

TITLE: FALSE TEACHERS EXPOSED

TEXT: 1 JOHN 4:1-6

INTRO: Context: John has been teaching about brotherly love –the family of God (i.e., how *not* to treat a brother –Cain; how to treat a brother – help him with his needs, even laying down your life). He taught brotherly love in **2:9-11**, then let them know that there were antichrists (false teachers) among them (**2:18-23**). Again, he taught brotherly love (**ch. 3**), and will continue on the topic in **4:7**, but interjects this reminder about false teachers. It’s as if he’s saying, “love one another (**3:16-18**), but part of loving is rebuking, even to the point of disfellowshipping. And these antichrists are **not** to be treated as brethren!

I. IDENTIFYING FALSE TEACHERS (v. 1-3):

(v. 1) Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

- A. *Do not believe every spirit....* A “spirit” in this context refers to men who would stand before them (the church) to teach (i.e., the spirit by which he spoke). John warns **not** to simply believe a man who shows up & claims to speak God’s words. In 1st century context, this is exactly what would happen. In **3 John**, John commends Gaius for being a loving brother & supporting these true, inspired men. But in **2 John 9-11** he warns about accepting & supporting those who “*abide not in the doctrine of Christ.*”
- B. *But try the spirits whether they are of God.* “Try, test, discern, prove” them – make sure they really are who they claim to be!
- How? In that miraculous age, one of the abilities the Holy Spirit provided certain members of the church was the “*discerning of spirits*” (**1 Cor 12:10**) – the ability to know whether the speaker’s message was indeed from God. Paul called on the Corinthian brethren to use this ability to verify *his* words (**14:37**). This would’ve been an extremely important ability considering they didn’t have the completed NT then. John says the same thing of these brethren (**2:20,27**).
 - Additionally, even *without* this ability they could know in general whether or not a man was abiding in the doctrine of Christ (as mentioned from **2 John 9**). Obviously there would be some fundamental errors that a man could teach that the brethren would be able to discern *without* any miraculous ability (e.g., that Jesus did *not* come in the flesh–**v. 2-3**)! No special ability would be necessary to show this man to be a false teacher (cf. **1:1-3**)! So test them (miraculously & by current knowledge).
- C. *Because many false prophets are gone out.... 2:19–“they went out from us, but they were not of us....”* They came out of “us” (church, i.e., they were Christians), but were not **of** us (of the truth, of the same obedient mentality). They apostatized, otherwise they would’ve stayed with us. The NT warns often of false prophets (**Matt 24; Acts 20:29-30, Gal 1:6-9; 1 Tim 4:1-4; 2 Pet 2-3**), etc. John says they’re out there too – so don’t be fooled! They’re goal is usually power, prestige, & money!
- Gnostics claimed “special knowledge” (God told *me* this, & not you)! They had different claims regarding Jesus (He *wasn’t* God in the flesh; He was only God from the time of His baptism until the time of His crucifixion, etc). Don’t buy it! *Ye have an anointing from the Holy One, & ye know all things. I have not written unto you because ye know not....”* (**2:20-21, 27**).
 - If many false prophets had gone out by the time John writes this (& before), what should we expect today?!
- a. Christians can be so naïve when it comes to accepting this! “Oh *my* preacher could *never* be a false teacher!” (cf. **Ac 17:11**)! False teachers today have different doctrines, but they’re goals are the same (they want to fleece the flock)!
- b. We can’t “discern spirits” miraculously today (& we don’t need to)! We have the completed NT, providing us all we need to know about Jesus & His doctrine. So we simply need to compare it to what is being taught (again, **Acts 17:11**).
- D. John isn’t talking about a teacher who teaches error by mistake; this man will correct himself. He’s talking about a false teacher!

(v. 2) Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:

- A. *By this you all know the Spirit of God....* “Spirit” could refer to the disposition of the man, as affected by God. This would certainly apply to today, since the Holy Spirit isn’t given today as in the 1st century. But in this context he’s referring to the Holy Spirit: By this you know whether or not it is the Holy Spirit speaking through this man, as he’s claiming:
- B. *Every spirit that confesses....* If a man makes this confession, he is truly from God, just as he’s claiming. But lots of men will make this claim today, yet they teach things that are clearly in opposition to the NT!
- Remember synecdoche (part stands for the whole). If you believe that Jesus was the Son of God in the flesh, then you’ll obey Him in *whatever* He says (cf. **3:23** – did Jesus just want us to believe but not obey? **Jn 14:15**)!
 - Don’t remove this from its **context!** *Today* there are countless false religions & teachers all claiming to be Christianity & who all believe that Jesus came in the flesh. But when John wrote there were **NO** denominations. Today’s context is **NOT** what John is addressing! He’s addressing the problem of *his* day– Gnostics –which would **not** confess this!

