

Name: _____

Date: _____

DISCERNING SPIRITS

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” (1 John 4:1)

Objectives

Knowledge of God’s Will	Our fight is against rulers of darkness and the spiritual hosts of wickedness. With God’s power, we can discern and overcome evil spirits.
Knowledge of God	God is the ultimate ruler of the spiritual realm. Only God can overpower Satan.
Good Works	Pursue an understanding of the spiritual realm. Prepare to fight against false teachings and the works of Satan.

A. The Spiritual Realm

The only way we can experience the existence of spirits is when they are revealed to us through the physical. But the spirit that reveals itself may be a spirit of God or of evil. It is important for us to learn how to discern what kind of spirit is revealing itself (2 Cor 11:14; 1 Tim 4:1).

B. The Opposition of Evil Spirits

1. *Characteristics of evil spirits:* We fight the rulers of darkness of this age, and their command over this world allows them to deceive men. Satan is king of this world, and has the power of death, which is the result of sin (Jas 1:14–15).
2. *Deceptions of evil spirits:* Evil spirits fight us with deceptions that are not easy to pick out, unless we are close with God and full of the Spirit’s wisdom. It is most dangerous when they tempt members to sin, and cause conflict between members using envy, heresies, and pride.
3. *Persecution from evil spirits:* Satan and his servants will always seek to overcome God’s followers. But God will help us (1 Cor 10:13), and if we overcome, we will be blessed (Mt 10:22).

C. Discerning the Spirits

A person with the intent to do harm, to cause conflict, and to hinder the church out of hatred or pride can also be considered an evil spirit that we have to defend ourselves against. This is especially true of false teachers, who can sow great harm and discord within the church (1 Jn 4:1–6).

1. *“Does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.”:* John describes these spirits as “the spirit of the Antichrist,” a spirit that directly opposes God’s truth.
2. *“They are of the world.”:* A false spirit is of the world, and encourages people to act according to their worldly desires.
3. *“The world hears them”; “does not hear us.”:* The world loves its own (Jn 15:19). A spirit of error deceives likeminded people who seek out their own interests, and also refuses to submit to the truth or change their ways.

D. The Importance of Discerning Spirits

It is vital that we learn to discern the spirits so that we avoid falling into the same pitfalls that many members have already fallen into. By understanding what tactics they use, we can begin to defend ourselves and avoid falling into sin and disharmony with God and our brethren.

Life Application

1. *Growing in Spiritual Wisdom:* Fear the Lord, equip ourselves with God’s word, and leave no room in our hearts for spirits of error.
2. *Be Watchful:* Remain alert, sharpen our spiritual sight, and rely on the power of God’s name.

