



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

1 JOHN 4:5 – WHO ARE WE TO BELIEVE? Part 4

COLORADO

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The true believer has the enabling power of the Holy Spirit living inside of them from the moment of salvation. It is He Who is greater than Satan and his minions in this world. And though they oppose God and all who believe in Him, he is a defeated foe. And yes, Satan still roars, but he has been defeated by Jesus Christ on the cross. And so John can remind every believer that the One living inside them is greater than the one in the world.

I. 1 JOHN 4:5 WHO ARE WE TO BELIEVE? PART FOUR

(1) “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” (2) “By this you know the Spirit of God; every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God;” (3) “and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.” (4) “You are from God, little children, and have overcome them, because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.” (5) “They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them.” 1 John 4:1-5

John writes to expose the false teachers, the antichrists and their heretical teaching. 1 John 4:1-6 provides a grid that is useful for testing any doctrine or any teacher. The test is not if the preacher is impressive or his message attractive, but whether what he says is true. False teachers will deny Christ, yet claim to be a Christian, and every true believer must be on guard. 1 John 4:5 focuses on the world and the false teachers that are everywhere; on every channel and in many churches. We must not be deceived because they are “*from the world*” and not “*from God*”. And we must remember from 1 John 4:1 that “*many false prophets have gone out into the world.*”

John isn't talking about an isolated instance. John's concern is stirred by numerous false prophets exerting a strong impact on the church in his day and it continues to this present day. Jesus Himself foretold of these false prophets during His ministry here on earth. (Matthew 7:15, 24:11, 15; Mark 13:21-23 to mention a few) They are also mentioned by other Apostles in Acts 20:28-30 and 2 Peter 2. John does not want the church of God deceived by the many false teachers that are already in the church. Therefore, this warning is issued to all believers even to this day. It is a concern, a red alert that every Christian must heed because false teachers can be so destructive as they give false teaching that may sound so good to the ear, but distort the real truth of God.

Basically John doesn't want the church to be gullible and wants us to be on guard and careful not to believe everything you hear taught, even if they claim to be from God. John calls on believers to have critical discernment regarding professed religious teachers. John would say that there is a clear and present danger. Today, with the sweeping inroads of numerous cults and occultic forces, the need for spiritual discernment is urgent.¹

A. “THEY ARE FROM THE WORLD...” - 1 JOHN 4:5A

“They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them.” 1 John 4:5

We must first understand who John is talking about in this verse as he begins with “*They*”. 1 John 4:4 clearly referred to true believers in Jesus Christ. But here in 1 John 4:5, the Apostle refers unmistakably to the false teachers who John says are “*from the world*” because what they say is of the world. It is the world's philosophy even though it may be dressed in Christian language and presented by those who claim to be Christian teachers.²

With this statement, “*They are from the world*”, John marks out the basic difference between false teachers and the true believers of 1 John 4:4. John literally shows where they are from and where their personal allegiance lies. In 1 John 4:3, John identified the antichrists as “*not of God*”. Now John adds to his portrayal describing them as being “*from the world*”, or of the world. They reflect the Christ-rejecting world. And with the triple use of the word, “*world*” in this one verse alone, John emphasizes their fundamental attitude and motivation. There can be no doubt that these false teachers belong to the world system where Satan is the prince. (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11)³

B. “THEY SPEAK AS FROM THE WORLD...” - 1 JOHN 4:5B

“They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them.” 1 John 4:5

Who and what these false teachers are John says, is revealed by their message. And the content of their message reveals they are false teachers. False teachers masquerade as men and women of God, proclaiming a message that sits comfortably with the world. Any Biblical truths that might happen to offend are minimized in the name of harmony or unity. Scripture can no longer be offensive to anyone.⁴

1 JOHN 4:5 – WHO ARE WE TO BELIEVE? Part 4

Their message reveals what they are. They draw the content of their teaching from the godless world and they pervert the truth. Their message conforms to the interest of the world and thus distorts the true message of God.⁵ They may have the nicest smiles and the most alluring messages, but people are feeling comfortable in their pews all the way to hell because they are not hearing the truth. The gospel of Jesus Christ is being distorted.

False teachers cling to worldly ideas (1 Corinthians 2:14) because they are from the world. They demonstrate they are anything but genuine servants of Christ by what they say and how they live. And, the message of false teachers fits in well with the prevailing thinking of the world. It does not challenge or confront the world with its sin and rebellion against God and so the fallen world *“listens to them”*.⁶

C. “AND THE WORLD LISTENS TO THEM.”- 1 JOHN 4:5C

“They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them.” 1 John 4:5

One of the saddest phrases in 1 John is found here in verse five, *“and the world listens to them”*.

“listens” Greek *“akouei”* denotes a receptive hearing of the speakers message.

So John is saying that the instruction of these false teachers arouses the interest of the world, and the world is attracted to it since they have the same attitudes and desires. The message given is appealing and the messenger has a definite following.⁷

1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 exhorts us to examine everything carefully because Satan will do everything he can to distort the

truth. Ephesians 4:14 gives us sound wisdom regarding what we hear or see in church to be careful, mature and wise so we are not sucked in by any doctrine, teaching or crafty speech, *“As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming...”*

While our situation is different today, we are still plagued with *“false prophets”* preying on Christians. Every generation must *“test”* the spirits (1 John 4:1). Our first responsibility is to test, examine and scrutinize what is being said and taught. This is our continual responsibility. We can't be mesmerized by eloquent or charismatic speech. We must always evaluate what we hear and measure it against what Scripture says. Scripture is the only reliable test and the Word is what is given to believers as our main defense against error. We have to stay anchored to the Word of God. We must practice discernment, with kindness, yet courage.

D. SO WHO DO YOU LISTEN TO?

So ask yourself, who do you listen to? The truth taught from Scripture will make us uncomfortable because it convicts us of our sin, our worldly and fleshly desires that are far from pleasing God. Don't give in to a comfortable message that allows for a worldly lifestyle. Do not be deceived by the world's philosophy even though it may be dressed in Christian language and presented by those who claim to be Christian teachers. There are many.

Who do you listen to?

¹ Hiebert, D. Edmond, *The Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary*. Bob Jones University Press: Greenville, SC, 1991. Pg. 177.

² Boice, James Montgomery, *An Expository Commentary: The Epistles of John*. Baker Books: Grand Rapids, MI, 1979. Pg.110.

³ Hiebert, D. Edmond, *The Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary*. Bob Jones University Press: Greenville, SC, 1991. Pg. 189.

⁴ Hamilton, Ian, *Let's Study the Letters of John*. The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, UK, 2008. Pg. 56.

⁵ Hiebert, D. Edmond, *The Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary*. Bob Jones University Press: Greenville, SC, 1991. Pg. 189.

⁶ MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Commentary Series on 1-3 John*. Moody Press: Chicago, IL, 2007. Pg. 159.

⁷ Hiebert, D. Edmond, *The Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary*. Bob Jones University Press: Greenville, SC, 1991. Pg. 190.