



sermon? Here are some of the things that either got briefly mentioned in the sermon or had to get omitted due to time. Have fun!

## What does it mean to Test the Spirits?

What does it mean to test the spirits?

“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” (1 John 4:1).

In this verse believers are commanded to “test the spirits to see whether they are from God.” This same command is echoed in other parts of Scripture as well. For example, in 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21 we find Paul exhorting the Christians to not “despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good.”

These two passages are just a few of the many that warn Christians to test the message that people or spirits proclaim. This is true in all situations but most importantly when a person or spirit is claiming to speak for God. Christians are to be discerning hearers and readers of all messages. The reason for the admonition to “test the spirits” or “test all things” is that there are “many false prophets” or “wolves in sheep’s clothing” that try to lead Christians astray. Sadly, there are many people who claim to speak for God who are presenting a false gospel that is powerless to save. Such errant teaching leaves people with a false hope of salvation and, in a way, inoculates them from the true message. People who are deceived into thinking everything is fine will be more resistant to the truth.

Second Corinthians 11:13-15 warns us that “such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.” So the reason for testing the spirits, for testing all religious teaching, is to see if it is truly from God or if it is a lie from Satan and his servants.

## Pneuma in the NT

Of the 379 occurrences of the substantive pneuma, only John 3:8, Heb 1:7, and 2 Thess 2:8 reflect the original meaning “wind/breath,” the latter two being influenced by OT quotations. In approximately 275 instances pneuma must be understood as “spirit of God”; of these, 149 are absolute; pneuma hagion, “holy spirit,” 92 times; pneuma hagiosynes, “spirit of holiness,” once (Rom 1:4); pneuma theou, “spirit of God,” 18 times; pneuma tou patros, “spirit of the Father,” once. Referring to Christos it is used 3 times; as pneuma tou huiou autou, “the spirit of his Son,” once; and as pneuma lesou, “spirit of Jesus,” once. pneuma is used roughly 47 times in the anthropological sense, mostly with reference to breath (Matt 27:50; John 2:25). pneuma may describe the whole human being, like sōma and psychē (2 Cor 7:1; 1 Thess 5:23), also in rhetorical pathos within the final greetings (Gal 6:18; Phil 4:23; Phlm 25; 2 Tim 4:22) and thus approaches the meaning of “I.” Therefore pneuma may also be interpreted, under the aspect of the acting and thinking “I,” as pneuma praytētos (1 Cor 4:21), as the locus of feelings (Luke 1:47), intellect (Luke 1:80), and, in a single instance, as reason (1 Cor 2:11).

Used either absolutely or with modifiers, pneuma denotes evil spirits approximately 38 times. Jesus and the disciples attack the pneumata akatharta, “unclean spirits” (Mark 1:23; ponēra, “evil [spirits],” (Luke 7:21); alala, “dumb [spirit],” (Mark 9:17) and exorcise them, since the power of the spirit of God in them overcomes the power of Satan. Unique uses of pneuma are Luke 24:37 (ghost); Heb 12:23; 1 Pet 3:19 (souls); Heb 1:14; Rev 1:4; 3:1; 4:5 and 5:6 (angels). Heb 12:9 calls God pater ton pneumatōn “Father of spirits.” The adjective pneumatikos, “spiritual,” is used 23 times in the NT, and the adverb pneumatikōs, “spiritually,” 3 times. Beyond its use in contrast to words for the flesh and carnality (sarkikos/sarkinos/psychikos; Rom 7:14; 1 Cor 1:15; 3:1; 9:11; 15:44, 46), or its substantival use in reference to things spiritual (Rom 15:27; 1 Cor 9:11) or spiritual persons (1 Cor 14:37; Gal 6:1), the adjective pneumatikos is used as a qualifier for the law (Rom 7:14), prayer (Eph 1:3; 5:9; Col 3:16), the Church (1 Pet 2:5), the resurrected body (1 Cor 15:44–46), and sacrifice (1 Pet 2:5).

## DIGGING DEEPER

September 26, 2021

The test is to compare what is being taught with the clear teaching of the Bible. The Bible alone is the Word of God; it alone is inspired and inerrant. Therefore, the way to test the spirits is to see if what is being taught is in line with the clear teaching of Scripture. In Acts 17:10-11 the Berean Jews were commended because, after they heard the teachings of Paul and Silas, they "examined the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so." The Bereans were called "noble" for doing so.

Testing the spirits means that one must know how to "examine the Scriptures." Rather than accept every teaching, discerning Christians diligently study the Scriptures. Then they know what the Bible says and therefore can "test all things and hold fast to what is true." In order to do this, a Christian must "be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). The Word of God is to be "a lamp" and "a light" to our path (Psalm 119:105). We must let its light shine on the teachings and doctrines of the day; the Bible alone is the standard by which all truth must be judged.

## Differences in Denominations

Below is an oversimplified chart of beliefs about the Holy Spirit from several denominations. Why is there such diversity in belief about this aspect of the Godhead? Why is the Spirit and His working in and through the church such an illusive thing?

### Denominational Differences concerning the Holy Spirit

Adventist	Third person of Godhead. The executive of the Godhead and when present is the presence of the Father and The Son.
Assemblies of God	The third member of the Trinity. Adherents are encouraged to seek out baptism through the Holy Spirit, which is characterized by speaking in tongues.
Baptist	Third person, or attribute of the one, and only one, God. God meaning "spirit."
Catholic	Third person of the Trinity, proceeding eternally from the Father and The Son as from one principle. Is equal to the Father and Son in perfection.
Christian Scientist	Is "multiform in office" God the Father-Mother; Christ the spiritual idea of Son-ship; and Divine Science or the Holy Comforter.
Church of God in Christ	As the third member of the Trinity, the Holy Ghost is to be believed in, obeyed, and worshipped along with the Father and the Son. He teaches and guides one into truth.
Church of Jesus Christ Latter-day Saints	Third member of Godhead. Has attributes of Deity. bears witness of Father and the Son. He is the minister of the Godhead and executes the will of the Supreme Council.
Disciples of Christ	Is the Comforter that was promised in the New Testament. The function and constitution of the Holy Spirit are not of any concern. It expands the Christian mind.
Eastern Orthodox	A distinct person of the God-spirit substance. The third person of God which proceeds from God, the Father.
Episcopalian	One of the tri-characters Of the one God-substance. Proceeds from the Father and The Son. Known as the Holy Ghost or Holy Spirit.
Jehovah's Witness	The Holy Spirit is not a person as Jehovah God and Jesus Christ are. The Holy Spirit is God's active force.
Lutheran	Third person of the divine essence. Proceeds from the Father and the Son. Is co-essential and co-eternal.
Methodist	A spiritual personality which proceeds from the Father and the Son. Is one with the Father and The Son in substance and Glory. "They are One."
Presbyterian	A spirit, is God Operating as one of God's persons. Functions for the one and only God (Spirit). Is the third person of the Godhead, one substance.
Quaker	Source of all religious truth and authority is the Holy Spirit, which makes God accessible to all men. Do not believe in the Trinity.
Unitarian	Do not believe in the Holy Ghost. Bible references cannot be taken literally.
United Church of Christ	The Holy Spirit is "creating and renewing the Church of Jesus Christ, binding in covenant the faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races."

\*Because specific teachings and beliefs can vary from congregation to congregation, some beliefs above may only be accurate in certain congregations or regions. Only the Catholic Church and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have teachings (doctrine) that come from one central place and remain the same world-wide.