

# Putting Teachers to the Test<sup>1</sup>

1 John 3:24–4:6

There are approximately ten thousand physicians practicing medicine in America who have a fake foreign medical degree. If these counterfeit doctors were evenly distributed in every state, there would be about two hundred in the state of Kentucky. Just think about this: many American citizens are receiving medical treatment from doctors who lied on their medical school loan applications. Instead of using the money received from this loan to get a degree, they decided to buy one instead.

Pedro DeMesones was one of the men who became rich through this scheme. He served a three-year prison sentence for his crime. He said that, in the three years he “expedited” medical degrees, he provided about one hundred clients with false transcripts showing they had fulfilled medical requirements of schools they didn’t attend. He says, “Clients paid me from \$5,225 to \$27,000 for my services”<sup>2</sup>—and that was in the 1980s. Can you imagine what these degrees are going for today?

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<sup>1</sup> If I were in an urban context, I would have begun this sermon in a similar manner to how Daniel Akin began when he preached this text. He stated:

Recently, Christian rapper and friend Shai Linne stirred quite a controversy with his song “Fal\$e Teacher\$.” It is a critique of “the prosperity gospel,” and in it he does the unacceptable in our hyper-tolerant/non-critical day: he names names. In the song, Shai particularly calls on Christians outside of America not to be deceived by these “wolves in sheep’s clothing,” the words of Jesus (Matthew 7:15), who export their heresies around the world. To be specific, he says,

Don’t be deceived by this funny biz, if you come to Jesus for money, then he’s not your God, money is! Jesus is not a means to an end, the Gospel is.

He came to redeem us from sin, and that is the message forever I yell!

If you’re living your best life now you’re heading for hell!

Turn off TBN that channel is overrated. The pastors speak bogus statements, financially motivated.

It’s kind of like a pyramid scheme. Visualize heretics Christianizing the American dream.

It’s foul and deceitful, they’re lying to people, teaching that camels squeeze through the eye of a needle!

John Piper via Twitter said of the song, “My, my, Shai, this is good.”

<sup>2</sup> *Spokesman Review*, December 8, 1984.

There are over three thousand unrecognized universities and colleges in the world. Many of them are nothing more than diploma mills. They print out the diplomas and people buy them with no academic rigor at all!

- “One international diploma mill, with offices in Europe and the Middle East and mailing addresses in the United Kingdom, run by Americans, has sold more than 450,000 degrees—bachelor’s, master’s, doctorates, medicine, and law—to clients worldwide, who did nothing more than write a check. Their revenues exceeded US \$450,000,000.”
- “The number of earned PhD degrees in the United States is 40,000 to 45,000 each year. The number of fake PhDs bought each year from diploma mills exceeds 50,000. In other words, more than half of all people claiming a new PhD have a fake degree.”<sup>3</sup>

There are fakes everywhere. John has dealt with a lot of fakes in this book. He has dealt with fake Christians—people who claim to be saved, attend church, and put money in the plate, but who sadly will burst hell wide open. John goes on to let you know how to identify them. Their life will be inconsistent. They will say one thing and live another. They love discord; they love to destroy churches.

God shows us some fakes in this morning’s passage. He shows us counterfeit teachers. We find ourselves this morning putting teachers to the test.

**Transition:** The Apostle John wants us to be aware of a few truths in this passage. Here is the first:

### **1. There are and always have been false teachers (1 John 4:1).**

The word *spirit* is not some disembodied, mystical figure like you may think of in a movie. A spirit here is speaking of a teacher. Apparently, we are not supposed to believe everyone who stands behind a pulpit or who holds a Bible. Everyone who comes across the radio or across the TV screen in your home cannot be trusted. Just because they come promoting spirituality does not mean it is the spirituality of the Bible. It could be spirituality coming from false spirits.

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<sup>3</sup> John Bear and Allen Ezell, “Does Your Doctor Have a Fake Degree? The Billion-Dollar Industry That Has Sold Over a Million Fake Diplomas,” Alternet, June 13, 2012, accessed April 15, 2016, [http://www.alternet.org/story/155864/does\\_your\\_doctor\\_have\\_a\\_fake\\_degree\\_the\\_billion-dollar\\_industry\\_that\\_has\\_sold\\_over\\_a\\_million\\_fake\\_diplomas](http://www.alternet.org/story/155864/does_your_doctor_have_a_fake_degree_the_billion-dollar_industry_that_has_sold_over_a_million_fake_diplomas).

We are to test them. The word *test* means to try, to analyze, to investigate. People that lack spiritual discernment *believe* everything they hear. People with spiritual discernment *test* what they hear.

John goes on to say that there are *many* false teachers gone out into the world? How many? We are not sure, but I am betting there are more false teachers than there are false doctors. If there are ten thousand counterfeit doctors, I would suspect Satan has more false teachers.

In Acts 20:28–30, Paul speaks to the pastors of the church at Ephesus and tells them to pay close attention to the sheep in the fold. The Holy Spirit gave them these sheep, and they are to be overseers. The text says, “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which he purchased with His own blood.” Paul continues by explaining that, when he leaves them, savage wolves will come in and try to destroy the flock. They will look like sheep and claim to be sheep, but they are wolves.

