*Series: The Composition of Confidence – 1 John*

**Confidence in Discernment – The Spirit of Truth and Error**

*1 John 3:24-4:6*

**Introduction**

1. The Composition of Confidence – **1 John**
   1. ***“confidence”*** – parrēsia (4x) (“boldness”)
   2. ***“know”*** – eidō (17x) – **1 John 5:13** – written that you may know you have eternal life.
2. “There is perhaps no portion of the New Testament which one could study to more advantage who is desirous of ascertaining whether he himself is a true Christian. An anxious inquirer, a man who wishes to know what true religion is, could be directed to no portion of the New Testament where he would more readily find the instruction that he needs, than to this portion of the writings of the aged and experienced disciple whom Jesus loved. Nowhere else can a true Christian find a more clear statement of the nature of his religion, and of the evidences of real piety, than in this Epistle.” (Albert Barnes)
3. With a world full of contradictory doctrines all claiming to be coming from Christ how can we be sure what the truth is? Can we know the truth? Is there a way to be confident that one doctrine is true to the exclusion of many others? Is it important that the doctrine I believe is true?
4. The Importance of Discernment (**3:24**) – Doctrine Affects Behavior
5. Believing Error Results in Destruction – **2 Thessalonians 2:9-12**
   1. The opponents labeled as “antichrists” were liars – **1 John 2:22-23**
   2. To believe their doctrine is to forfeit fellowship with God.
6. *Still, some question why it is so important to believe the right thing in every case and deny that we can even do so.*
7. Discernment of Sound Doctrine Promotes Righteousness
   1. There are things ***“proper for sound doctrine”*** – **Titus 2:1-10** – i.e. sound doctrine requires and produces this behavior; unsound doctrine does the opposite.
   2. **3:24a** – the condition of fellowship with God (mutual abiding) is keeping His commandments (**present active** – ***“he who is keeping His commands,” YLT***).
      1. **Cf. John 15:1-2, 5-6** – bearing fruit, i.e. righteous activity according to His will.
   3. **3:24b** – ***“by this we know”*** points backwards to the conditional statement concerning fellowship with God – keeping His commands.
      1. This is a test of fellowship.
      2. If you want to know if you have fellowship with God, see whether you are actively obeying His word.
      3. **NOTE: Some would deny this statement. Some suggest that spiritual life, and relationship with God and Christ are to be distinguished from our conduct. Whether you are part of God’s family is not dependent on your obedience, so they say. HOWEVER, JOHN IS SAYING THIS VERY TEST IS DIVINE.**
   4. **3:24c** – ***“by”*** – *ek* – “marker denoting origin, cause, motive, reason, from, of…[c] to denote derivation” (BDAG)
      1. EX: ***“no lie is OF [ek] the truth” (2:21)*** – lies are not derived from truth.
      2. ***“and in this [prior statement, JC] we know that He doth remain in us, [this is, JC] from [ek, derived from] the Spirit that He gave us.” (YLT)***
      3. I.E. IT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT WHO TEACHES THAT KEEPING GOD’S COMMANDMENTS IS THE CONDITION OF FELLOWSHIP, AND THEREFORE A PROPER TEST FOR WHETHER HE ABIDES IN YOU.
      4. **Understanding, believing, and accepting this doctrine leads to righteous conduct.**
   5. Alternative – **2:4** – they were teaching this concept, and as those who had accepted it, they were living in rebellion to God.
   6. **Application – No matter how small the doctrinal distinction might seem to us, if discernment leads us to understand it contradicts scripture it is extremely dangerous and will affect us negatively. False doctrine always produces rotten fruit.**
8. The Warning (**4:1**) – Do Not Believe Every Spirit
9. ***“Spirit”*** Used by Metonymy of the Cause
   1. **“This is when the cause is put for the effect…(i.) The person for the action.” (Bullinger, E.W., Figures of Speech Used in the Bible, 539)**
   2. Concerning the context of **1 John 4:1-3** – **“The Spirit is put also for special revelations and visions communicated by Him” (ibid., 543)**
   3. **Spirit = revelation from someone/somewhere.**
      1. Claim of false teachers – **2:20** – implicit in the statement is the claim by the heretics that their doctrine concerning Jesus was inspired – they had special revelation others didn’t.
      2. **Test whether any statement with the claim as being spiritual, divine truth is indeed so.**
      3. Alternative – **1 Timothy 4:1-2; James 3:14-16** – if it is not from the Spirit of God it is from demons/Satan.
         1. NOTE: Not that these people are possessed, or inspired by Satan or demons, but their teaching is false, and serves the purpose of Satan and demons.
         2. An emphatic way of saying it is not from God and is therefore deadly.
10. The Reality of False Teaching Requires Healthy Skepticism
