
The Epistles of John

“Let It All Hang Out”

1 John 4:1-6

When couples first come to me for counseling, they frequently fall into the trap of thinking that at the conclusion to the process all their problems will be solved. Unfortunately, or fortunately depending on your perspective, this isn't the case.

The counseling process is one in which we identify major issues that affect the relationship between husband and wife. We look at family dynamics that are interfering with family harmony. Past issues of abuse may also be factors that affect current struggles. And aside from medical factors, the core of most of these struggles is spiritual and an inaccurate way of looking at life.

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:2).

On the other hand, often the world's systems, while identifying the sources of struggles, teach clients they are victims and consequently they have no responsibility for their struggles. Even worse, what is clearly sin is excused and the client is encouraged to adjust and accept sin as acceptable. And for those who don't want to see things from God's point of view, this is great. This means it's okay to “Let it all hang out.”

The false prophets were also offering a very appealing system to the believers of John's day. They taught that it didn't matter how one lived once you were saved. This meant it was okay to “Let it all hang out.”

I Introduction

II Testing the Spirits

Verses 1-3

III Who's Doing the Talking?

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I Introduction: In this first epistle of John, he has presented the truths of the Old Covenant, Christ and the Apostles as the basis for the Christian life. He made it clear that it was important how we live as believers. In fact, the absence of a commitment to truth and living out that truth is symptomatic of the spirit of anti-christ.

He has shown that the life of the believer is typified by love of God and others. And, while the believer will still sin, he no longer either perfects his sin, or finds comfort in it. In contrast the unbeliever's life is typified by hatred of God, His righteousness and that righteousness lived out in the believer. The unbeliever may not sin, but his life is identified with and he is comfortable in his sins.

But, it isn't enough to simply tell John's readers what's wrong with specific teachings of false teachers. He is concerned with believers knowing how to evaluate teachings of others on their own. This section gives the specific approach. And for us this same method should be used to test the words of contemporary theologians, whether the words are verbal or written. The method can be used to validate systems of church growth, counseling, self-help systems and the plethora of material dropped into the Christian community on an almost daily basis. It can and should be used to test the words of those exercising the Gift of prophecy.

II Testing the Spirits: Reality is, feelings are subjective. Many false teachers appeal to feelings as a way to validate their teachings. This is foundational to Mormonism as an example. This is why we can't trust our own emotions. Just because we aren't "feeling" saved on any given day has nothing to do with truth.

This is why John calls us to "test the spirits." Paul gives essentially the same message.

"Test everything. Hold on to the good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Within the fall came damage to our emotions and to our cognitive abilities. This is why, while our emotions are important, we can't trust them for truth. But John is saying even more. Consider again the case of Mormonism. It may well be Joseph Smith encountered a being who give him information. The problem was, clearly this being didn't come from God so therefore it could only have been demonic.

*"Judaism especially associated the Spirit of God with prophecy but acknowledged the existence of false prophets, who John says are moved by other spirits. His readers would understand his point; Jewish people were familiar with the idea of other spirits besides the Spirit of God. There were many pagan ecstasies in Asia Minor, as well as Jewish mystics claiming special revelations; the need for discernment would be acute."*¹

Expanding on this concept, there is another kind of spirit. Keep in mind all of these teachings were in direct contradiction of the teachings of scripture, of the apostles, and of Christ. This means the teachings were in the spirit of anti-christ

"I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also" (1 John 2:21-23).

Here is the truth, the truth of who Christ is, is not one of the negotiable truths. It is not a secondary truth. This is why groups who call themselves Christian are actually in the spirit of anti-christ. Mormonism, Jehovah Witnesses, Christian Science and even those who appear orthodox, but deny the truth of the Tri-unity of God, the divinity of Christ, the Virgin Birth, etc. are false. This is why world religions, Islam, Buddhism, etc. are empty of God's Truth, because they deny the reality of who Christ is. And John tells us that we can discern that which is false from that which is true by simply asking, as Jesus asked ...

¹ Keener, Craig S., "IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament," InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL 1993.

“Who do people say I am?” (Mark 8:27).

Baker states:

“The test itself appears to hinge on the words “that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.” The false prophets may well have believed that Christ was the Savior of the world, but they probably denied the connection between the divine Christ with Jesus of Nazareth. At least they clearly denied that “the Christ” ever had come “in the flesh.” This denial makes them not only precursors of Gnosticism but also of Docetism. The confession John urges speaks not only against those heresies but against any form of adoptionism as well. The clause “that Jesus Christ has come” reflects the author’s clear view of the preexistence of the Son, who came from the Father and from the moment of his historical birth was Jesus Christ in the flesh.

How does this confession give evidence of the Spirit? For John, as for Paul, the truth of the Christian gospel is hid from the world (cf. 1Cor 2:7-16).”²

“No, we speak of God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written:

***“No eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no mind has conceived
what God has prepared for those who love him”—***

but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man’s judgment:

***“For who has known the mind of the Lord
that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ” (1
Corinthians 2:7-16).***

III Who’s Doing the Talking?: Apparently Joseph Smith didn’t know who he was listening to. If he really was interested in what God had to say he never could have been sucked into listening to Satan’s lies. This is John’s point. As God’s children we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and therefore do not have to fall for the lies of the enemy.

“For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible” (Matthew 24:24).

