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A Letter to Dear Children, Part 14

Testing and Resting

Text: 1 John 4:1-6; 2 Cor. 13:5; 1 Thess. 5:21

On Sunday March 3, 1991, Rodney Glen King was stopped by Los Angeles police for speeding. He was repeatedly beaten by the police and that beating was videotaped by a bystander. The officers involved were acquitted and the city of Los Angeles erupted. Rodney King added a rhetorical question to our national lexicon when he asked, “Can we all get along?”

One can imagine that same question being raised in the first century. There were teachers roaming about, teaching doctrine quite contrary to what John learned and taught. John would say, “No we can’t all get along.” In the second chapter of this epistle, John wrote about those who were with us for a while, and then separated themselves from the community of faith (2:18-19). John would say that their spirits and our spirits are not the same.

 Not all spirits are bad. “There was a good spirit in the clubhouse that night” we’ll say, after the Super Bowl party.

“She has a sweet spirit”, we will say of a staff person at the Department of Motor Vehicles. Hebrews 1:14 speaks of angels as “ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation”. Not all spirits are bad. However, *some* are! An appropriate question would be “how do we tell the false from the real, the legitimate from the illegitimate?”

We dare not believe every spirit. D. Moody Smith, in his commentary on 1 John (Interpretation: First, Second and Third John, p.98) writes,

*The call to test the spirits demands that the author should say how, or by what means, the spirits are to be tested.*

That’s a valid, reasonable request. If John tells us to test the spirit, since everyone does not have the same spirit, John ought to give us a *means* for that test. John says there *is* a test.

Q: **Why** would we test?

A: Because there is a plethora of false prophets that have been dispatched into the world. (v.1)

Q: **How** do we test the spirits?

A. The test is at once both **theological** and **confessional**. We test the spirits by asking specific questions regarding the Christ. Some people think that if they say they believe in Jesus, that is enough. However, the test is more specific. Do you believe that Jesus is God in the flesh? This is a question of incarnation. There were some in John’s day and some in ours, who admire Jesus because he was a good teacher. Fair enough. He worked miracles. He was winsome and charismatic. Good. Do you believe that Jesus is the visible expression of God on earth? That’s the test, according to verse 2. Did you see the “by this” at the beginning of verse 2? **The test is at once both theological and confessional.**

The opposite of the test is also noted. Every spirit that *doesn't* make an incarnational confession is *not* of God.

Every spirit is not the same. There is, in the world, the spirit of Christ and there is the Antichrist.

Note the *we-they* dichotomy in v.5-6.

*We* are God’s children (3:2) and have overcome *them*, the heretics, the antichrists. (v.4)

*They* are of the world. They speak as of the world (v. 5)

John sets up a clear comparison in verses 5 and 6.

We will spend all our days, as maturing believers, keeping the lines of demarcation clear. We are *not* like everybody else in the world. Some people are not walking with God, are not seeking the Christ.

We will spend our days in two simultaneous postures.

1. Testing the spirits.
2. Resting in the knowledge that the One who is us (verse 4) is greater than the one who is in the world!

Amen