    1. **NOTE: “healthy skepticism” does not mean that we question everything. There are things we know and have verified to be true. However, when we hear something that sounds strange, or would logically lead to something strange, we must immediately be skeptical about it, and test its derivation.**
    2. **4:1** – ***“spirits”*** are the messages/revelations of ***“God”*** or the ***“false prophets.”***
    3. Throughout the Old Testament there were those who prophesied falsely – **Jeremiah 5:30-31**
    4. The same is true now, in the final dispensation – **2 Peter 2:1-3**
       1. The nature of false teaching – secret, destructive, deceptive.
       2. Requires maturity, sobriety and vigilance to avoid – **cf. Ephesians 4:14**
    5. We must have the attitude of the Bereans – **Acts 17:11** – they were testing whether the “spirit” (revelation of Paul and Silas) was indeed from God as they claimed it was.
       1. They went to what they already knew was from God to compare.
       2. They were not closed minded, stubborn, or resistant, but had the healthy skepticism which vetted the doctrine they were being taught to verify it was indeed from God.
    6. **NOTE: This is important in all areas of learning – commentaries, workbooks, articles, study materials, preaching, teaching, podcasts, etc.**
    7. **John prescribes a test to administer to ensure our discernment concerning the origin of the teaching is reliable.**
11. The Method of Discernment (**4:2-6**) – By This You Know
12. The Theme of Origin and Derivation is Continued
    1. A series of ***“of [ek, ex]”*** statements have been made marking the knowledge of a person’s origin, or of a thing/statement’s derivation.
    2. **Origin with God or Devil?** – **2:29; 3:8, 9, 10, 12** – origin known based on behavior.
    3. **Origin with Truth** – **3:19** (same as God, **3:9** – ***“seed”*** = word, truth) – origin known based on behavior.
    4. **3:24** – continues this theme, but segues into the origin or DERIVATION of a message (rather than a person).
       1. Before – are WE from God?
       2. Now – is this MESSAGE/REVELATION (***“spirit”***) from God?
13. Examine WHAT is Said (**4:2-3**)
    1. ***“By this you know the Spirit of God”*** – this offers achievable confidence in what we understand is from God, and thus true – IT REQUIRES EFFORT ON OUR PART IN ADMINISTERING A TEST.
    2. **What does the *“spirit”* (revelation, message, messenger) *“confess?”*** – *homologeō* – lit., “to speak the same thing” (homos, “same,” lego, “to speak”), “to assent, accord, agree with,” (VINE)
       1. **The word implies the OBJECTIVE nature of a message – it exists outside of a person and their experiences.**
       2. **The word implies the person has been faced with that message and accepted it as true AS STATED.**
       3. God’s Spirit has already spoken – **2:20-21, 24; cf. Hebrews 1:1-2** – YOU HAVE ALREADY BEEN GIVEN THE TRUTH.
       4. IS THE SPIRIT SPEAKING THE SAME THING? (Confessing it?)
       5. **“A teacher or prophet who is inspired of God ("is from God") says the same thing about Jesus that God says, and says it openly and boldly.” (Reese, 133-134)**
    3. **4:2-3** – the question of whether ***“Jesus Christ has come in the flesh”*** is one specific to the context of John’s concern.
       1. God says He did – **1 John 1:1-4; John 1:14**
       2. If a ***“spirit”*** (revelation/message) confesses this, it is ***“of God”*** – **i.e. FROM, or DERIVED FROM God.**
       3. If a ***“spirit”*** (revelation/message) does NOT confess this, it is ***“not of God”*** – **i.e. NOT FROM, or NOT DERIVED FROM God.**
    4. **This is not the general test that covers every issue. There may be a “spirit” that is NOT from God which confesses the incarnation of the Son of God.**
    5. **This test is a SPECIFIC example of a GENERAL concept – the SPECIFIC test here would fail to vet other errors:**
       1. Is Judaizing error exposed with this?
       2. Are the nuances of the Colossian heresy all exposed with this?
       3. Etc.
    6. **What we learn about discerning the spirit of truth and error** – “It is essential in every crisis in the church, as early as possible, to contrive a methodology for distinguishing those who hold to the truth and those who hold to error, in order to isolate the error and stop it before it infects large numbers of unwary Christians.” (King Sr., Daniel, Truth Commentaries, 120)
       1. **Simply put, when one departs from the truth on any subject, and others are in danger of being swayed, the error must be combatted with the truth, and in doing so, Christians are being equipped with the ability to administer tests to see whether anyone is teaching truth or error.** (**cf. 2 Corinthians 10:4-5** – pully down strongholds, casting down arguments)
       2. Justification is by faith only – **James 2:24** – ***“not of God”***
       3. Baptism is not an essential part of salvation – **1 Peter 3:21** – ***“not of God”***
       4. There is more than one just cause for divorce – **Matthew 19:9** – ***“not of God”***
       5. Man cannot help but sin – **1 John 2:1, 6** – ***“not of God”***
       6. Man cannot change his heart (intellect, will, emotion) – **Ezekiel 18:31** – ***“not of God”***
