

Recognizing God's Spirit (1 John)

By David Feddes

How do we recognize God's Spirit? That's a really, really important question, and it's one of the main questions that the book of 1 John deals with. John wants to help us recognize God's Spirit and also to recognize spirits that are not from God.

John wrote with some very important purposes in mind. One purpose of the letter was to debunk deceivers, to show who the liars were. John said, "I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray" (1 John 2:26). John wanted to help them recognize the spirit of deception.

But another very important reason and a wonderful reason for writing was to confirm their confidence: "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). Those are two major purposes of 1 John: to help protect us from lying spirits and also to confirm our confidence that we belong to God, that we have eternal life, that the Spirit of God lives in us. And that means that we need to be able to recognize God's Spirit.

In 1 John, there are a variety of ways of describing a real Christian. Quite a few times it speaks of being "born of God." It also speaks of someone who "knows God" and of God living in us and we living in him, or his Spirit living in us. All of these terms are referring to a genuine Christian who's been born again by the Spirit of God, who has a living relationship with God and knows God, and where his life is in God and God's life is in him.

Now, how do we recognize God's Spirit? You might say, "Well, that's simple enough. Let's go back to the day when God's Spirit came on the church, the day of Pentecost. There was a sound like a mighty rushing wind. Flames of fire came to rest on the heads of Jesus' followers, and they began to speak in other languages, other tongues, and those who heard them were able to understand what they were saying" (Acts 2:1-12). So you might say, "It's simple. You know you've received the Spirit of God when something amazing and extraordinary happens."

Well, those were wonderful things that really did happen when the Spirit was first outpoured. But we do not recognize the Spirit of God nowadays by waiting for a flame to come down and rest right above someone else's head, or to hear a really loud noise of a blowing wind, or even to receive a gift of speaking in other languages.

Some have said, "In order to really know you've received the Spirit, you need to be able to speak in tongues." Nowhere does the Bible say that. Nowhere does the Bible say that speaking in tongues is the sign always of having received the Holy Spirit. These things happened in the book of Acts, but that does not mean they always continue to happen.

And the book of 1 John, which speaks of knowing how to recognize the Spirit of God, says absolutely nothing about flames of fire, or about tongues, or about other supernatural phenomena for that matter. The Spirit can grant such things if and when he so chooses, but that's not the way you recognize whether or not you've received the Spirit of God. In fact, I've known missionaries

who told me that the non-Christians, the unbelievers with their own religions, were able to speak in tongues more than the Christians did in those particular settings. So let's not be mistaken about supernatural phenomena being the way to recognize the Spirit.

Another way that we might think of recognizing God's Spirit is by results, by lots and lots of people flocking to know God. And on the day of Pentecost that certainly happened. Peter preached a message calling people to repent and to trust in Jesus, and 3,000 people were added to the church that day (Acts 2:41). It was the work of the Holy Spirit, no doubt about it. But you will not always recognize the Holy Spirit by the thousands of people who are drawn in all at the same time. The fact is that phony religion often attracts more people than real faith in Jesus Christ. And so you can't recognize the Spirit of God simply by how many people talk a certain way or how many people flock to a particular cause.

Nowadays, spirituality is very popular with many, many people, but it's often not a spirituality that comes from God's Spirit. There are some very large religions in the world with millions and millions of followers, but they are religions that do not come from the Spirit of God. Sometimes there are mass conversions that come from the Holy Spirit, but looking at numbers is not the way to recognize the Spirit. Sometimes Christians are a very small and despised group, but you can still recognize the Spirit of God in them.

How do we do that? If it's not the ability to speak in tongues, if it's not the sheer numerical results of large groups of people following a particular perspective, how do we recognize the Spirit of God? That's where 1 John can really help us. When we want to recognize God's Spirit, there are three main things.

Recognizing God's Spirit

1. **Belief in Jesus:** God's Spirit reveals Jesus as Son of God and Messiah who became human to be our sacrifice and Savior.
2. **Apostolic fellowship:** God's Spirit connects people to the Book He inspired (Scripture) and the Body he indwells (church).
3. **Godly life:** God's Spirit empowers active love and obedient living.

