Ain’t nothing like the real thing. This is a hit song from 1968 sung as a duet by Tammi Terrell and Marvin Gaye. It’s still well known to this day partly due to it’s catchy melody but its also been remade numerous times by other artists. And of course, what’s it all about? The song is not about authenticated paintings, or about the natural flavoring of some food item. The song speaks to a basic desire in all of us…the desire to be loved. When they are singing about the real thing, they are singing about love.

Nobody is interested in faked love or false pretenses. Nobody wants to be dedicated to an imitation. Advertisers have picked up on this idea. Here is an old one from Coke. And apparently from this we are to understand that when it comes to real things, there’s Coke and everything else is just our imagination.

Here we have an ad for gold…real gold. And they just straight up stole the song title! You can’t see it but in the fine print in says that gold is wealth in its most real form. Hey yeah, I don’t want fake wealth, I want the real thing. Here we have Fiat claiming to be a real sports car for imitation prices. And finally something better than the real thing! Brussels airlines is now your connection to something beyond reality. That sounds exciting doesn’t it?

The point here is that this type of branding has an effect on us. It speaks to our desire for authenticity. Why is art collecting a thing? Why do we have museums? I can still enjoy a print of an original painting or a replica of an ancient artifact. They look the same, and yet we desire the real thing…we want authenticity. We as consumers are willing to pay more for a product if it carries a certain band name. We associate names with quality or value or personal preference. There are whole companies and websites out there dedicated to testing every product on the market in order to determine where brands rate when pitted against each other.

When it comes to jewelry people pay very large sums for a very small item, as long as it is genuine. There is value in the preciousness of an authentic diamond. Most every bride to be will show off her new engagement ring to friends and family…to facebook. And she is going to want to claim that what she has is a real and true diamond ring.

Gordon Ramsey is probably the best known of the celebrity chefs in the world. He has had numerous TV shows the best of which is called Kitchen Nightmares. It was a popular show because each episode involved Gordon invicerating some poor restaurateur and for some reason, and as long as we are not the ones being yelled at, we find that entertaining. In every episode Gordan sits down and orders a sample of dishes from the menu. We then watch as Gordon eats a bite, makes some twisted face, spits the food into a napkin followed by a string of bleeps. Often he will say to the camera, if he is eating fish for example,…this is not fresh fish, it’s frozen. The menu says it’s fresh. In anger he will confront the owner. Why are you lying to people? If you say it is fresh it has to be fresh!” Some owners are so shocked…they simply cannot believe the freshness of their fish is such an issue. It’s not really about fish, it is about authenticity…it is about being real.

This is exactly true when it comes to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity is mysterious to us…The Bible says that when you believe in Jesus Christ, when you trust in him, the Spirit comes and dwells within you. The power of God rests upon you. Now I don’t care where you are from, that is a weird notion. It’s a strange idea to think that God himself would choose to live within us human beings….actually it sounds like a pretty bad idea. But that is how God works…his wisdom seems like foolishness to us. But anything great is going to instigate imitators. And even though we don’t pay attention to it, there is a world of spirits all around us vying to take up residence within our hearts. A world of spirits pretending to be the real thing.

Let’s take a look at 1 John. Most people take the author here as the disciple John. There are many shared themes between this letter we are looking at and his gospel. But now John is an old man and in this letter, we can sort of see him sitting in the recliner sharing his wisdom. But certain things are made apparent in this letter: First, John is a teacher at heart. He is looking the clarify certain things and provide definitions, he wants us to learn something. Secondly, he longs for the best for his readers. He really wants life to go well for them. He wants them to know the truth. SO as we read keep these things in mind.

John deals with many different themes and the section we are looking at focuses on fellowship and testimony. These certainly sound like churchy words, but we know about testimony from courtrooms. It is simply telling about what you have seen and heard. But fellowship can be a bit foggier. We think of pot-lucks or maybe our upcoming BBQ’s out on the back lawn. John uses fellowship to mean being with someone or knowing someone…existing in relationship is fellowship. When it comes to fellowship with God, John speaks of being in or living in, he uses the terms “born of God” and “children of God”. This goes beyond eating food together. In fact, once John says that if we acknowledge Jesus the Son we also have the Father. And so here fellowship takes on the connotation of possession. It reminds me of marriage. I mean I am my own man right? I do what I want and go where I please. But I am in fellowship with my wife…I have her and she has me. We belong to each other and so the things I choose to do will build up our relationship and not detract from it.

