



# CAPITOL COMMISSION™

## 1 JOHN 4:6 – WHO ARE WE TO BELIEVE? Part 5

COLORADO

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*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 must always evaluate what we hear and measure it against what Scripture says. Scripture is the only reliable test and the Word 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.*

### I. 1 JOHN 4:6 WHO ARE WE TO BELIEVE? PART FIVE

*(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.” (6) “We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.” 1 John 4:1-6*

The false teacher cares nothing for what God wants and everything for what men and women want. They are man-pleasers rather than God-pleasers. Of these the Apostle Paul would write in 2 Timothy 4:3-4, “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.” False teachers crave popularity and praise from the world. To maintain their follower’s respect, they preach only the parts of the Bible that are “acceptable”. They speak much of happiness but little of sin, much about heaven and nothing about hell. They give people what they want to hear. They preach a partial gospel which is no gospel at all. They preach this partial, false gospel to packed crowds. This is what John warns all believers to test and know what is truth and what is error.

### A. “WE ARE FROM GOD...”- 1 JOHN 4:6A

*“We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.” 1 John 4:6*

The world’s hearty response to false teachers stresses the need for John to emphasize another aspect, which is revealed by the

kind of followers they draw. John begins verse 6 with “We”. With the use of this pronoun, John does not refer to all believers. His reference would go back to the beginning of this letter, to 1 John 1:1-4 where we find the use of this pronoun referring most strongly to the Apostolic teaching and testimony. The “we” mentioned 6 times in the first three verses, refers to a certain group of people who have heard, seen and touched. It was those few who were qualified to be Apostles because they witnessed all Jesus did. (Acts 10:41) This witness was more than just John, it was a united witness by all the Apostles to the veracity, the reality and truth of Who Jesus Christ is.

John emphasizes the material manifestation of Jesus to men’s ears, eyes and hands. Indeed, John’s Epistle reminds us that faith in Jesus is **NOT** a matter of credulity, mysticism or superstition. Our faith is belief that is founded on evidence. The Apostles were men of reason.<sup>1</sup> Jesus was a true flesh and bone body as witnessed by the Apostles; both before Christ’s death on the cross, witnessing His death, and after His resurrection. They heard Jesus Christ, they visibly saw and touched Jesus in the flesh before and after He rose from the dead. The Christian faith is founded upon evidence!

So John refers to the collective testimony of the Apostles as the direct counterparts to the false teachers. And he describes them as “from God” referring to where their personal allegiance lies. They are of God and belong to God.

### B. “HE WHO KNOWS GOD LISTENS TO US...”- 1 JOHN 4:6B

*“We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.” 1 John 4:6*

Critical to John’s description of the Apostles is that “he” who knows God will listen to the Apostles testimony. One of the distinguishing marks of true believers, people who “know God” is that they listen to, believe and embrace Apostolic teaching. Our new birth in Jesus Christ gives us an appetite for God’s truth. In John 10:27, Jesus said, “My sheep hear My voice and I know them and they follow Me.” One’s response to God’s Word can reveal whether you “know God” or whether you are not from God.<sup>2</sup> This relationship is not merely an intellectual relationship based on just a bunch of facts, but rather a living, growing walk with Christ that affects one’s mind, heart and life. And because they “listen” to the Apostolic teaching, the

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Word of God, this means there is a receptive hearing, living and doing the message from God. This is a genuine believer.

### C. “HE WHO IS NOT FROM GOD...”- 1 JOHN 4:6C

*“We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.” 1 John 4:6*

As John contrasts the false teacher with this next phrase, notice he does not say that this one does not “*know God*”. Rather John says, “*he who is not from God*”. Clearly John identifies this one as not being born of God. Only through the new birth does one come into a genuine relationship with God. Only the one born again has the ears attentive to the Word of God.<sup>3</sup> So John makes clear that whoever is not from God does not listen to the Apostles teaching.