The first thing is belief in Jesus. 1 John shows us that God's Spirit reveals Jesus as the Son of God, as the Messiah who became human to be our sacrifice and Savior. That's a loaded statement, and we'll explore it a little further, but that's the basic belief in Jesus that comes to someone who has the Spirit of God.

A second aspect of recognizing God's Spirit is fellowship with the apostles. This apostolic fellowship is where God's Spirit connects people to the book that the Holy Spirit inspired (Scripture) and to the body that the Holy Spirit indwells (the church).

Thirdly, God's Spirit is recognized by the fruit, by what happens in a person's life. God's Spirit empowers active love for God and for other people and obedient living, where we live holy lives, becoming like the God who lives in us, like the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us.

Before we look at each of these in more detail, let's first read part of 1 John 4, in which we see these three emphases very strongly:

^{4:1} 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.

⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

¹³ We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. ¹⁶ And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

In this passage, we see those three things: belief in Jesus, apostolic fellowship, and godly life. And we see those things throughout the whole letter of 1 John. So let's take a closer look.

Belief in Jesus

God's Spirit reveals Jesus as Son of God and Messiah who became human to be our sacrifice and Savior.

"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:9-10). In that statement you see two main things. God sent his one and only Son. That's who Jesus is, God's one and only Son, the one who is himself God the Son. You need to know that about Jesus, who he is. And you also need to know why he came: he came as a human as the supreme expression of God's love to pay the penalty for our sins, to be the propitiation, the atoning sacrifice, the one who suffers in our place and takes the punishment our sins deserve so that we can be forever right with God.

You need to know those two main things about Jesus: who he is and the meaning of his death. There's more to know about Jesus than that, of course—his teaching, his life, all that he's come to do—but who he is and why he died, those are of supreme importance.

Throughout 1 John, key things are said about Jesus. Jesus is "the Christ" (5:1), which means he's the promised Messiah of the Jews, sent by God to fulfill his promises. He's "the Son of God" (4:15; 5:5). "He is the true God and eternal life" (5:20). That's Jesus in a nutshell. If you just have to know one sentence: he is the true God, he is eternal life, and to have him is to have eternal life. As John says, "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (5:12).

Jesus is the Son of God, and he "has come in the flesh" (4:2). That's a key thing. "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" (1 John 4:2-3). There were false teachers at the time of John, sometimes called Gnostics, who claimed that Jesus did not come in the flesh, that the Son of God did not come as a human being. It's very important to know that Jesus is not only God, but that he's also completely human: God came to live among us, the Word became flesh. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). A mark of the Holy Spirit is belief in Jesus as the Son of God come in human flesh.

He did this to die as "the atoning sacrifice for our sins" (2:2; 4:10). And he came to deal with Satan, "to destroy the devil's work" (3:8).

The teaching of 1 John about Jesus is very brief but very rich, and the basics are there: the conqueror of Satan, the sacrifice for sin, the Son of God come in human flesh, the Christ, the promised Messiah of the Jews. What tremendous teaching.

We recognize the Spirit of God by whether someone holds these beliefs. Any spirit that denies these things, any spirit that does not display and teach these things about Jesus, is not from God, no matter what might seem attractive about that particular teaching or spirit. "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 antichrist" (4:2-3). "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" (1 John 2:22).

There was teaching at that time that John was opposing, teaching that there was a Christ spirit who came on Jesus the man at his baptism and then left Jesus again before his crucifixion. So Christ and Jesus were divided. They were united only between Jesus' baptism and his crucifixion. But before that, Jesus was not the Christ, and after that period, Jesus was not the Christ. There was this separation of the Christ spirit from Jesus in the flesh.

But the Spirit of God acknowledges that Jesus has come in the flesh. The Son of God has been flesh from the moment of his incarnation in Mary's womb and remains flesh still today. That is what the Spirit of God teaches. It's the spirit of antichrist to deny either that Jesus is God or to deny that Jesus has come in human flesh.

John points out that we don't need to wait around for one big huge meanie at the end of the world to be the antichrist. He says, "You have heard that the antichrist is coming; even now many antichrists have come" (1 John 2:18). I've mentioned already the Docetists or Gnostics who were teaching at the time of John and afterward. They were denying that Jesus was God or that Jesus was the Christ come in the flesh.