That is one of my responsibilities. As the pastor, I am to guard, protect, and warn you of false teachers. Do you know why I am supposed to do that? Because, at times, they are not easy to detect.

The devil doesn’t just prowl around like a ferocious lion (1 Peter 5:8); the devil also appears as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14), spreading his false teaching (1 Timothy 4:1), through false ministers (2 Corinthians 11:15).<sup>4</sup>

There is a popular stream of thought today that says, “Let’s just proclaim the truth; we do not have to worry about calling out error. Instead of identifying the false Christians sent by Satan into the congregation and the false teachers sent by him into the congregation, let’s just stay positive.”

Actually, you cannot have one without the other. You cannot preach the truth and ignore error. That’s a false, unbiblical dichotomy that goes against the examples we have in the Scriptures. If I preach the truth, I must confront error head on!

There are counterfeit Christians in the church and counterfeit preachers in the pulpit. The

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<sup>4</sup> Stephen Davey, “Putting Teachers to the Test,” Colonial Baptist Church, accessed April 15, 2016, <http://media.colonial.org/files/PDFs/CBC/20130616-am.pdf>.

counterfeit Christians bring division and discord, and the counterfeit pastors bring wrong theology—devilish doctrine. Pastors are to help people develop the discernment to see Satan’s missionaries.

The antichrist’s ambassadors sneak into an assembly and stay awhile, but they eventually show their true colors. Hell’s representatives start out with a smooth beginning, then try to do a hostile takeover.

I am not saying these people are not good moral people, but do not be deceived; they are the devil’s agents—Satan’s spokespersons.

**Transition:** John moves from showing us false teachers are present today to showing us . . .

## **2. There are ways you can identify false teachers (1 John4:2–3).**

Please pay close attention here, because we find out how to identify false teachers. The last thing we want to do is to call a true teacher a false teacher. That is a crime of which we do not want to be found guilty. God says in Psalm 105:15, “Do not touch my anointed ones, and do my prophets no harm.”

Sadly, some fall prey to the devil’s tactics of calling heresy what God does not call heresy—calling evil what God calls righteous. So what is the test?

I have heard the following issues given as a test:

- Well, he does not wear a suit when he preaches, so he is a false prophet.
- Well, he is not loud enough; God’s prophets are loud. *Or* he is too loud; God’s prophets are not that loud.
- He is too tall, too short, not enough hair, too much crazy hair.
- He preaches from the wrong version of Scripture.

Pity the man or woman who calls a genuine teacher a false teacher. Those who did that in the Bible were eaten by female bears (2 Kings 2:22–23), plagued with leprosy (Numbers 12), or even experienced fiery serpents in Numbers 21. So please understand that I approach this topic very seriously. I do not desire to flippantly call someone false who is not false.

The real test to prove a teacher’s authenticity is not about clothing, hair, size of the preacher, volume, or tradition. You see, this test is not preferential; it is doctrinal. It is theological. Christianity is rooted and grounded in the Christological question. What do you believe about Jesus?

Verses 2–3 lay it out clearly. Here is the test: Did Jesus Christ come *in the flesh*? Notice I

said *in* the flesh and not *on* flesh or *upon* flesh.

John is attacking the Cerinthian Gnosticism developed by Cerinthus during the last years of John the Apostle's life. (You will need to know that for the test later!) On a serious note, please see that John is confronting theological error. He is not ignoring it.

Cerinthus was the first to teach that Jesus and Christ weren't the same person—that Jesus was just an ordinary man upon whom a “Christ spirit” came—and it descended on Jesus at His baptism. That dove-like figure was really some kind of Christ spirit. The Christ spirit empowered Jesus to do amazing things, but then, at the crucifixion, the Christ spirit left Jesus. So Jesus was just an ordinary man, empowered by God only temporarily.<sup>5</sup>

Another heresy in this day said that Jesus was just an enlightened religious leader. The Docetists said Jesus was a phantom or ghostly spirit who only appeared to be human. When it comes to what people believed about Jesus, the early church was plagued much like the 21<sup>st</sup> century church.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), the father of modern liberal theology, offered an adoptionist understanding of Jesus, dismissing as outrageous the idea that Jesus was the eternal Son of God who became human. What distinguished Jesus from other humans was “the constant potency of His God-consciousness, which was a veritable existence of God in Him.” Jesus was a God-filled man, a God- intoxicated man, but not the God-man.<sup>6</sup>

Liberal theologian John Macquarrie says, “Jesus Christ pre-existed in the mind and purpose of God, and I doubt if one should look for any other kind of pre-existence”<sup>7</sup>

Religious pluralist John Hick says, “We see in Jesus a human being extraordinarily open to God's influence and thus living to an extraordinary extent as God's agent on earth, ‘incarnating’ the divine purpose for human life. He thus embodied . . . the ideal of humanity living in openness and response to God, and in doing so He ‘incarnated’ a love that reflects the divine love.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Davey, “Putting Teachers to the Test.”