The written revelation of Scripture is the sole authority by which Christians must test all teaching. (2 Timothy 3:16-17) This is the standard of truth. (John 17:17) It is more sure than any experience. (2 Peter 1:19) and it endures forever. (1 Peter 1:25) It is trustworthy all together. (Matthew 5:18) And it is unchanging and eternal. (Isaiah 40:8)<sup>4</sup>

### D. “BY THIS WE KNOW...”- 1 JOHN 4:6D

*“By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.” 1 John 4:6d*

How can we know who to listen to? Those who are from God and those who are from the world can be distinguished by their response or lack of response to the Apostolic teaching. If John was the only one claiming this it would be presumptuous, but it is not. This refers to the collective testimony of all the Apostles, the “*we*” who were the eyewitnesses that visibly saw, touched and heard the message of Jesus Christ. Therefore, John refers to the collective testimony of the Apostles as the direct counterparts to the false teachers. In addition, he describes them as “*from God*” referring to where their personal allegiance lies. They are of God and belong to God.

### E. SPIRIT OF TRUTH/THE SPIRIT OF ERROR-1 JOHN 4:6E

*“By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.” 1 John 4:6e*

All believers are responsible to distinguish between the “*spirit of truth and the spirit of error*.” They represent two realms, two

spirits competing for the control over all humanity. The “*spirit of truth*” refers to the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit. (John 14:17, 15:26, 16:13) By this description, John sets forth the very nature of the Spirit Himself Who is the embodiment of truth. By contrast and opposition to the Spirit of truth is the “*spirit of error*.”<sup>5</sup> And this is the only place in the New Testament where this phrase occurs.

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“*error*” Greek “*planes*” a noun meaning wandering, roaming and used to denote error, delusion, deceit, deception, the leading astray, deceit.

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John refers to the relentless activity of Satan and his minions. John has already warned against “*those who are trying to lead you astray*.” (1 John 2:26 and 3:7) John characterizes these antichrists as those who seduce you, trying to deceive and lead astray believers. And they will persist even if they are not effective. They will continue to try and are tireless in their effort to deceive. John doesn’t underestimate their persistence and wants believers to be continually on guard against their deceptive efforts.<sup>6</sup> We must never underestimate the strength or subtlety of the deceivers, the antichrists. John continues to warn that there is great danger from deceivers. John gives a description of the relentless activities of Satan and his false prophets. Their activity is to promote error or deception. They are engaged in relentless effort to lead believers into spiritual error. Satan is ever at work through his human agents, the false prophets. And man’s reasoning not God’s revelation is their final authority for the “*spirit of error*”.

There is a warfare between the “*Spirit of truth and the spirit of error*” for the control over the life and destiny of mankind. And we must remember what John has just taught, “*that greater is He Who is in you than he who is in the world*.” (1 John 4:4) These dark and destructive forces are real but they pale in comparison to the power and victory we have in Jesus Christ because we “*know God*”.

Remember, we live in an era that looks with suspicion on any certainty or conviction about the truth. But we must be like the noble Bereans who tested and compared everything they heard and were taught. (Acts 17:11)

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<sup>1</sup> Erdman, Charles R., *The General Epistles: An Exposition*. The Westminster Press: Philadelphia, PA, 1919. Pg. 115.

<sup>2</sup> Hamilton, Ian, *Let’s Study the Letters of John*. The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, UK, 2008. Pg. 56-57.

<sup>3</sup> Hiebert, D. Edmond, *The Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary*. Bob Jones University Press: Greenville, SC, 1991. Pg. 191.

<sup>4</sup> MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Commentary Series on 1-3 John*. Moody Press: Chicago, IL, 2007. Pg. 159-160.

<sup>5</sup> Hiebert, D. Edmond, *The Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary*. Bob Jones University Press: Greenville, SC, 1991. Pg. 193.

<sup>6</sup> Hiebert, D. Edmond, *The Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary*. Bob Jones University Press: Greenville, SC, 1991. Pg. 121.