A couple of centuries later, a bishop named Arius began to teach that Jesus was the first creature, that before he was the man Jesus, he was a spirit creature. But he was not God the Creator. He was not truly the eternal Son of God equal to the Father. He had a beginning and was not eternal. This was a terribly powerful heresy that nearly took over the Christian church, and only by God's Spirit was it stopped.

More recently, we've had variations on this denial of Jesus being fully God and fully man. Muslims, 600 years after Jesus, began to teach that Jesus is not God appearing among us but just a prominent prophet. And the Muslims also deny that Jesus came as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. They say Jesus did not die at all but that, as a prophet, he was taken directly to heaven. Muslims directly deny the two main hallmarks: who Jesus is and why he came. Muslims deny that Jesus is God, and they deny that he's an atoning sacrifice, the very two things that 1 John emphasizes the most.

Unitarians and theological liberals teach that Jesus is not God but just a great teacher who had a strong sense of God within him.

Mormons, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, teach that Jesus came from Mary's union with the visible body of Elohim the Father. Jesus had a beginning and is not fully equal to God the Father. Mormons also emphasize salvation more by works than by the atoning work, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Jehovah's Witnesses deny that Jesus is fully God. They teach that the Archangel Michael gave up his angel nature to become Jesus the man, and Jesus was never God.

Now I want you to notice: these are not just nice little varieties in religious opinion. According to 1 John, these are teachings of antichrist. These are antichrists who have come into the world ahead of the final antichrist, and they deny who the Christ really is. They deny the saving work, the atoning death of Jesus Christ for our salvation. "Even now many antichrists have come" (1 John 2:18). You need to be able to recognize the spirit of antichrist and how this spirit and its teaching differ from the teaching of the Spirit of God.

So that's the first thing in recognizing God's Spirit: belief in Jesus. God's Spirit reveals Jesus as the Son of God and Messiah, who became fully human to be our sacrifice and Savior.

Apostolic fellowship

A second mark of God's Spirit is apostolic fellowship. God's Spirit connects people to the Book He inspired (Scripture) and the Body he indwells (church). 1 John begins with these words:

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:1-3).

Who is "we" or "us" in this passage? It's John and his fellow apostles who knew Jesus, who lived with Jesus, who heard the voice of Jesus here on earth, who looked at Jesus with their own eyes, who touched Jesus, who ate with Jesus. These appointed apostles, these eyewitnesses, were telling what they had seen and heard and handled concerning the Word of life, Christ who had lived among them.

John says, "I'm writing these things so that you'll have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). If you're not in fellowship with the apostles, you are not in fellowship with Jesus Christ.

Notice again what he's saying. This is opposed to the ideas of the Gnostics, that the Spirit only seemed to be human in Christ and only appeared to have flesh. The Gnostics were anti-body. They didn't like the body. But John emphasizes, "We saw his body. We heard his voice. We touched his body. We know that he had a real body. And now we're proclaiming to you that real body of God made flesh, and we're doing it in human words." The Gnostics wanted something that was not human flesh and wanted something that was not communicable in human words, that could not be spoken in human words. They wanted mysteries. They didn't want something that could be plainly spoken.

But God has given us his Son in a body, and God has given us his gospel in human words. Human body and human words--those who deny the human body of Jesus or the human words of Scripture as the revelation of God are not in fellowship with the apostles. You've got to be in fellowship with the teaching of the apostles, the Bible, and with the body of the apostles, the church, in order to be in fellowship with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

Nowadays it's popular to say, "I can be a Christian without the church." But the church is the body of Christ, and you can't be in fellowship with Christ without being in fellowship with his body. Notice what John says: "Even now many antichrists have come. They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us" (1 John 2:18-19). Remember, "us" is the apostles or the apostolic church, the body built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20). Leaving a church that is in union with the apostles is a very, very serious matter.

Now in some churches, there's been an emphasis on what's called apostolic succession. They say that the true church is marked by bishops who originally had hands laid on them by the apostles, and then those bishops laid their hands on more bishops, who laid their hands on more, down to our generation. That, they say, is apostolic succession.

But apostolic succession is not just the succession of who managed to get whose hands laid on them. It is the succession of the spirit and of the teaching of the apostles. Notice what John says: it's not just the apostolic body but also the apostolic truth, the book. "We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us" (1 John 4:6). That's apostolic succession: the people who listen to the Bible, to the testimony of the apostles in the New Testament, and of course all of the Old Testament Scripture that the apostles were echoing and building upon.

