

OUTFRONT



HOLY BIBLE

**Has the TRUTH
set you free?**

855-FIND-TRUTH John 8:32

WHAT & WHO IS OF GOD?

BY KEITH A. BUTLER

Have you ever heard someone speak—maybe on a podcast, a YouTube channel, or on the television or radio—and the words they said sounded convincing? The individual appeared to be an honest person; maybe he or she even claimed to be religious or spiritual, but something about that person just didn't seem right? **Partner, many voices are vying for your attention today more than in any other time in history.** The battle for hearts, souls, and minds is ramping up as we near the end of the age. Jesus warned us to, “*Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves*” (Matthew 7:15).

People can dress to impress, but they may merely be wolves in sheep's clothing. They memorize talking points and even use verbiage that make them sound like they could preach from your church's pulpit. They may acknowledge a higher power and say that we are all children of God. But their god is not the God of the Bible. They often talk about peace, but they are enemies of the Prince of Peace.

Partner, it is vital that you know how to discern whom or what is of God and whom or what is not of God so that you will not be misled. In Matthew 10:16, Jesus tells us to be “*wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.*” Thank God! We can be wise and recognize who and what is of God. Proverbs 4:7 tells us that “*wisdom is the principle thing,*” and wisdom comes from the Word of God.

Psalm 19:7

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

So what does God's Word say about discerning who and what is of God and who or what is not of God? *First John chapter four* is about identification. In this particular letter, we read the phrases, “*is of God*,” and “*is not of God*” several times. Remember how vital it was for the early believers to be able to have this kind of discernment! The canon of Scripture was not officially recognized until late in the fourth century. Many so-called

“inspired” writings and “prophetic” teachers were circulating around the churches within John’s lifetime. Some were of God; others were not.

Paul warned Timothy, “*Now the Spirit speaketh expressly [outspokenly], that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils*” (1 Timothy 4:1). Paul wrote that some would depart from the faith because they listened to and followed seducing spirits. *Seducing spirits* means *impostor* or *demonic spirits*. We are now in the latter times, and we do not want to depart from the faith! Therefore, it’s vital to learn how to identify the phony from the real!

Partner, if anyone knew how to identify what is of God and what is not of God, it was John. John was the youngest of the disciples and was part of Jesus’ inner circle. He was one of only three whom Jesus took to the Mount of Transfiguration—Peter, James, and John. The same three were in the garden of Gethsemane with Him. John was so close to Jesus, that as He hung dying on the cross, Jesus commended the care of His mother to John.

John 19:26

When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son!

John penned the Gospel attributed to him, as well as three Epistles—1st, 2nd, and 3rd John. Church history tells us that when the Emperor tried to kill John by boiling him in oil, the Apostle John miraculously survived, and was then exiled to the Island of Patmos where he received and recorded the Revelation of Jesus.

John knew how to recognize the voice of God, and he instructed us how to do the same when he wrote, “*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world*” (1 John 4:1).

Now, partner, some people want to throw the baby out with the bathwater. In other words, they don’t allow any of the gifts of the Spirit to flow because they are concerned about allowing an evil spirit to speak. Don’t throw out the Holy Spirit because of deceiving spirits; instead, learn to tell the difference!

Paul encouraged the church to operate in the gifts of the Spirit. He wrote, “*But covet earnestly the best gifts...*” (1 Corinthians 12:31). He also instructed the Thessalonian church to, “*Prove all things; hold fast that which is good*” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). The word *prove* means *to put to the test*. Paul agreed with John: we must test the spirits to determine if they are of God.

The ultimate test of anything is this: Does it agree with the Word of God? Partner, we all should test our behavior, decisions, and speech the same way. Do they agree with God’s Word? The problem many believers encounter is that they aren’t familiar enough with the Bible to determine what is of God and what is not. **Ignorance is not bliss! Ignorance creates confusion and can lead you into deception.** John gave more instruction about distinguishing God’s Spirit from other spirits:

1 John 4:2-3

Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come

in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

The New Testament uses the Greek word *pneuma* for *spirit*. Sometimes it refers to the Holy Spirit; other times it refers to the human spirit or some kind of angelic or demonic spirit. Often, the King James version capitalizes the “S” when it is used about the Holy Spirit, but sometimes we have to determine its meaning by the context. *First John 4:2-3* discusses both the Holy Spirit as well as other spirits.

The word *confesseth* in *1 John 4:2-3* is *homologeo* in Greek. It means *to acknowledge*. The first test of any spirit who speaks through a person, writing or ideology is this: **What does it say about Jesus?** We can’t judge them by their appearance or even good deeds. Who do they say Jesus is?

To *homologeo* is *to acknowledge that everything Jesus said about Himself is true*. In other words, Jesus was not merely another prophet, or just a teacher or rabbi, or a good man. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. He died on the cross for the sins of the world, is risen from the dead, seated at the right hand of the Father, and is coming again. Jesus is Savior and Lord—meaning He is Master of all!

What else did John say about determining what is of God and what is not?

1 John 5:1-2

Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.

The Greek word that is translated *Christ* is *Christos*. It means the *Anointed One* or *the Messiah*. Again, we see the another thing that separates those who are of God and those who are not: **Those who are of God acknowledge that Jesus is the Anointed One.** They believe that Jesus was the One about whom Isaiah and the other prophets foretold.

Isaiah 7:14

Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Isaiah 9:6

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

Partner, there are many world religions and political leaders who talk a good talk; they sound convincing. Some of them have wonderful family lives and promote community involvement. But if they do not acknowledge that Jesus is Who He said He is, they are not of God. Many deceivers are in the world today, and many were in the early church too!

2 John 1:7

For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

Antichrist means *an opponent of the Messiah, an opponent of the Sent One*. John warned that the closer we get to the end of this age, the more deceivers there would be. People will claim to have secret knowledge of the way to salvation. They will point Christians away from the Word of God and faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus prophesied the same thing when He said: *“For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great*

signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not” (Matthew 24:24-26).

I'm not writing this letter to make you afraid or to create concern for you, Partner! I'm writing this so that you can confidently stand firm against every attack that the enemy brings against you in these last days.

1 John 4:4

Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

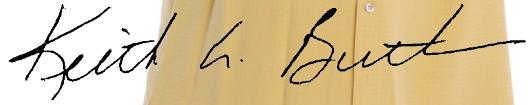
Partner, you have overcome! You have prevailed! You have the victory over every lying and deceiving spirit. The Holy Spirit, the One inside of you is bigger than any other spirit in this world! The Greater One on the inside of you is activated by faith. *First John 5:4 tells us, “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”*

“*Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God*” (*Romans 10:17*). Partner, we just can't get away from the importance of faith in God's Word. God's Word is the determining factor of who or what is of God. What agrees with God's Word is of God; what does not line up with God's Word is not. Partner, when you take the five steps of faith: hearing, receiving, believing, speaking, and acting on God's Word, you will win in every battle!

There are deceiving spirits in this world who come to steal, kill, and destroy, but they will always lose to the Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit is the Greater One, and He lives in you!

Partner, Pastor Deborah and I pray for you daily. You are important to us. More importantly, you are important to our Lord! You are always on our minds and in our hearts.

If you have a specific prayer request and would like prayer, please call us at our KBM Partner Care Center at 248.353.3476, ext. 256. Or, if you would like to email your prayer request, you may do so by sending it to partners@keithbutler.org. You may also submit your prayer request through our website at www.keithbutler.org.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Keith L. Butler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Keith" and "L." being more stylized and "Butler" being more formal.