

Testing the Spirits

The New Testament mentions false apostles with false gospels (2 Cor 11:1-15), false prophets (Matthew 7:15), false teachers (2 Peter 2:1), false brethren (2 Corinthians 11:26) and even false spirits performing false miracles (Matthew 7:21-23, 24:24, Mark 13:22, 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12, Revelation 13:13,14, 16:14,19:20) in the End Times to the point where they attempt to “deceive the elect” (Matthew 24:24). There are even false christs (Matthew 24:24) and a false holy spirit (2 Corinthians 11:4). This was such a great problem that all the books in the New Testament, except Philemon, warn against false teaching.

We see magicians such as Simon Magus performing great signs and wonders (Acts 8:9-25) and the false miracles workers of Matthew 7:21-23 are engaged in prophesying, exorcisms and might works; yet God does not know them and rebukes them as “workers of iniquity”!

The apostle John exhorts us to “test the spirits”, which, in this context means testing both spirits and people claiming to be spiritual or claiming to have spiritual authority:

1 John 4:1-6 *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. (2) By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, (3) and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. (4) Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. (5) They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. (6) We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.*

These are the twelve tests that John recommends in his three epistles:

1. A false spirit will not confess that Christ has come in the flesh (1 John 4:3, 2 John 1:7)
2. They deny Christ (1 John 2:22,23) especially that He is the Son of God (1 John 5:10-12)
3. A false spirit will speak from the world and love the world (1 John 2:15, 4:5)
4. A false spirit will not listen to sound Christian doctrine (1 John 4:6)
5. They invent new teaching and do not abide in the teaching of Christ (2 John 1:9-11)
6. A false spirit will separate itself from the body of Christ. (1 John 2:19)
7. They put themselves first and reject authority (3 John 1:9-10)
8. They refuse to welcome others into the fellowship and in fact exclude them (3 John 1:10)
9. They are full of hatred and do not abide in love (1 John 2:9-11, 3:10,14,15, 4:8,20,21)
10. They walk in darkness and claim that they have not sinned (1 John 1:5-11)
11. They refuse to obey the commandments of Jesus (1 John 2:3-6)
12. They are lawless and continually practice sinning (1 John 3:4-10)

If a person claiming spiritual authority does even ONE of these things (especially denying Christ in some way) it is a serious cause for concern!

Paul give us some tests for ecstatic experiences in 1 Corinthians 12:

1 Corinthians 12:1-3 *Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. (2) You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. (3) Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.*

This test is only for ecstatic experiences such as tongues or prophecy, as obviously any heretic can manage to say “Jesus is Lord” in everyday speech.

Therefore, we see that people claiming the anointing must confess Jesus as Lord, Son of God and as having come in the flesh. They must work righteousness and truth and live in love. They must not love the world or the things of the world or speak as from the world for the approval of the world. True Christians remain as part of the body of Christ, abide in love, and walk in the commandments of Jesus Christ.

Deceptive Appearances

Matthew 7:15-20 *"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. (16) You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? (17) So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. (18) A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. (19) Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (20) Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.*

Acts 20:29-30 HCSB *I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. (30) And men from among yourselves will rise up with deviant doctrines to lure the disciples into following them.*

The false prophets are like a wolf in sheep's clothing and their real intent is to devour the flock. They have the appearance of sanctity but are inwardly greedy, manipulative and exploitative. They are hard to recognize and have charming personalities so we must look at the fruits of their character, their works and their lifestyle.

Paul lists some of the "bad fruit" that is put on display by these false teachers:

2 Timothy 3:1-7 MKJV *Know this also, that in the last days grievous times will be at hand. (2) For men will be self-lovers, money-lovers, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, (3) without natural affection, unyielding, false accusers, without self-control, savage, despisers of good, (4) traitors, reckless, puffed up, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, (5) having a form of godliness, but denying the power of it; even turn away from these. (6) For of these are those who creep into houses and lead captive silly women loaded with sins, led away with different kinds of lusts, (7) ever learning and never able to come to the full knowledge of the truth.*

Paul says also that they wear a disguise, and will appear to be "ministers of righteousness" while in fact being servants of Satan.

2 Corinthians 11:13-15 HCSB *(13) For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. (14) And no wonder! For Satan himself is disguised as an angel of light. (15) So it is no great thing if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their destiny will be according to their works.*

False teachers would not get too many followers if they told the truth such as: "I am just after your money" or "I am really just a fake who wants his ego boosted". They have to tell lies and make false representations and some of them are very good at it.