"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 4:6). You know that you are a true Christian and a true church of Jesus Christ if you're listening to the Bible. If you're adding all sorts of sources of information besides the Bible or denying the Bible, then you are not truly from God. Whoever is not from God does not listen to the apostles.

So do not abandon the body of Christ: the apostolic church. Do not abandon the truth or the gospel of Christ: the book, the Bible, the apostolic truth. That's how you recognize the Spirit of God: is it in line with the body and with the book?

Godly life

Along with belief in Jesus and apostolic fellowship, 1 John highlights a third test for recognizing God's Spirit: what is your life like? God's Spirit empowers active love and obedient living.

Active love

"We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death... If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth" (1 John 3:14, 17-18).

Over and over in 1 John we're told that someone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness (1 John 2:9). Anyone who claims to love God but doesn't love his brother can't be a child of God. It's impossible—if you don't love your brother whom you've seen, you can't love God whom you haven't seen (1 John 4:20). And so love is a hallmark of really having the Spirit of love in you.

You'll remember the apostle Paul said in Galatians 5, "The fruit of the Spirit is love..." (Galatians 5:22). Without love, there is no Holy Spirit.

Obedient living

Along with love—and just in case we think that love is just a feeling and it doesn't matter what we do, that we can live however we want—there's also obedience to God's commands. "We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him... Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us" (1 John 2:3-4; 3:24).

You see the connection between recognizing the Spirit and obeying God's commands. When you have the Spirit, you love and you listen carefully to God. You study his Word, especially the words of Jesus but also the rest of the Scriptures, and you obey his commands. That's how you know that you live in him and that he lives in you.

There are many ways proposed for recognizing the Spirit of God. But the Scriptures inform us that if you believe the truth about Jesus, if you're connected and in fellowship with the apostles—through the apostolic book and the apostolic body, the church—and if you're living a life of love and of obedience, then you can recognize that you have the Spirit of God and that he's working in you. Where those things are lacking, the Spirit of God is missing.

"Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love... No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit... Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:7-9, 12-13, 16).

You have the very life of God, the Holy Spirit of God, living inside you. This is what gives you the ability to believe. This is what connects you to the body of the church and to the truth of the Bible. This is what helps you to live like God and to love like God, because God is actually living in you and God is actually loving through you. These are the marks of having the Spirit of God.

Test the spirits

1. Test your own spirit
 - a. Strengthen assurance *or*
 - b. Discover need for new birth
2. Test other spirits
 - a. Bond with brothers and sisters *or*
 - b. Resist fakes and antichrists

Let me remind you of the purposes for testing the spirits.

Test your own spirit. If you see these marks, it strengthens your assurance again and again. "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). God wants us to have clear, strong assurance that we belong to him, that his Spirit lives in us, that we are saved, that we belong to him.

If we fail these tests of the Spirit and discover that our own spirit is not indwelt by the Spirit of God, then we've discovered something very worthwhile as well. We can't have assurance of salvation in that condition, but we will have discovered that we need to be born again. We need to be born of God (John 3:7). If these tests show that we don't have the Holy Spirit, God can show us our great need, and that's often the first step in bringing us to new birth.

So there's tremendous value in testing your spirit, either to assure you of salvation you already have or to show you the need to receive salvation.

There's also great value in testing other spirits. If you test the spirits and you find that a person or group passes these tests, that they believe the truth about Jesus, that they are part of the apostolic church and they hold to the Bible, and that there's love and obedience among them, then you can recognize the Spirit's work and bond with them as brothers and sisters.

Nobody this side of heaven passes the tests perfectly. If we claim to be perfect, then obviously we've already failed the test, because John says, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9). So it's not like you get 100% on every test. We sin. We have weaknesses sometimes in our beliefs. We certainly have dreadful weaknesses in our lives. But we keep repenting of those and turning to Christ.

Where these basic tests are present in others—belief in Jesus, trust in the Scriptures and belonging to the church, loving and obeying—we can say, "Whatever we might disagree on, whatever differences there might be, those people are our brothers and sisters in Christ."