<sup>6</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 97.

<sup>7</sup> John Macquarrie, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 57.

<sup>8</sup> John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate: Christology in a Pluralistic Age* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 12.

Anthony Buzzard wrote a huge book entitled *Jesus Is Not a Trinitarian*. He contested that Jesus never said He was God: “The churches after Bible times gradually developed this novel concept. Jesus knew nothing of such a claim. The claim of the Deity of Jesus cannot be based on his own words, and should be discarded for that good reason, unless of course even Jesus did not know who he was!”<sup>9</sup> Buzzard is trying to be funny, but this is not laughing matter.

Howard Marshall said, if someone tells you they believe in Jesus, it is right to ask if they believe in the real Jesus! What one thinks about Jesus has enormous consequences. In a real sense it determines everything. Tell me what you believe about Jesus, and I will give you 95% of the rest of your theology.<sup>10</sup>

Well, who is Jesus? Our statement of faith says it well:

Christ is the eternal Son of God. In His incarnation as Jesus Christ He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself human nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with mankind yet without sin. He honored the divine law by His personal obedience, and in His substitutionary death on the cross He made provision for the redemption of men from sin. He was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion. He ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God where He is the One Mediator, fully God, fully man, in whose Person is effected the reconciliation between God and man. He will return in power and glory to judge the world and to consummate His redemptive mission. He now dwells in all believers as the living and ever present Lord.<sup>11</sup>

**Transition:** Let’s review what we have learned so far in this passage: There are and always have been false teachers, there are ways to identify false teachers, and . . .

### **3. There is a teacher in you that is greater than all the false teachers (1 John 4:4–6).**

The last verse of chapter three introduces our internal teacher. He is the Holy Spirit. In verses 4–6 of chapter four John elaborates on our teacher—the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>9</sup> Anthony Buzzard, *Jesus Was Not a Trinitarian* (Morrow, GA: Restoration Fellowship, 2007), Kindle, locations 4809–4811.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Akin, “Test the Spirits! They Are Not All from God,” accessed April 15, 2016, <http://www.danielakin.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/1-John-4.1-6-Test-the-Spirits.They-Are-Not-All-from-God-manuscript-kh.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Southern Baptist Convention, “The Baptist Faith and Message 2000,” accessed April 15, 2016, <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfm2000.asp>.

A great teaching tool is comparison. John uses comparison all throughout the book.

- Light and darkness
- Life and death
- Truth and lies
- Old and new commandments
- Hate and love
- Christ and Anti-Christ

And the two that are listed here in this text . . .

- False spirit and greater Spirit
- Spirit of truth and the spirit of error

Because we have the greater Spirit, we can overcome error. The verb “you have overcome” (verse 4) is in the perfect tense. That means an action happened and the results are continuing. So John is implying here that there was a time when he faced the false teachers with their false Jesus, and he overcame them. John may have had an incident in mind.

So this Holy Spirit teacher inside of you warns us to watch for error, especially when it comes to the person of Jesus Christ. One man wrote a book a few years ago entitled *Jesus + Nothing = Everything*. That is a good formula. Here is another good formula: Jesus + Anything = Heresy. There is no Jesus plus or Bible plus theology for those who know God.

Many of the religions and cults of the world have Jesus and the Bible plus something else.

- It is Jesus and the Bible plus Joseph Smith’s Book of Mormon.
- It is Jesus and the Bible plus Mary Baker Eddy’s *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*.
- It is Jesus and the Bible plus the Jehovah Witnesses’ *Zion’s Watchtower*.
- It is Jesus and the Bible plus the Hindu’s *Bhagavad-Gita*.
- It is Jesus and the Bible plus papal decrees and church traditions.
- It is Jesus and the Bible plus Scientology’s *Dianetics*.
- It is Jesus and the Bible plus the Jewish mystics’ Kabbalah.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Davey, “Putting Teachers to the Test.”

False religions always promote something in addition to the Jesus and the Bible. When it comes to salvation this formula rings true—Jesus + nothing = everything!

By the way, these false teachers may have a large following too. They speak a message that logically makes sense with the world, so the world listens to them (read verse 5).

## **Conclusion**

A Chinese boy who wanted to learn about jade went to study with a talented old teacher. This gentle man put a piece of the precious stone into his hand and told him to hold it tight. Then he began to talk of philosophy, men, women, the sun, and almost everything under it. After an hour, he took back the stone and sent the boy home. The procedure was repeated for several weeks. The boy became frustrated. When would he be told about the jade? He was too polite, however, to question the wisdom of his venerable teacher. Then one day, when the old man put a stone into his hands, the boy cried out instinctively, ‘That’s not jade!’”<sup>13</sup>

The same is true when it comes to the person of Jesus. You do not learn about the errors concerning the person of Jesus by just studying other religions. You will be able to discern the error by knowing the truth. If you know the Jesus of the Bible, you will be able to detect a counterfeit when it is thrown into your hands.

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<sup>13</sup> Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 99.



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