

Scripture Text

1 John 4:1-6

Context

1 John was written to assure believers of their standing in the faith, that they may know that they have eternal life (5:13). A genuine follower of Christ will have these characteristics: belief in the truth, obedience to the truth, and love for God's people.

Observation and Meaning

1. What are believers urged to do in v. 1? Why?
2. According to v. 2-3, by what standard should we "test the spirits"?
3. What encouragement in v. 4 does John give us, as we exercise spiritual discernment?
4. In vv. 5-6, what distinguishes those who know God from those who are "from the world"? What is the reason for this key distinction?

Big Idea

Believers are urged to exercise spiritual discernment, so that they hold fast to the truth about Jesus Christ and reject false teaching. If we are from God, His Spirit works in us and enables us to believe in Christ.

Connecting to the Bible's storyline

Christ has come in the flesh and poured out the Holy Spirit on God's people, so that we might follow Jesus and distinguish truth from error.

Application

1. How can we better equip ourselves to discern truth from error?
2. As we strive to exercise spiritual discernment, how can we keep from adopting a judgmental or over-critical attitude?
3. How is spiritual discernment also an expression of Christian love?
4. How does believing in the truth help to strengthen our assurance?

Guide for Study Leaders

Use the C.O.M.A. (Context, Observation, Meaning, Application) method to work through the biblical text.

Context

Pay attention to the surrounding verses, paragraphs, chapters, events, etc. to see how this passage fits within the context of this particular book of the Bible.

Note how this passage fits within the larger storyline of the whole Bible, i.e. how God is saving a people through Jesus Christ to live under his rule in his place.

Observation & Meaning

Make careful observations of the biblical text. Notice details such as linking words (eg. "for", "if", "therefore"), repetition, dialogue, narrative, OT quotations, etc.

To understand the meaning of the biblical text, we need to discern the author's purpose or intent: Why is the biblical author writing this?

Helpful questions to ask include:

Who is writing and to whom?
What is the situation of the author and of the readers?
Are we made aware of any problems that need to be addressed?
Are there any repeated themes, or a single idea that holds everything together?

Application

Apply God's word to the heart. Move beyond merely addressing circumstances and behaviour by asking good "heart" questions. For example: Why do we do what we do? What do we really desire?

Always connect the gospel to application. For example, what difference does knowing Christ make to our obedience to God?

Ask what the passage teaches us about God, ourselves, salvation in Christ, the church, the world, etc.