(v. 3) And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh [ASV omits “is come in the flesh”] is not of God: and this is that spirit of [the] antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

- A. *Every spirit that confesses not....* These Gnostics would **not** confess that Jesus was God in the flesh, or “the Son of God”–**4:15**, or “the Christ”–**5:1** (or simply “confess Jesus” as the ASV reads). So they *can’t* be from God! This is obvious!
- B. If not from God, then they are antichrists (opposed to Christ). As we mentioned in **2:18-23**, the world has a false idea that there will be one Antichrist who will come in the “last days,” and this will be a sign of the end of the world!
- First of all, John is *not* talking about the end of the world; he isn’t giving signs for any future event. He’s warning faithful brethren about false brethren – those who were *already* teaching their error – and how to recognize them.
 - Even though the definite article “the” is in the Greek (i.e., “this is that spirit of *the* antichrist”), this is not specifying one particular person. It’s specifying a particular *spirit* (disposition) – the *spirit* of one who is antichrist (opposed to Christ), and the attitude & teaching that come from it. And as John says twice, these antichrists **are already here** (**2:18; 4:3**)!
 - In **2 Thess 2:3** Paul speaks of the man of sin & the falling away. This is **NOT** a *future* person/event today; it was already “working” then (**v. 7**). Paul was telling Christians, who were overly concerned about Christ’s return being imminent, that this would happen first, so He couldn’t return until sometime *after* it happened (but **not immediately** after).
 - Even if John is referring to this man of sin, he says that the same spirit (i.e., opposition to Christ) is already here! So John’s point was **NOT** to worry about some *future* event, but to identify the dangers **in the present**, & defeat them (**v. 4-6**)!

CONCLUSION: If this was the message *then*, how much more so now? We’re to love one another, but this does **not** mean we ignore false teachers! Love calls us to expose them & their error (**Eph 5:11**), so others can be saved! Do *you* know the truth well enough to expose error?

II. OVERCOMING FALSE TEACHERS (v. 4-6):

A. The Christian's Source (v. 4)

(v. 4) *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. *Ye are of* (out of, source) *God* - again, John speaks of the source of the Christian; he is of (spiritually born/begotten) God.
 - a. How are we of God? *Every one that doeth righteousness is born of God (2:29), Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin (3:9), whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother (3:10).*
 - b. Because you **do** these things, He abides in you (3:24), which means *His Word* abides in you (John 14:23; 15:7), which means you are obedient to it! This is what it means to be "of God," AND this is the resolution to *any* spiritual problem!
2. *Ye...have overcome* (conquer, prevail against) *them*. You've overcome these false teachers, these antichrists (contextually, these Gnostics). You've overcome their temptations & influences. What temptations & influences?
 - a. The temptation to leave the truth and accept their false teachings about Jesus. This was a huge issue in the 1st century church, and apparently **many** were falling prey to it. John says that these brethren were not!
 - b. Or, rather than outright departure from the truth, it's possible to yield to the temptation of compromise. As it is today, it must've been tempting to compromise the truth in order to fit in – in order to avoid confrontations & disagreements. The temptation to do this can be **very** strong. Many people believe that this is the definition of unity (i.e., have your beliefs, but accept everyone else's too, just so we can all have "unity"). We're unified in the truth, not error. If someone is teaching error, we can't have fellowship together (1:7). Rather we can & should **teach** them. But if they won't listen, we must withdraw from them.
 - c. John says these brethren had overcome & were continuing to overcome the Gnostics false teachings & influence. How?
 - a. "He that is in you" is God (i.e., the anointing—2:20,27), & is greater than "he that is in the world" (Satan —3:8).
 - The miraculous knowledge & abilities these brethren had was far greater than anything the Gnostics had to offer!
 - Notice John doesn't say "greater is He that is in you than he that is in them (false teachers, antichrists)." Rather he refers to them as "the world" (i.e., Satan's realm). There's either God or Satan (the world); you're either on one side or the other. John doesn't create a third category in which to place these men (like people want to do today).
 - b. You've overcome *them*, so you've overcome him (Satan). You're able to defeat their false doctrines because of Him that is in you. Again, this is seen in two ways: **1)** Through the Holy Spirit that was in them & provided miraculous abilities, and **2)** through their non-miraculous knowledge of His will (same as us today).
 - c. He says "you've overcome" (perfect tense— you have & still are), but he still warns them. Never be so confident that you think you can't fall (1 Cor 10:12—"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall").
 - d. But *do know* that if we're obedient to the Word, our eternity is secure! What we have today in the Word is far greater than anything the world can throw at us! *Fear not them which kill the body but are not able to kill the soul (Mt 10:28).*
3. *Because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.*
 - a. "He that is in you" is God (i.e., the anointing—2:20,27), & is greater than "he that is in the world" (Satan —3:8).
 - The miraculous knowledge & abilities these brethren had was far greater than anything the Gnostics had to offer!
 - Notice John doesn't say "greater is He that is in you than he that is in them (false teachers, antichrists)." Rather he refers to them as "the world" (i.e., Satan's realm). There's either God or Satan (the world); you're either on one side or the other. John doesn't create a third category in which to place these men (like people want to do today).
 - b. You've overcome *them*, so you've overcome him (Satan). You're able to defeat their false doctrines because of Him that is in you. Again, this is seen in two ways: **1)** Through the Holy Spirit that was in them & provided miraculous abilities, and **2)** through their non-miraculous knowledge of His will (same as us today).
 - c. He says "you've overcome" (perfect tense— you have & still are), but he still warns them. Never be so confident that you think you can't fall (1 Cor 10:12—"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall").
 - d. But *do know* that if we're obedient to the Word, our eternity is secure! What we have today in the Word is far greater than anything the world can throw at us! *Fear not them which kill the body but are not able to kill the soul (Mt 10:28).*