John starts again with the communal statement, “dear children.” Remember in dependency in the context of a believing community, we can stand against the whiles of the devil. We are significantly at risk when we are living the isolated life. The more isolated we are the more

² Barker, Glenn W., The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, “1 John,” Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1990

likely we are to fall into shaky thinking. The shakier our thinking, the easier it is to take the position “I’m the only one who can say how I should live. If I want to, I should be able to ‘let it all hang out.’”

John wants to reassure us by reminding us, no matter how life looks we are cared for by God and so no one or no thing has power over us unless He allows it, or we don’t depend on Him.

*“Reliance on God is the secret of all victory whether over heresy or any other snare. The indwelling One—the Holy Spirit who indwells every believer (3:24; 4:13; Rom. 8:9) and is thus ‘the One who is in you’—and is mightier than the one who is in the word, namely Satan (1 John 5:19). He is called ...”*³

“You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ” (Romans 8:9).

“We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one” (1 John 5:19).

“... the prince of this world” ... “The god of this age” ... and ... “the ruler of the kingdom of the air” (John 12:31; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2).

The distinction between God’s children and the world’s is really very clear. The dividing line is unassailable. The difference between Heaven and Hell is what one chooses to do with Christ. It’s simple. If you accept Christ on His terms you are saved. If you reject Him, you will remain in your condemnation.

And as for the lost, the ant-christs, those who reject Him, speak from a worldly point of view. Which shouldn’t come as a surprise. And equally non-surprising the world listens to these people, the false teachers, the Oprahs and Dr. Phils. Why wouldn’t they.

“For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths...” (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

... that people are basically good, the wise aliens are out there, you can make anything out of yourself you want, humanity evolved from lower forms of life and will continue to evolve, science and medicine will solve all our problems, etc.

Keeping all this in mind, is it any surprise that since we have listened to God, the world isn’t willing to listen to us. *How have you experienced this truth?* Nor should we expect the world to listen, except in the situation where their hearts are softened by the Holy Spirit and they choose to listen to Him.

The question that will have to be answered by every man and woman is delineated in Mark when Christ speaks.

³ Hodges, Zane C., The Bible Knowledge Commentary. “1 John,” Victor Books, USA, 1987, p. 898.

“ Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, “Who do people say I am?”

They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.”

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Peter answered, “You are the Christ.” (Mark 8:27-29).

So not only does truth, or the absence thereof, define whether a person is listening to the Holy Spirit’s or spirits it also identifies where they will spend eternity. Oh yes, everyone will acknowledge who Christ is one day, but for much of humanity it will be too late.

*“ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-11).*

Conclusion: Lesson number 1 — John was warning believers against the dangers of being caught up by false teachers, and Christians are just as venerable today. They get taken in by in the Campings, Coplands, Hines, etc. But they don’t need to do so. If we remember the call to test the spirits, the teachings of men against God’s word, His truths, His Spirit will always give us discernment. But we need to be more concerned for truth than for our own opinions or what makes us comfortable.

Lesson number 2 — There really is no way into the presence of God, other than for judgment, without coming to Christ and accepting His offer of salvation. It doesn’t matter how arrogant this may be perceived by the lost, it is still the only Truth that matters. So let us be willing to **lovingly** present it to the lost who God places in our path.

So Truth serves two aspects. The first is the way to salvation.

“ Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

The second is a basis for the believer to have discernment in distinguishing those who are speaking for God and those who are speaking for themselves.

“ Dear friends, don’t trust every spirit. On the contrary, test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. Here is how you recognize the Spirit of God: every spirit which acknowledges that Yeshua the Messiah came as a human being is from God, and every spirit which does not acknowledge Yeshua is not from God” (1 John 4:1-3 CJB)

Harry Ironside closes this section by stating:

“ He that knoweth God, heareth us; he that is not of God, heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.” Any man who knows God will hear the Word of God. We can test ourselves

*by that. Do you accept the testimony given in this blessed Word, the testimony of our Lord Himself? He that is of God hears this testimony, and he that is not of God rejects it, and John says, "Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error." What a blessed thing it is to know God as revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ. What a wonderful thing it is to realize that He has come so close to us. He, the infinite holy One whom these poor finite minds of ours could not comprehend, has become Man, that we might see in Him God fully revealed. Shall we not praise Him and adore Him?"*⁴

*Praise God, from whom all blessing flow;
Praise him all creatures here below;
Praise him above, ye heav'nly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
Amen.*⁵

⁴ Ironside, H. A., Addresses on the Epistles of John, Loizeaus Brothers, Inc., Neptune, NJ, 1966, p. 133-134.

⁵ Ken, Thomas, "Praise God, From Whom All Blessings Flow," Public Domain.

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I Introduction:

II Testing the Spirits:

(1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 John 2:21-23; Mark 8:27; 1 Corinthians 2:7-16)

III Who's Doing the Talking?:

(Matthew 24:24; Romans 8:9; 1 John 5:19; John 12:31; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2; 2 Timothy 4:3-4; Mark 8:27-29; Philippians 2:9-11)

Conclusion:

(John 14:6; 1 John 4:1-3 CJB)

Personal Application: This week let us ask God to help us see any area where our understanding of truth is less from God than from our own interpretations.

Prayer for the Week: Lord, guide me in the paths of Your Truth and help me to avoid the side roads thrown in my way by the enemy. Amen.