So we cannot understand what John is talking about unless we look through that lens of relationship with God. And we are not just talking about knowing him, but of being in him, of being his children…of having God and him having us.

Let’s read. 1 John 4. I am just going to read it straight through and then we will break it down:

**4**Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, (so John is pointing out an undisclosed number of spirits…various spirits) but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, (why?) because many false prophets have gone out into the world. (John is concerned about the real thing…he wants authenticity…not frozen fish here.) **2**This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: (now this is where John shines as a teacher. He is giving what I call a proof statement. He is going to clarify and define how we can test these spirits). Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, **3**but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. (John also clarifies this term antichrist elsewhere in the book. In 2:22 an antichrist is a liar, someone who denies the Father and the Son. Simple enough. We have a tendency to add much more to that term, but I think we can read “liar” here.)

I want to stop here for a moment and look closely at the criteria for this test. Every spirit that acknowledges the Jesus has come in the flesh, in other words, born as a human, is from God. Every spirit that does not acknowledge this is not from God. The test here is based on testimony. If I acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God born among us, I am giving testimony to what I believe. But wait, now. Anybody can get up here and say anything. Anybody can claim to believe anything. False testimony is not just a problem in the courtroom. Well, let’s read on…

**4**You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them (the antichrists or false spirits), because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. (We need to pay attention to this word.) **5**They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. **6**We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+John+4#fen-NIV-30610a)] of truth and the spirit of falsehood. (Another proof statement.)

John is very black and white here. There is the world and there is God. There are lies and there is the truth. There is death and there is life. And you might say well God created the world, and he himself said it was good. Indeed it was good, but what John isreally getting at, and I learned this from Dr. O who spoke at camp this last year, what John is talking about is an attitude. World can certainly mean the planet we live on, the dirt beneath our feet, but here, world is referring to an attitude, a position of the heart. It again boils down to relationship: Whoever knows God listen to us, meaning the teaching of the apostles. Whoever knows God listens to God’s word. Listens to truth, listens to life.

Now this whole thing has a few implications for us. First of all, it is all about Jesus. It is all about Jesus. What is? It is! What is “it”? Well, name it? Your job? Your home? Your finances? Your politics? The way you parent? The way you spend your free-time? Your faith? Your heart? It is ALL about Jesus. If we confess, if we testify that Jesus was born of Mary, that we was killed on a cross and that he rose three days later, that Jesus came in the flesh to save us all, then everything we are and everything we do is all about Jesus. If you are a believer, you need to hear this. We have been set apart, we do not share the same viewpoint as the rest of the world. We have the Spirit of Truth! And this Spirit is working within us to make it all about Jesus. If you are not a believer, you need to know that there is a reason life seems empty. There is a reason you are longing for something you cannot define. There is a reason that true joy and hope have eluded you. It because this world can only serve up lies. The spirit of this world denies the Word of God, denired the primacy of Jesus. The world says that sure, Jesus was a great teacher, an important figure in history. Jesus said some good things and he should be respected. This Jesus cannot save you, and in this view, Jesus was a complete lunatic. But we say No! Jesus is not a topic found in an ancient book. Jesus is alive! His Spirit dwells within us. We testify to this! And by this testimony and by our fellowship with God we are given new sight and Jesus becomes our everything.

Another point to make here is that the viewpoint given to us by the Spirit, means that we have to make a judgement call. We have to decide if we are eating fresh fish or frozen. I hear so often that we should not judge, Jesus himself says that if we judge others, we will be judged in the same way. But every one of us, every day judge between the quality of a brand-name product and its knock-off. Every one of us judges between the authenticity of someone’s story, their testimony. Every one of us must judge between wisdom and folly…that is what making a decision is! How much more than must we judge between the Spirit of Christ and the spirit of the anti-christ or the liar. And if the Spirit of truth is our means of judging, then we can invite that type of judgement upon ourselves. If we live by the Spirit, we will be judged as truthful!

Last point: Don’t discern alone. There are so many voices in our lives: family members, the media, religious leaders, politicians, our own psyche…it is too much for us to sift through alone. We need each other in this process. We need the church. We need to subsist on a steady diet of truth! How can Gordon Ramsey know fresh from frozen in an instant? Experience! When we become well-versed in scripture, when we have been marinated in God’s presence, when we have spent considerable time with God in prayer, we can hear the ring of truth. We can and smell the stench of lies. We can discern between the spirits because we have tasted and seen God truth. We have experience with his Spirit. We know beyond the shadow of a doubt that there ain’t nothing like the real thing.