14. Examine WHO Said It (**4:4-6**)
    1. **NOTE: the next 3 verses contain 3 distinct groups.**
       1. ***“You” (v. 4)*** – John’s readers.
       2. ***“them,” “They” (vv. 4-5)*** – the false teachers, antichrists.
       3. ***“We,” “us” (v. 6)*** – John and the other apostles, those who have borne witness and declared. (**1:1-4**)
    2. **Many times, our awareness of the danger of possible error is heightened because of WHO it is that is speaking.**
       1. This is a godly approach to discernment, and one which God has enjoined upon His people.
       2. **Romans 16:17-18** – they are noted, and pointed out so that others are aware of them and avoid them – not even giving them the time to teach their error.
    3. ***“They”*** – The false teachers, spirits not of God – **(v. 5)**
       1. ***“are of [ek] the world”*** – i.e. from the world, that is their origin, or derivation.
       2. What does it look like to be ***“of the world”?*** – **2:15-17** – they are fulfilling these lusts and are pursuing pride.
          1. **1:6** – walk in darkness.
          2. **2:4** – do not keep His commandments.
          3. **2:11** – hates his brother.
          4. **3:8** – actively sins.
       3. ***“Therefore they speak as of the world”*** – ***“they speak OF [ek] the world”*** – i.e. because they are ***“of the world”*** their teaching is derived from the world is as well, it is worldly.
          1. **The aforementioned passages are expressions of their doctrine – you can continue in sin, neglect God’s commands, hate your brother, and still be in fellowship with God.**
          2. **Matthew 12:33-35** – they are evil, and therefore cannot ***“speak good things”*** (**cf. Matthew 23**)
          3. **2 Peter 2:12-17** – their ungodly behavior (**vv. 12-16**), affects their message, making it void of substance despite its promise (**v. 17**).
          4. **1 Timothy 1:19-20** – rejecting faith and a good conscience leads to shipwrecking the faith (gospel, truth).
    4. ***“We”*** – John and the other apostles, those who have borne witness and declared (**1:1-4**), who have ***“the Spirit of God.”*** – **(v. 6)**
       1. Their work and message is directly linked to the choice of Jesus for them to be His witnesses – **1:3; John 15:26-27** – ***“the Spirit of truth”*** was given them.
       2. **2 Peter 1:20-21** – they are ***“holy men of God,”*** contrary to ***“They [who] are of the world”*** (**cf. John 15:3** – clean because of the word), and are inspired of the Holy Spirit.
          1. **2 Peter 3:2** – on plane with prophets before as mouthpieces of God.
       3. What did you hear from them the beginning? – **2:24; Acts 2:42** – the ***“apostles’ doctrine”***
          1. **4:6** – he who knows God and is of God hears the apostles’ doctrine because it is ***“of God.”***
          2. ***“By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error”*** – **Galatians 1:8-9; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 2 Timothy 1:13**
    5. ***“You”*** – John’s readers – **(v. 4)**
       1. ***“have overcome them”*** – perfect, active – “The overcoming was an event that happened in the past, with present continuing results.” (Reese, 138)
          1. I.e. they had encountered error from the antichrists already and have resisted and overcome.
          2. They continue in this victory, and John further equips them with the confidence and tools to do so.
       2. **HOW HAD THEY OVERCOME – *“You are of God…He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world”***
          1. ***“of [ek] God”*** – origin, ***“born of God” (2:29).***
          2. How do they belong to God? What is the evidence? What does that mean? – **(1:5, 7; 3:7-9)** – separate from darkness, walking in light, separate from sin, practicing righteousness, word (seed) abides in them.
          3. **Result –** When a worldly message from worldly people presents itself **(v. 5),** those who are in fellowship with God, who have an affinity for righteousness, and an aversion to unrighteousness **have sensitivities that are heightened toward ungodliness, and are able to discern and avoid such messages.**
             1. **Hebrews 5:14** – their senses are exercised, and when they hear something that is evil, they are trained to know it is evil.
             2. **1 Thessalonians 5:19-22** – with the word of God from which they are born, they test things, and act accordingly.
       3. **(v. 4)** – **Ephesians 4:11-14** – when we are born of God, and allow Him to shape us inwardly, Christ is formed in us (**cf. Galatians 4:19**), we are not tossed by the errors of man because we can discern the spirits.

**Conclusion**

1. God has sufficiently disclosed His will to us in the revelation of His Son. The Holy Spirit has revealed the full gospel of Christ.
2. Because God’s word is perfect, and the will of Christ has not, and will not change, we can administer certain tests which God Himself has disclosed to us and be confident that we have the truth. This is our duty, and we have been shown where confidence is found.