

TRUTH COMMUNITY

- TEACHING GOD'S PEOPLE GOD'S WORD -

Who Speaks for God

1 John 4:1-6

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Good morning. Welcome to GraceLife. Again, it has already been a good morning. (an inaudible word) says rejoice with those who rejoice, not so much weeping with those who weep this morning, just a lot of good rejoicing to be able to share with the people of God and to see the power of the Holy Spirit to leave people out of error and in to truth.

The time before in our little fellowship time there, as Paul was introducing visitors, everything illustrated for us the reality that we all know is that we live in the midst of impeding claims to spiritual authority, competing claims of people saying “I speak for God, I speak for God” saying different things, having different ideas about what truth is, new philosophies of ministry, charismatic phenomena comes in modern day so-called prophecies, institutions like the Jehovah’s witnesses and the Mormons and the Catholic church, all claiming to speak for God.

And yet ironically in the midst of those spiritual claims, we live in a cultural environment where there are incessant pleas and cries for tolerance and acceptance of your view of truth and my view of truth are equally valid, sadly coming from the midst of those even who would claim to be Christians. And so there is a horrible stew of spiritual claims to authority while anyone trying to say that’s wrong and false and demonic is decried as intolerant and unjust and all of that.

Well, in the midst of that kind of confusion, whenever there is confusion in the society at large, in the church in general or in your own personal life, the thing you do is you go quickly to the word of God to get clarity. The wonderful thing of course about the word of God is that it clears away the smoke, it brings clarity and focus and accuracy to our thinking and gives us a sense of confidence as we move forward as to what exactly is the truth and what God would have us believe and what God would have us to do in the life that He has given us.

In our passage this morning from 1 John chapter 4 (I invite you to turn there) in our passage this morning, the apostle John shows us how to discern and to protect ourselves from those false teachers who would corrupt the gospel and undermine our confidence in Christ. And so we are going to look at the first six verses of chapter 4 this morning from the epistle of 1 John. Let me read them for you to set them in your mind as we begin. Apostle John writes:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God because many false prophets have gone in to the world. By this you know the Spirit of God, every Spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of anti christ of

which you have heard that it was coming and now it is already in the world. 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. They are from the world, therefore they speak as from the world and the world listens to them. 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.

Now people get confused over the conflicting voices and to the point of wanting to throw up their hands and say “I don’t know what to believe, therefore I’m not even going to try.” And this passage teaches us that checking out and spiritually resigning from the process is not an option. John tells us to test the spirits not to withdraw from any and all spiritual extraction, but he says to test the spirits. There is a responsibility that you have as a believer to test the spirits, to examine what teachers say and determine whether what they say is true or not. And so we are not meant to be people who don’t know who to believe or what to believe.

But understand this, and I find a lot of encouragement from this particular fact. Our situation today is nothing new at all. Throughout the history of revelation of Bible history, there have been competing truth claims that people had to deal with as they were walking through life as the people of God. The Egyptian magicians challenged Moses in Exodus chapters 7-11. The prophets of Baal challenged Elijah in 1 Kings chapter 18. Moving in to the New Testament, the Pharisees challenged Jesus and magicians challenged the apostle Paul—this is nothing new. And spiritual confusion reigning in the masses is nothing new. You remember that Jesus asked His disciples “Who do the people say that I am?” They say well “Some say John the Baptist and others Elijah and others one of the prophets.” There was just total confusion in the circle surrounding the teaching of Jesus about who He was. This confusion, this competing truth claims were nothing new, and we ultimately have to get down to the question of who speaks for God.

And speaking of your individual responsibility, I always find it fascinating that Jesus responds to that to those confusing perceptions of who He was. It was to ask the disciples directly “But who do you say that I am?” Naturally the question, who do you say Jesus is? What do you say the truth is? How do you know what the truth is? It is not that we are independent agents, flying around, making our own truth claims, the question is how do we understand the objective authority of truth that is outside us. What are the marks of truth that are independent of us. What is true if you have never been born, as our pastor MacArthur likes to ask the question. What is truth and how do we know who speaks for God?

Can we get something out of the way really quickly especially in this day where the charismatic nonsense has infiltrated the church and become a cancer that doesn’t seem to be going away anytime soon. Understand this, understand the miraculous signs prove nothing. It is as though their little controlled environment healing services in stadiums would somehow prove that what they say is truth. Nothing could be more backward and false and misguided than that. The Bible specifically warns us not to look for signs and wonders as a test of truth. Jesus said in Matthew 24, at the end times, He said:

False christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders so as to mislead if possible even the elect.

The fact that somebody puts on a little show in front of you doesn't say anything about whether they are speaking the truth or not. The beast in Revelation 13 performs great signs in order to deceive the nations. And so, the message of the scripture as we are going to see as we go on, consistently at so many times says don't be gullible, don't believe everybody that passes by, don't be taken in by the latest excitement that is surrounding the latest charismatic thing that is going on, you can count on more waves of this coming. Don't be tossed about, Ephesians says, don't be tossed about from one wave to another, but be established in the truth. And understand that those who are looking for miracles are easy prey, they are targets for the devil because the fact that something, even if something is supernatural and not simply manufactured, the fact that something is supernatural does not say anything about whether it is from God or not. Listen to 2 Corinthians chapter 11, beginning in verse 13, he says:

These men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

Can you imagine how many books somebody can write if they had a true experience and say "Oh, an angel of light came to me." Man, the Christian world would suck that up and put it at the top of the best sellers list, all the while drinking in a doctrine of Satan. It is unbelievable that we have become so gullible and so spineless in our discernment in this day and age.

But understand this, disguised as an angel of light, Paul goes on to say.

Therefore, it is not surprising if his servants (Satan's servants) also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness whose end will be according to their deeds.

Understand that there are going to be disguises, there are going to be men pretending to be one thing when they are actually something else—wolves in sheep's clothing. You have to be able to penetrate beyond the superficial appearance, beyond the superficial claim that someone has to be speaking for God and say "What are you actually saying? By that I will judge whether you speak for God or not."

Well, 1 John, chapter 4, this passage I just read directs us toward that kind of discernment. There are three points that I want to bring out for you today from the passage:

1. The Command for Discernment

Understand that we are commanded to be discerning. We are not to be gullible children, but we are to be mature adults who test what we hear.

Now, entering in to the world of the people who received John's letter, they were the subject to the teachers who were trying to deceive them. When John wrote this, he was writing about a matter that was urgent and practical to them when they received the letter. They needed his help

urgently right then. Look at chapter 2:26 just to help you see this, that the thread of spiritual deception among the recipients of John's letter was an important issue. He says in verse 26:

These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you...

There were people in their midst trying to deceive these believers that John was writing to protect. The efforts of deception are nothing new, the fact that we realize that should give us some strength and encouragement. Look at chapter 3:7:

Little children, make sure that no one deceives you. The one who practices righteousness is righteous just as He is righteous. The one who practices sin is of the devil.

He says "little children" and "beloved"; he is appealing to them. His apostolic love and concern for them which is the mark of the true man of God, a spiritual leader, as one who loves the flock, and it comes out and is expressed in a way that he talks with them and deals with them.

Contrast that with what the Jehovah's witnesses do when someone wants to leave their organization, they shun them and essentially kill them and have no contact. It is a brutal method of dealing with people who are presumed to test the spirits.

By contrast, the true man of God, the true leaders of God, those who truly speak for God are those who are inclined toward obedient toward God's word and who love the brethren—that is the nature of true spiritual leadership.

All of that simply to say that John's readers were dealing with this problem of potential deception and so John steps in to the breach in order to help them. I love that about this letter, I love the whole approach that the apostle John takes. There is a great article waiting to be written by someone who would examine John's pastoral approach to his leaders, but that's for another time and for another man to do. But notice this, notice that in the midst of that deception, John tells them to test the spirits. Look at chapter 3:24, we will pick up the context, he says:

The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

By the Spirit that He has given us, and then John picks up on that word "Spirit" and says but there are other spirits that are at work as well, and so in chapter 4:1 he says:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test them to see whether they are from God because many false prophets have gone out in to the world.

Now, a true prophet in Old Testament times was a genuine mouth piece for God's Spirit. God would put His word as it were in the mouths of the prophets and the prophets would speak forth those words and that would be the way that God communicated with His people in Old Testament times. And there was a carry-over as the New Testament canon was being completed, that there were some New Testament prophets as well that were supposed to be speaking

revelation from God. Now by contrast, a false prophet was a mouth piece (get this) a mouth piece for a lying spirit, a mouth piece for a demonic spirit, speaking lies, drawing people away from the truth, trying if possible, even to mislead the elect of God. And so, in these competing claims of spiritual authority, we need to recognize that there is a spiritual battle going on behind the scenes between the unseen forces, the Holy Spirit speaking truth through true teachers of the word of God and demonic spirits, speaking through the false teachers of God, deceiving people, deluding them, leading them away from the true Christ, leading them away from the true gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone based on the scriptures alone.

The difficulty in that situation is that both prophets, both kinds of teachers let's say, are claiming to speak for God. "I speak for God" "I speak for God" one is speaking by inspiration of a demonic spirit, the other speaking truth from God's word. How can you know, how can you tell the difference between that. This is a profound importance, who do you listen to?

Well, in the Old Testament God acknowledged this issue and gave Israel certain standards by which to tell true prophets from false prophets. You can read about that in Deuteronomy 13 and Deuteronomy 18, we won't take time to go there, Jeremiah 28. You know if they speak forth, they make a prediction about the future and it doesn't come true, they are exposed as a false prophet. If they speak things that are true, but somehow use that and distort that in order to call you away from the true living God, false prophet. Who is the god that they ultimately point you to is one aspect of the Old Testament tests. And so God, from the very beginning of calling His people out from Egypt established these standards so that they have the means of knowing who they should listen to and whom they should follow.

In the New Testament it is not any different, He has given us other standards by which we can know and we can test the spirits and know who is speaking the truth. We need to be discerning today even if the teachers are claiming to receive new revelation from God. You can go to some of the liberal denominations, look, they are just dead, they are not claiming to speak for anybody, but you still need to know how to discern that and say "Oh, I'm listening to a dead spirit, how about that? No wonder no one is here."

When John uses that phrase, test the spirits, his meaning has the sense of examining something to see if it is genuine or not. A teacher stands up and says "Here is God's word for you," the question is how do you test that to see if it is genuine, something that is true, that is true gold not fool's gold you might say.

Well, this call to discernment as we said is prevalent Jesus said. If you are claiming Jesus as your Master and Lord, understand that He Himself raised this issue in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:15, He said:

Beware of the false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

And He said in the context of teaching that the way to heaven is like a narrow gate, there are few who find it, there are few who enter in, but there are many who are deceived and deluded, going

on the broad way. In that context, Jesus says beware of the false prophets, beware of those who would point you to a different way to heaven, a different way to God. He says be on your guard, be discerning, watch out for this and the early church understood the importance of this. You remember Acts 17:11 as the apostle Paul was circulating and doing his ministry, Acts 17:11 where he said of the Bereans that:

They were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see whether these things were so

Now think about this, here they are, getting instructions from an apostle, the apostle Paul is instructing them and they are hearing what he says and they go to the scriptures and examine what he is teaching them to verify whether it is true or not. What does scripture say about that? What does the scripture call them, noble-minded.

Contrast that with teachers who don't want you to challenge their authority, who don't want you to ask questions, who try to perpetuate their teaching by virtue of their own inherent personal authority and say don't challenge it. That in itself is a big warning sign that somebody is not speaking truly for God because the true teachers invite you to say listen to what I say, understand it and then compare it with scripture. True teachers don't mind that at all, true teachers invite that, want that because they want you to know the truth. If the man is simply concerned about perpetuating his own authority, he will try to forbid that from you. And understand that when that kind of forbidding tone takes place, a forbidding tone that says no, you can't listen to that person, don't read the Bible for yourself as the Catholics are known to do over the centuries, understand that they are trying to seal you off from that which would give you discernment and that which would expose them as the liars and their demonic inspired host that they are.

No, the Bible commands us to test the spirits. Going back to 1 John chapter 4, you can't see this clearly in the English translation, but in the original, the command to test the spirits is in the plural, it is a plural noun given to all believers to test the spirit, no pope, no other leader can preempt or extinguish your right and your responsibility to exercise your private judgment on spiritual matters. You are designed to know the scriptures for yourself and then be able to be discerning about who is teaching the truth and who is not. Understand that God commands us to discern—that's the first point for this morning. Now second point, we won't need to spend much time here because I have been saying this all along, but I just want you to see it from our text this morning:

2. The Need for Discernment

John commands them to test the spirits and then he immediately tells them why they need to do so. Look at the end of verse 1, he says:

Test the spirits because many false prophets have gone out in to the world.

You can't assume that everyone who claims to speak for God actually does. False teachers thrive on their livelihood, and their pretty wealthy livelihood a lot of times depends on people

being gullible, depends on people not asking questions, not thinking for themselves. They thrive on gullible people, they live off the income of gullible people who don't know the scriptures and who don't think to ask. The apostle Peter mentions this in 2 Peter 2:1, and notice that he warns the church about this as he is speaking, he says:

False prophets also arose among the people just as there will also be false teachers among you who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction on themselves.

Paul said to the Ephesian elders in Ephesians 20:29 where he said:

I know that after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them.

You have to be discerning even here in our context, the whole point is to teach and to learn so that we could be even more discerning about what the truth is. What is the need for discernment? Because there are a lot of false teachers out there, there are a lot of false prophets out there, wolves manifested by the same satanic spirit that is looking for someone to devour, to bring you under their authority, to bring you captive to their power and to intimidate you so that you will be an instrument to accomplish their personal and satanic ends—that's why you need to be discerning, you don't want to be under the rule of men like that. That's why God commands us to be discerning, it is not so that we can be unloving, it is not so that we can be puffed up and boastful about our position or anything like that. No, it is in order to protect us.

Think about building a garden, you build a garden and you put a fence around it to keep the rabbits out, so that the rabbits don't come in and devour what you are trying to grow. What the apostle John is doing here in this section of scripture is he is putting a fence of protection around the believers so that (get this) the confidence that he had been talking to them about at the end of chapter 3, this confidence before God in chapter 3:21, we have confidence before God, John understands that if false teachers get in to the garden so to speak, they are going to eat away at the spiritual fruit that he is trying to cultivate in them.

They are going to be attacked by these false teachers if he did not do something to protect them. And so in giving this passage on this sermon, he is protecting the believers, building a fence around them to keep the wolves out and to keep the true believers in, a situation where their love for one another could flourish, their love for God and their love for Christ could flourish and that they could glorify God in the circumstances in which He has placed them. There are significant things at stake in this, significant spiritual consequences to this, that's why the Bible talks about it so very much, that's why John talks about it here.

I want you to see this connection, I want you to see the end of chapter 3 again, just how much his heart is bleeding for these people. The love of his heart is just pouring out upon them and he says in chapter 3:13, don't be surprised brethren, my spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ, don't be surprised that the world hates you. Verse 18:

Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue...

He was probably about 90 years old when he was writing this, everyone was a child to him by comparison. He has that affectionate tone of a father loving his children saying, little children, let me tell you something else. And then in chapter 3:21 he says:

Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God...

What you need to see in that is the great love and affection that this apostle has, trying to protect them, trying to build them up. And understand that the call to discernment flows right on the heels of that kind of apostolic love. And as I have said many times, John's apostolic love for his readers is only a reflection that points you to the love that God has for his sons and daughters in Christ. This is the attitude of God toward His children, it is a loving protective attitude. So when He calls us to discernment, He is calling us that way in order to protect us and in order to bless us. And churches and professing Christians ignore this command only in disobedience to God and in putting their own souls in peril. You can't be undiscerning and be an obedient Christian. Let's put it that way, because the commands come too frequently in the scriptures to view it any other way.

So that's the need for discernment and that's the motive behind it, is God's love for His church, Christ's love for His church and the apostle John's love for the particular flock that was in front of him as he was writing this letter. We are not discerning because we are hateful people. We are discerning because we are loving people and we want to protect people from those influences that would destroy them. We want to protect them from satanic doctrines that would lead them to hell. Of course we are going to be discerning, of course we are going to call out false teachers when we see them. It is not that we are itching for a fight, it is that we are itching to protect the flock of God in obedience to what the scripture says. This is not complicated, this is the heart of God for His people on display as we read this text.

The command for discernment, the need for discernment, what comes next?

3. The Tests for Discernment

If I am going to determine whether something is genuine, I need a standard by which to compare it to. How can I know genuine teachers? How can I know those who truly speak for God? I need something to evaluate them by, something that goes beyond my gut check. You hear people say "I just had a check in my spirit as that person was talking." Well, did you have tacos earlier? May be that was the check in your gut. (That happened to me not long ago.) Don't rely on indigestion to give you a sense of discernment.

No, no. The sense of discernment is first of all, objective, it is outside of you. There are standards of truth outside of you that are independent of your existence that help us understand what is true and what is not. Those things that help us discern true teachers and false teachers, those things that help us discern true Christians from false Christians even if they are not in the teaching capacity. And for some of you, those tests that would apply to you to see whether you

yourself are truly in the faith as you claim to be or not. It is the same standards that are operating to give us clarity in all of these things, but John is applying them particularly to teachers in this passage.

John had earlier written in the letter that you could identify false teachers and false Christians through (get this) their ungodly lifestyles and their unloving dispositions, their unloving behavior. The unloving lifestyles and unloving dispositions expose who true Christians are and who the children of the devil are. Look at chapter 3:10:

By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious. Anyone who does not practice righteousness is not from God nor the one who does not love his brother

Ungodly lifestyle, unloving nature clearly exposing somebody as a false professor, a false teacher. Harsh arrogant men, even if they are speaking things that are apparently true are not meant to be followed. I have seen some of them in the past, they are not around here, but in past experiences I have seen them like that in leadership, liars, arrogant, abusive, those are men that need to be kicked out not affirmed just because they happen to speak things that are true. So John tells us, watch out for ungodly lifestyle, watch out for the arrogant men and be discerning and let it be obvious to you who is true and who is not because if they live that way, you can tell that they are not true believers. If they tell you that you can live that way and still be a true Christian, they are false teachers because true Christians are loving, true Christians are obedient to God's word, true Christians hunger after Christ. If someone tells you that you can profess Christ as a child and live unchanged for decades and still be a true Christian and go to heaven when you die, that is an absolute lie no matter what else they say because this is obvious, John says, God says in His word, that someone who does not practice righteousness is not from God and the one who does not love his brother is not from God.

Let's not make this more complicated than it is, let's not make excuses for people that we see, or loved ones in our family who are living godless lives and yet profess Christ. Don't give them the comfort of saying "Well, I'm sure you're just... You know, you just need to come back to the Lord." Yes, they need to come to the Lord, it's not come back, it's because they're not saved that they're living that way. John says this is obvious.

Now, as we move in to chapter 4, he is dealing with the different aspect of discernment. He is dealing with two doctrinal tests to aid our discernment. Remember, we are trying to answer the question, who speaks for God. Well, think about this, I was thinking about this just a little while ago. There are two places that come immediately to my mind where the scripture particularly says that God has spoken. One of them is in Hebrews 1:2 where it says:

In these latter days, God has spoken in His Son.

God spoke in Christ, God spoke in the incarnation. Elsewhere, 2 Timothy 3:16 says:

All scripture is inspired by God...

God breathed out in the scriptures, came in to existence as it were. God, speaking in His Son, God speaking in the scriptures. Now get this, this is so simple, the man who truly speaks for God is going to be a man who speaks for God where God has already spoken. He is going to be a man who speaks on Christ and exalts and glorifies Christ and he is going to be a man who speaks and explains the scriptures because that is where God has spoken. And when you read this passage in 1 John 4, you see that that is exactly where John points our attention as well.

Point #3 is the test for discernment:

A. Examine their view of Christ

What is their view of Christ, because the person's teaching about Christ is the acid test. Those who rightly confess Jesus prove that they possess the spirit of truth, that the Holy Spirit is truly speaking through them. The Holy Spirit's ministry is to glorify not Himself, but to glorify Christ—that's what you look for. Look at verses 2-3, he says:

By this you know the Spirit of God, every Spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God, this is the spirit of antichrist of which you have heard that it is coming and now is already in the world.

I want you to notice something here. First of all, when he says that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, he is speaking about the incarnation, he is speaking that this man's view of Christ is that Jesus Christ is God from all eternity past, God come in human flesh. He is saying that is what it means, this is the Spirit that confesses Jesus. Look for a man who confesses the true incarnation, that doesn't try to diminish Christ by saying he was a god or he was a created being or he was someone else supernatural or he was a really good man or he was the greatest of all the prophets. No, anything that pulls Jesus down off His deity by any degree whatsoever is the mark of the antichrist because a false Christ cannot save you. You must believe in the true Christ in order to be saved.

The gospel of John says in John 1:14:

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

How simple, how clear is that "...the Word was God..." We have covered that in the past in detail. The teachers in John's day did not teach that, there were men who were saying that Jesus, the man Jesus, was an ordinary man, born by ordinary means of procreation to Joseph and Mary and then a Christ spirit came upon him at his baptism that abided on him and that gave him the power for his earthly ministry and then that spirit departed Jesus before he was crucified. And so Jesus under this teaching was born as an ordinary baby to ordinary parents and he died as an ordinary man and there was just this parenthesis in between. They denied the incarnation, they taught a false Christ. Notice, they were talking about Jesus, they were attributing supernatural things to him, but in the end they denied the incarnation, they denied that Jesus was the Christ

from God who came in flesh, Jesus Himself. It wasn't that the Christ spirit came in to a preexisting man. No, the man Jesus was a human expression, He was God in human flesh, Jesus came from heaven and became that man. He didn't come in to somebody preexisting, He was that man, He was incarnated as it were.

Now, the apostle John says the true teachers affirm that, true teachers affirm that God became flesh in Jesus Christ. True teachers affirm that deity in human flesh were fully wedded together for ever in Christ and that this was done for the work of our redemption. Jesus was a full human being so that He could die in our place. He was fully God, uncreated, coequal with the Father through all of eternity, there was never a time where Jesus was not. There was never a point in the history of all time where Jesus was not preexisting eternally you could say. Jesus was fully God so that His sacrifice on the cross could have infinite value to redeem His people. He died as our substitute, He died to save us. Anyone who does not teach those things is a false teacher, inspired by the devil himself—that's what John is saying here.

What I want you to see here in particular at this point, notice in verse 3:

Every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.

Understand that he is simply saying "confess Jesus" there in verse 3 is a short hand reference to everything that he had just said in verse 2, it is the full confession of verse 2 and you need to make that full confession in verse 3. It is not simply that he acknowledges the historical existence of the man named Jesus and therefore confesses that minimum amount, then you can give him a pass. No, he is using that as a short hand reference to bring in to verse 3 everything that he had said in verse 2. And every spirit, every teacher, look at it, it's just right there on the pages of scripture, I am not making this up, every spirit, every so-called prophet, every teacher that does not confess Jesus in that full, undiminished sense is expressing the spirit of the antichrist.

The spirit of the antichrist is speaking through that man who week after week, month after month stands in the pulpit and simply tells us funny stories and never gets around to really teaching truth about Christ because this confession is an open confession, it's an open thing, it's not something the teacher hides in his heart and says "Yes I believe that, but my ministry is something else, so I'm going to talk about these other things as I supposedly speak for God." No, no. If a man is a pastor, if a man is called to teach and proclaim the word of God and he truly believes these things that we are talking about this morning, he will have to speak about them because his heart compulsion is such that he could not speak about anything else.

When you truly love Christ as a minister of the gospel, you can't get up and talk about stupid, silly earthly things because you are so compelled by the greatness and the grandeur of Jesus Christ and the greatness and the grandeur of the gospel. And you are so compelled by the urgent need of the people in front of you to believe and to be saved from their sins, you are so compelled by that that you can't talk about anything else, it's an open and free confession. And so if a guy gets up and puts on a show for you week after week to entertain you and to make you laugh, to look like a good story teller and then just tacks Jesus on at the end of it, get out, run

from men like that because the little bit of Jesus that they talk about is simply a way to inoculate you against the truth, to lower your standard of discernment and say “Well, he must believe it because he mentions Jesus at the end.”

Please, if the man truly believes these things, Jesus is front and center, the scriptures are front and center. And that is all wrapped up in that verb “confess” it is open, this is his declaration. You don’t give men room to say they have these private beliefs that never work their way out in to what they say in the ministry. That’s even more damnable than anything else, to say you believe it and never talk about it, to hide it. False teachers are going to face a greater condemnation, James 3:1. I wish these men would tremble and fear God because as scripture says they have become a mouth piece for the antichrist. Those who teach falsely about Christ are who stay silent about Christ and are giving voice to demons. They are forerunners of the antichrist who will appear at the end of the age. That’s what it says, look at verse 3 again, I’m not making any of this up:

Every spirit that does not openly confess Jesus is not from God, this is the spirit of the antichrist of which you have heard that it is coming and now it is already in the world.

You read on in the Bible and read about the outcome of the career of the antichrist that he is cast in to eternal hell, you don’t want to go there. You don’t want to follow men like that, you don’t want to follow men who are expressing the spirit of the antichrist.

So be on guard, be discerning. Keep your mind in the scriptures so that when these men come along, you can recognize them and turn away. Because true teachers openly proclaim the true Christ, their view of Christ and what they say about Christ and what they don’t say gives you grounds for great discernment. Next point as our time starts to get away from us. The other test that John lists out here, going beyond their view of Christ:

Sub point 2. Examine their view of scripture

You can recognize true teachers by their attitude and their submission to apostolic teaching. True teachers affirm the Bible as the inerrant word of God. When I say the Bible I am talking about the 39 books of the Old Testament and 27 books of the New Testament, nothing more, nothing less, they affirm that as the inerrant word of God, they heed it, they teach it, they obey it. Look at verses 4-6 with me quickly, he says “You are from God, little children...” There it is again, you see that pastoral note of assurance. In the midst of talking about these false teachers, he immediately comes back to his audience and say, you are from God little children, he affirms them, he loves them, he doesn’t want them to be in a place of doubt and confusion and questions. He is affirming them just like he was at the end of chapter 3:

You are from God little children and you have overcome them because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. They are from the world, therefore they speak as from the world and the world listens to them. 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.

I have to go through this really quickly, but I want you to notice something. Notice in the English text, verse 4 “you” verse 5 “they” verse 6 “we” It is a very emphatic contrast in the original text, he is drawing sharp lines of distinction between you the true Christians who were his audience and the intended recipients of this letter and they the false teachers who were in a separate group and then us, we, he says, talking not about Christian teachers in general, but specifically talking about the apostles. These verses are making emphatic contrasts. And in verse 4 as he says “you” to the true Christians, he says you have overcome the false teachers because the Holy Spirit has guided you in to the truth.

If you have turned away from false teachers, if you have stepped out of a cult and now are following the true Christ, understand it was not because of your superior intellect or superior perception, it is because the Holy Spirit had mercy on you and led you out of that and taught you and gave you discernment and led you away from them. He says that’s how you have overcome the world and you are a true Christian. The verb “overcome” is in the perfect tense, it is an accomplished fact with ongoing results continuing on. You have overcome them and you abide in the continuing results of having overcome them. The Holy Spirit who led you out will not let you go back, He will keep you. You have overcome them. They are a vanquished and defeated foe, these false teachers are, he says. You escaped their lies because of the goodness of the Holy Spirit on your life.

Now in verse 5 he refers to the false teachers. He says you know why the world listens to them? He says they listen to them because the world listens to its own kind. When a religious teacher (I don’t want to call him a Christian teacher) when a religious teacher rises to prominence and has vast people following him, or even a lesser known man who has congregated around him a bunch of unbelievers as he is teaching on supposedly spiritual matters, understand that the audience of these teachers is exposing you to their true reality. The world listens to people who speak from the world, they listen to their own circle. Sinners like false teachers because the sinners themselves are rebelling against the true God and the teaching of the false teacher allows them to continue in that rebellion, it never calls them to repent, it never challenges them and calls them out of it. It never calls them out of their pride and self-sufficiency, to humble themselves before the Lord Jesus Christ. And so of course the world is going to listen to men who never talk that way, who never have that. False teachers simply affirm sinners in their rebellion and their pride and unbelief.

And so as you examine teachers and you see someone who has a following of a lot of unsaved people around him, turn away, turn away from a man like that because the only reason the world continue following after that is because he is not teaching them the truth, the world wouldn’t tolerate it otherwise. And if you find that he was teaching the truth, you find Christians starting to congregate around him because of the value of his ministry. I think some of the people that are involved in seeker sensitive movements, seeker sensitive churches need to pay particular heed to this verse. How could it be that you can build a ministry around people that you are consciously trying to attract the unsaved that says things about you that the world is listening to you, it can listen to you over time and continue to affirm you. You need to be stopped in your track and ask yourself am I really speaking for Christ or not. The world listens to its own.

Now in verse 6 (Give me just a couple of minutes here so I can finish this if you would.) In verse 6 he turns and starts talking and says “we” he is talking about the apostles just like he was in chapter 1. Turn to the very first verse of this letter. Long ago, in a time far, far away, I taught on this passage, we emphasized the authority of the apostles and John opens this letter emphasizing his apostolic credentials:

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands concerning the word of life. What we have seen we testify and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father was manifested to us. What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also.

He is opening with his apostolic credentials. We have seen the true Christ, we have walked with Him, we have touched Him, we have heard them with our ears, we have seen Him with our eyes. We talked about all of that. Here in verse 6, John is not talking about Christians generally, he is talking about the apostolic circle when he says “we are from God.” The apostles were uniquely commissioned by Jesus Christ to be His ambassadors to the world, to be His messengers of truth. And the apostles, he says here in verse 6, “we are from God” we apostles are from God and he who knows God listens to us. The test of listening to apostolic teaching, submitting to, obeying, explaining, affirming apostolic teaching, that’s the test here.

This view of scripture, any teaching from that day forward, from the time of Christ forward must be consistent with apostolic doctrine or it is to be rejected. What he is saying is true Christians listen to the apostles. Stated differently, true Christians are people of the Bible. Jesus said in John 8:47:

He who is of God hears the words of God, for the words of God are contained for us in the scriptures.

So bear with me here. Any one, any teacher, any professing Christian (listen to me very carefully) the apostolic authority is final. Revelation 22:18-19 talks about that:

If anyone takes away from these words or adds to them, let him be accursed.

His name will be erased from the book of life. So there is a finality and a completeness to the apostolic teaching and John says when you listen to that, you know that you are from God, if you don’t listen to that, you know you are not from God.

And so, someone, a teacher or a professing believer who does not submit to the authority of the apostles, does not submit to the word of God or someone who adds to their authority, the supposed additional revelations is not from God because they are not listening to the apostles, they are listening to the myths that they spun out of their own minds, their own satanically induced minds. And so, teachers who appeal to tongues and modern day prophecies are not from God. Teachers who appeal to Mormon doctrines and covenants and the pearl of great price is additional coequal authority with the Bible are not from God. Catholics who appeal to their tradition and the authority of the pope are not from God because they are not listening to the

apostles. When you add to their authority, you have denied their authority and those men stand under God's curse and they are men to be turned away from so that you can pursue the true things of God.

What should we say to these things? God gives us these tests. This passage is a gift of mercy from God to the church. He gives us these tests so that we can know that we are of the truth, that we truly have eternal life and so that we can walk in joy during our time on earth. My prayer is that the Holy Spirit guide you to true teachers and keep you from those who would undermine you in the faith.

Let's pray. *Father, do just that, by the power of your Holy Spirit, establish us in the truth, expose to our minds and our hearts those who are false so that we might walk in the truth and to glorify you. We rejoice Father that you have saved us from sin. We rejoice that we can be called your children and that we can know that we have overcome Satan himself because greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world. Build up these believers who are in this room and those who will hear later. Father, build them up in the truth, protect them and secure them from false teachers so that they might know the fullness of joy and assurance of having eternal life, loving Christ and walking by the power of the Spirit. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*