They might disagree with us about the timing of when God created the world. They might disagree on the exact roles of men and women in the church. They might disagree on the question of speaking in tongues. But if they are in fundamental agreement on these tests for recognizing God's Spirit, then they're brothers and sisters, and we ought to embrace them, love them, and treasure them as fellow followers of Jesus and support one another in our walk with Jesus.

If you run into a group or a teaching or an individual who doesn't pass these tests, stand firm. Resist the fakes. Recognize the antichrists and don't go along with them. There's tremendous value and benefit in knowing the truth about spirits who do not belong to Jesus Christ.

So let me remind you one last time. First, belief in Jesus. God's Spirit reveals Jesus as Son of God and Messiah who became human to be our sacrifice and Savior. Second, apostolic fellowship. God's Spirit connects people to the book he inspired, the Bible, and to the body that the Spirit indwells, the church. And third, the transformation that brings about a godly life. God's Spirit empowers active love and obedient living.

All of this has been written so that we will know. John ends his epistle: "We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him. We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true—even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Dear children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:18-21).

Trust the one who is the real and living God. Resist the fakes. And rejoice that we know we belong to him.

Recognizing God's Spirit (1 John)

By David Feddes

Slide Contents

Purposes of 1 John

- **Debunk deceivers:** I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. (2:26)
- **Confirm confidence:** I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. (5:13)
Descriptions of real Christian: "born of God" "knows God" "God lives in him"

Recognizing God's Spirit

- **Belief in Jesus:** God's Spirit reveals Jesus as Son of God and Messiah who became human to be our sacrifice and Savior.
- **Apostolic fellowship:** God's Spirit connects people to the Book He inspired (Scripture) and the Body he indwells (church).
- **Godly life:** God's Spirit empowers active love and obedient living.

^{4:1} 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.

⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

¹³ We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. ¹⁶ And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

Recognizing God's Spirit

- **Belief in Jesus:** God's Spirit reveals Jesus as Son of God and Messiah who became human to be our sacrifice and Savior.
- **Apostolic fellowship:** God's Spirit connects people to the Book He inspired (Scripture) and the Body he indwells (church).
- **Godly life:** God's Spirit empowers active love and obedient living.

Belief in Jesus

God's Spirit reveals Jesus as Son of God and Messiah who became human to be our sacrifice and Savior.

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (4:9-10)

Jesus is "the Christ" (5:1), "the Son of God" (4:15). "He is the true God and eternal life" (5:20). He "has come in the flesh" (4:2) to die as "the atoning sacrifice for our sins" (2:2) and "to destroy the devil's work (3:8).

The spirit of antichrist

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 antichrist (4:2-3).

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. (2:20-22).

Many antichrists have come

- **Arians:** Christ is the first creature; he is not God the Creator.
- **Muslims:** Jesus is not God appearing among us but a prominent prophet. He did not die.
- **Unitarians/liberals:** Jesus is not God.
- **Mormons:** Jesus came from Mary's union with the visible body of Elohim the Father.
- **Jehovah's Witnesses:** The archangel Michael gave up his angel nature to become Jesus the man. Jesus was never God.

Apostolic fellowship

God's Spirit connects people to the Book He inspired (Scripture) and the Body he indwells (church).

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched —this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. (1:1-3)

Abandoning apostles

Even now many antichrists have come. They went out from us [apostolic church--Body], but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us. (2:19)

We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us [apostolic truth—Book]; 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. (4:6)

Godly life

God's Spirit empowers active love and obedient living.

Active love

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death... If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. (3:14-18)

Obedient living

We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. (2:3-4)

Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us. (3:23-24)

God loving and living in us

Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love... No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. (4:7-16)

Test the spirits

1. Test your own spirit
 - a. Strengthen assurance *or*
 - b. Discover need for new birth
2. Test other spirits
 - a. Bond with brothers and sisters *or*
 - b. Resist fakes and antichrists

Recognizing God's Spirit

1. **Belief in Jesus:** God's Spirit reveals Jesus as Son of God and Messiah who became human to be our sacrifice and Savior.
2. **Apostolic fellowship:** God's Spirit connects people to the Book He inspired (Scripture) and the Body he indwells (church).
3. **Godly life:** God's Spirit empowers active love and obedient living.

We know!

We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him. We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true—even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Dear children, keep yourselves from idols. (1 John 5:20-21)