B. The Non-Christian's Source (v. 5)

(v. 5) *They are of the world: therefore speak they [as] of the world, and the world heareth them.*

1. *They* – these antichrists –*are of* (out of, source) *the world*. Again, "the world" is Satan's realm; it's "not of God." In the NT, "the world" refers to the lost (i.e., everyone *other than* the church). 5:19- "*and we know that we (the church) are of God, & the whole world (everyone else) lieth in wickedness.*" "*Love not the world...*" (2:15; cf. Jam 4:4). And here, John refers to these **antichrists** synonymously with "the world," because Satan controls **both!** There's no middle ground! This applies to **everyone** outside the church (from the believers to the non-believers to the Satan worshippers)!
2. Because these false teachers are **of** the world, therefore they speak of (out of) the world – their words & actions are worldly; they fit in with the world.
 - There should be a huge, visible distinction between the world & the church! When a person becomes a Christian, his life changes; he speaks & acts differently (different from how he used to, and different from his non-Christian friends & family), because he is no longer *of the world*. And when he speaks & lives the Word in his life, **he WILL stand out!**
3. These antichrists also stand out; they're claiming to be in the church, having left the world, but they're still worldly, and this is noticeable! Sound Christians know better, but the world does not, so they listen. In other words, those Christians who hear (give audience to) these antichrists & "*follow their pernicious ways*" (2 Pet 2:2) are still worldly themselves! That's why they listen to these false teachers! Do we not see why it's so important to leave the unbiblical ways of the world?!

C. The Reaction to The Truth (v. 6)

(v. 6) *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.*

1. Continuing the contrast, he says *we are of God* – because we do righteousness... (3:10). These are the only options (God or the world/Satan). There is such a huge disparity between the two, and it's seen in the followers of the two as well.
2. *He that knows God, hears* (listen to, give audience to) *us*. "Knows God" is synonymous with being "of God," as seen in this verse. He that *isn't* of God doesn't hear us; he doesn't follow the truth.
3. He doesn't say this person *can't* hear us, but *doesn't* hear us (he doesn't hear because he doesn't *want* to hear & obey)!
4. *Hereby we know...* We know them by what *they* say (refusal to confess Christ –v. 2-3; worldliness –v. 5); We know them by their response to what *we* say (v. 6). This is plenty of evidence as to who a person really is: **1)** listen to him talk (e.g., confession of Jesus, knowledge of His word, & obedience to His word), and **2)** talk to him about the Word. Does he hear you? Does he disagree with Scripture? Is he more interested in what he already believes, or his feelings, etc.? Is he even interested in this type of discussion? Every false teacher I've known could be exposed in these ways.

CONCLUSION: False teachers are legion today. But they can be overcome, because He that is in us is greater! If you know His word, then you know that there's *no* false teaching that it doesn't address. But you must know it, and this requires a lot of personal effort. It's a great responsibility...but with great benefits! How comforting to know that in our Bible we have the ability to identify & overcome *any* error!