Generally speaking if someone is "too good to be true" or "too smooth" or "too perfect" then they are hiding something. Real people have visible faults and imperfections. People like the apostle Peter or Thomas are real people with real humanity. Fake humanity is the sign of an actor or a hypocrite.

Christians have to learn the difference between character and personality. Personality is the exterior mask that people wear. It is how they project themselves to others and is not their true self. Character is the deeper self. Some people with boring personalities can have great character and some people with wonderful personalities can be charlatans and rogues. Here in California the cult of personality is strong and religious fakes abound. We have to be a lot more careful about who we choose to follow.

The Characteristic Behaviors of Cults

Cults are remarkably alike in that they exhibit certain "odd" behaviors in order to appear more spiritual than the truth and freedom that is in Jesus Christ. In the end though these "super-spiritual behaviors" are profitless and often make a person eccentric, bizarre and spiritually proud.

(1 Timothy 4:1-7 NASB) *But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, {2} by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, {3} men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. {4} For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude; {5} for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer. {6} In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ*

Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following. {7} But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness....

Our first four behaviors from the above passage are:

1. Involvement with spirits - which deceive them.
2. Forbidding marriage
3. Dietary restrictions on normal foods
4. Ungodly Superstition

We see cults forbidding marriage, or arranging marriages or in the case of David Koresh claiming all women belonged to him. Most cults have some dietary restrictions and forbid certain kinds of foods, not out of common sense or health reasons but out of the desire to "be spiritual" or attain "energy" or to seem pure and exalted above the common lot of mankind. Thus, people substitute food for character and handling for holiness. They think "I am good person because I do not eat pork" rather than "I am a good person because I love God and my neighbor." This leads to a false sense of spirituality that is so common in cults.

In his letter to the Colossian church Paul writes:

(Colossians 2:16-23 NASB) *Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day-- {17} things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. {18} Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, {19} and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God. {20} If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, {21} "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" {22} (which all refer to things destined to perish with the using)-- in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? {23} These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.*

Here Paul lists a few more behaviors associated with the false spirituality of cults:

5. Legalism - do not handle, do not taste, do not touch.
6. False humility
7. Harsh treatment of the body -especially for so called "purification"
8. Worship of angels (and other such beings)
9. People going into great detail about what they have seen in the spiritual realm.
10. Enormous spiritual pride
11. Experience takes over, Christ is no longer central and no longer a source of life.
12. Emphasis on religious festivals, new moons and Sabbath days.
13. Their regulations appear to be wise but are in fact ineffective for restraining fleshly indulgence.
14. Self-made religion - worship made up by man rather than truly revealed from God and inspired by God

The apostle Peter also had a few words to say about this self-deluded form of worship:

(2 Peter 2:18-19 NASB) *For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, {19} promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.*

Thus, we see that cults are frequently:

15. Boastful
16. Promise false "freedom" - many cults do this.
17. Appeal to the lusts of the flesh - a wise sales tactic
18. Slaves to sin and corruption

The final words must be with Jude the brother of Jesus who writes:

(Jude 1:8-16 NASB) *Yet in the same manner these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties. {9} But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you." {10} But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed. {11} Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.{16} These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage.*

19. Boastful to the point of rejecting all authority, even that of angels.
20. Pollute their own bodies
21. Without shame
22. React abusively against whatever they do not understand.
23. Live by instinct and run headfirst into evil.

Some cults involve the promotion of the grossest immorality under the banner of "love-ins" and David Koresh's gross immorality was so he could "experience the depths of sin" for the world. These 23 points cover most of the behaviors commonly associated with cults in Scripture. Any one of them should be a "red flag" to a Christian. When three or more of them are present, the group is almost certainly wandering away from the will of God.

How to Apply These Tests

Jesus and the apostles have given us many tests to help us remain in the truth. First of all, we must read the Scriptures above and start to memorize the main tests which have been handed down to us. We then need to ask the Lord for the gift of the discerning of spirits (1 Corinthians 12:10). This spiritual gift will help us to understand what is going on. Thirdly, we need to be cautious about falling for appearances and powerful personalities and instead look for spiritual fruit, godly character, wisdom and obedience to Christ's commandments. The more we know the Truth, the easier it will be to spot the fake. Fifthly we need to be aware of spiritual deception and false miracles in the End Times, I have written an entire article on that at: <https://www.globalchristians.org/articles/falsemir.htm>



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