

The Last Eyewitness, VIII

To Test the Truth (1 John 4:1-6)

November 30, 2003

THIS IS A TEST

Q: Have you heard that Pepsi is coming out with a new “patriotic” can that includes the “Pledge of Allegiance,” but without the two words: Under God. [Shaking fist in air] Pepsi!

Q: Did you see the petition to stop a Hollywood production company from portraying Jesus as a homosexual in a new film about His life? [Shaking fist in air] Hollywood!

Q: Did you hear the incredible news that a company drilling for oil in Siberia picked up on their seismic recorders, the “screams of the damned”? [Shaking fist in air] Siberia!

Now before you boycott Pepsi, sign that petition, or offer your in-laws a free trip to Siberia ... you better listen to what John has to say to us today. As we closed chapter three, the last thing John said was:

And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us. - 1 John 3:24 NIV

Now, as we open chapter four, the first thing he says is:

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. - 1 John 4:1 NIV

John wants us to be confident but not gullible. So he gives us a three-fold approach to those who claim to speak truth.

1. We must not believe every spirit.

Q: What types of spirits is John talking about here?

Maybe we should be on guard when a demonic apparition manifests itself with instructions - like: Bill Gates will give you money if you forward this email! John is talking about the spirit behind the person speaking or teaching. John commended the Ephesians’ healthy suspicion:

You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles ... - Revelation 2:2 NLT

Q: Do you ever get urban legends forwarded to your email?

- Each of the rumors I’ve shared is not true.

Including that missing day in the OT that NASA recently verified with a new computer system that uses the trajectories of stars to count back in time ... NOT true.

And listen: Madalyn Murray O'Hare is not petitioning the FCC to deny rights to religious broadcasters. For one, that violates the 1st Amendment to the U.S. constitution. And two, she's dead! So it's just not possible ... unless they've recording her through that hole in Siberia!

- We need some healthy suspicion or we'll be misled.

2. We must test the spirits.

We must examine, analyze, and evaluate the things we hear, in order to make sure they're biblically sound and accurate.

Now the Bereans [**buh-REE-uhns**] were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. – Acts 17:11 NIV

Paul wrote two-thirds of the NT, and yet the Bereans are commended for questioning him.

- We can only test the spirits by testing the person.

If someone gets perturbed or overly defensive when you question them – if they regard scrutiny as mutiny – big red flag! We have a spiritual obligation to test their claims.

3. We must distinguish if they're from God.

We must have intention behind the inspection; an aim to our examination. We must pursue truth and error with purpose.

But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good ... - 1 Thessalonians 5:21 NAS

If I'm cynical or skeptical due to relentless doubt, distrust, or disbelief, I'm as misguided as the one who questions nothing. Skepticism is only healthy if it helps us verify truth.

LITTLE ANTICHRISTS

Now John returns to the subject of the antichrist. Not the big antichrist to come – but the little antichrists that are here.

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, 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. – 1 John 4:2-3 NIV

Q: Remember John's previous teaching on the antichrist spirit?

Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist ... - 1 John 2:22 NIV

John now builds on that statement to cover both heresies:

- The Ebeonites taught that Jesus was only a man – not God.
- The Docetists taught that Jesus was only God – not a man.

It's extremely important to acknowledge the fullness of Christ.

- If He wasn't a man, he couldn't have died for our sins.
- And if He wasn't God, He could not have defeated death.

JESUS' COUSIN

John may have an incredibly unique position of authority on the subject of Jesus' humanity.

- We're going to do some detective work here.

In his gospel, Mark identifies (by name) three significant women who tended to Jesus' crucified body (Mark 16:1). He also distinguishes these ladies from the crowd at the cross:

Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, **[JOH-seez]** and Salome. **[suh-LOH-mih]** – Mark 15:40 NIV

1. Mary Magdalene is the woman who had seven demons that Jesus cast out. (Mark 16:9)

James and Joses are listed as Jesus' brothers. (Mat 13:55; Mark 6:3)

2. Mary, mother of James & Joses was Jesus' mother.
3. Salome is a bit of a mystery at this point.

However, Matthew draws attention to three women at the cross:

Among them were Mary Magdalene, **[that matches up]** Mary the mother of James and Joses, **[that matches up]** and the mother of Zebedee's sons. – Matthew 27:56 NIV

Ten times (in the NT) John is referred to as the "son of Zebedee". If these are the same women ...

2. Salome (Zebedee's wife) was John's mother.

If John's and Jesus' moms were this close, it explains why John was chosen to care for Jesus' mother as his own. (Jn 19:25) But there might be a reason their mothers were so close ... John describes the scene differently:

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, **[KLOH-puhs]** and Mary Magdalene. – John 19:25 NIV

Again, Mary Magdalene matches up, as does Jesus' mother.

4. Mary, the wife of Clopas is someone new. But I doubt she's also Zebedee's wife.

That just leaves the woman John refers to as Jesus' aunt.

If the mother of the sons of Zebedee (Salome) is the sister of Jesus' mother (Mary) then John and Jesus are first cousins. This could explain the nerve of John's mother toward Jesus:

Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. ... "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom." - Matthew 20:20-21 NIV

"Come on, they're your cousins! You've been together since you were boys. Do this little thing for Auntie Salome!" As His cousin, John would certainly have the most unique position of authority on the subject of Jesus' humanity!

Q: Do you minimize the humanity of Christ by thinking of Him as a "Heavenly observer" or do you maximize His humanity by relating to the Lord as One who completely understands your temptations and appreciates your pain and suffering?

- Isn't it interesting that Jesus' favorite title for Himself was, "Son of Man".

We have an advocate in Christ who fully empathizes and identifies with us.

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. They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. - 1 John 4:4-6a NIV

It's okay to feel unqualified to analyze deception, and overwhelmed with the task of discerning truth from error. John reminds us that the Lord is the one responsible for leading us and guiding us into all truth through His Spirit. It's not us against the world ...

- It's the one in us against the one in them.

Our job is simply to keep from grieving or quenching His Spirit.

- We grieve Him by rejecting His ways (Ephesians 4:30)
- We quench Him by neglecting His Word (1 Thessalonians 5:19)

MASTER COUNTERFEITER

This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood. - 1 John 4:6b NIV

Q: Do you know how bank tellers learn to recognize counterfeits?

A: By getting so familiar with the genuine article that the phonies just become obvious.

- The devil is the master counterfeiter of the ages.
- God's Word is the genuine currency of the Kingdom.

Our task is to get so familiar with it, that Satan's forgeries - however sophisticated - become unmistakable. We won't be held responsible for knowing all truth ... just for examining the things that we choose to put into our hearts.