to be discerning?