

1 John 4:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

Analysis

We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

John contrasts the apostolic message with false teaching. "We are of God" (hēmeis ek tou theou esmen)—the apostles belong to God, commissioned by Christ, inspired by the Spirit. Their teaching originates from God, not human wisdom or worldly philosophy. This apostolic authority grounds their message's reliability.

"He that knoweth God heareth us" (ho ginōskōn ton theon akouei hēmōn)—genuine knowledge of God produces recognition of and submission to apostolic teaching. Those born of God and taught by the Spirit recognize apostolic truth as God's word. Conversely, "he that is not of God heareth not us" (hos ouk estin ek tou theou ouk akouei hēmōn)—those who don't belong to God reject apostolic teaching. Rejection of Scripture's authority indicates spiritual deadness, not intellectual sophistication.

"Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error" (ek toutou ginōskomen to pneuma tēs alētheias kai to pneuma tēs planēs). The test is clear: alignment with apostolic teaching indicates the spirit of truth; departure from it reveals the spirit of error. This provides objective criteria for discernment—measure all teaching by Scripture (the apostolic deposit). Private revelations, personal feelings, or cultural preferences must submit to biblical authority. The spirit of

truth produces teaching consistent with the apostles' word; the spirit of error contradicts it.

Historical Context

The apostles claimed divine authority for their teaching, not human opinion. Jesus promised the Spirit would guide them into all truth (John 16:13). Paul distinguished his gospel as received by revelation from Christ (Galatians 1:11-12). The early church recognized apostolic teaching as authoritative Scripture alongside the Old Testament (2 Peter 3:15-16).

This apostolic authority undergirds Protestant sola Scriptura—Scripture alone is the final authority. The Roman Catholic addition of tradition as equal authority and charismatic claims of new revelation both challenged apostolic finality. John's test remains valid—teaching aligned with apostolic doctrine (Scripture) manifests the spirit of truth; teaching contradicting Scripture manifests the spirit of error. Reception of apostolic teaching indicates regeneration; rejection indicates spiritual deadness.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How do you determine whether teaching aligns with apostolic doctrine as preserved in Scripture?
2. What does your reception or rejection of difficult biblical teaching reveal about your spiritual state?
3. How should the principle that those who know God hear apostolic teaching affect your approach to biblical interpretation and authority?

Interlinear Text

ἡμεῖς ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἐσμεν· ὁ γινώσκομεν τὸν
We Hereby G3588 God are G3588 he that knoweth G3588
G2249 G1537 G2316 G2070 G1097

Θεοῦ, ἀκούει ἡμῶν ὃς οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ,
God heareth us he that not is Hereby G3588 God
G2316 G191 G2257 G3739 G3756 G2076 G1537 G2316

οὐκ ἀκούει ἡμῶν ἐκ τούτου γινώσκομεν τὸ πνεῦμα
not heareth us Hereby G5127 he that knoweth G3588 the spirit
G3756 G191 G2257 G1537 G1097 G4151

τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς πλάνης
G3588 of truth and G3588 the spirit G3588 of error
G225 G2532 G4151 G4106

Additional Cross-References

John 14:17 (Spirit): Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

John 10:27 (Parallel theme): My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:

John 15:26 (Spirit): But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:

1 John 4:1 (Spirit): 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 4:4 (References God): 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.

1 Corinthians 14:37 (Spirit): If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.

John 18:37 (Truth): Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.

Micah 3:8 (Spirit): But truly I am full of power by the spirit of the LORD, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin.

Isaiah 8:20 (Parallel theme): To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.

Isaiah 29:10 (Spirit): For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered.