

1st JOHN BIBLE STUDY

1 John 4:1-6

Lesson #15

Introduction

This is lesson 15 of our 1st John Bible Study. We'll be looking at chapter 4, verses 1-6. John has written this epistle to address some specific issues that were troubling the church, and one of these was a growing heresy that says that Jesus was not a real flesh and blood human being, but rather some kind of spirit manifestation. John has already spoken of this, but desires to repeat it again here to make sure that the saints grasp the importance of this error. Because believers are by nature a trusting lot, false teachers often have an easy time carrying them away in a wrong direction.

The popularity of Gnosticism was rising among the secular population, and as it always does, these popular secular trends eventually find their way into the church, either by accident or by intention, or perhaps a little of both. And, because most people are not inherently inclined to be critical thinkers, many things get accepted that wouldn't be, if people actually took the time to think them through to their logical conclusions and pondered the ramifications. But quick and easy is the common practice, and this isn't new, it's human nature. And the failure to ponder the ramifications of the idea that Jesus was not a real man, had allowed this heresy to gain a foothold in the church. But the ramifications, if perceived and understood, strike a fatal blow at the validity of the entire process of substitutionary atonement by a suitable sacrifice. We can't have an acceptable atonement, if we didn't have an acceptable sacrifice. And Christ's incarnation into creation in the form of a flesh and blood man is a mandatory part of His being that acceptable substitute sacrifice, as is His perfect sinless life, and His bodily resurrection. These are not just some arbitrary incidentals regarding His life, they are the defining attributes by which our Savior is made acceptable to God the Father to be our substitute. You cannot forfeit the qualifications of Christ, without simultaneously forfeiting the accomplishments of Christ.

This should be an immediate "no brainer" to everyone who claims the name of Christian, but that doesn't seem to be the case. And it's probably got a lot to do with the shallow preaching that fills the churches. For example, I've seen a preacher take the first sentence from one chapter, then the first sentence from the next chapter, and then the first sentence from the next chapter and from those three verses, proceed to explain what was supposed to be the content of all three chapters of that book. And what was his conclusion, well he was a Baptist, so his conclusion was that they taught us that we are all supposed to be evangelists. You see, he's been taught that the bible has only one message, and that's evangelism, and it's like the rest of the bible is a piece of green garnish that chef's put on top of a meal. It looks pretty, but it really isn't intended for consumption, it's just there for appearance, and has no real nutritional value. So we admire it for a second or two, but then we set it aside and proceed to eat our meal.

This was exceedingly painful to me when I sat through it, because it's like a parent going through a magnificent cafeteria line and picking out one grain of rice, and then taking that to his family for their dinner, when there was a whole vast array of nourishing and delightful foods right there before him for the taking, but he simply chose to ignore them, and fed his family none of it. I had to stop attending those services or I would have been unable to restrain myself from pointing this out, but it wasn't my place to do that as a visitor to their church. And, the preacher had often made it clear that he was suspicious of my attendance, and was afraid I secretly wanted to preach there. But God knows somebody needed to, because the saints were dying from malnutrition. The meatier concepts of sanctification, transformation, obedience, Christlikeness, spiritual maturity, reverence, sovereignty of God, acceptable worship, were treated as nothing but pretty garnish that adorn the perceived real issue of evangelism to them, and as such, there was little or no knowledge of any of these things by most of the members. So, is there any wonder that the saints are so ill-prepared to defend their faith from heresies, when they've never been taught the very rudiments and purpose of their faith themselves.

The only protection from error is a genuine and thorough knowledge of the whole truth. And the scriptures, and they alone, not secular trends or popular fads, or worldly philosophers or scholars, are the source and absolute authority on all matters of faith and practice. Unless one has an unshakeable confidence in the literal truth, the total accuracy, the absolute sufficiency, and the divine authority of the holy scriptures, they have no definite starting point from which to proceed, and no firm mooring to which they can stay firmly attached regardless of shifting currents. (Philosophies, fads and trends)

In these next verses that we're about to read, John is calling us to use our abilities of discernment. To think critically and expend the effort to think things through, and compare what we hear with what the scriptures say. Not to just sit by and accept anything and everything that we hear, but to maintain a healthy skepticism when it comes to things we're being told are the Words of God. On many things we might afford to be less critical, but one should approach the Word of God as something holy and transcendent, and to mishandle it is like mishandling a dangerous material. The Word of God should strike holy reverent fear into all who hear it, and should never be handled fast and loose as it so often is, especially today.

And, we must be aware, and be willing to accept, that there are as many, or even more, who wish to use it to deceive us, and do us harm, as there are true preachers of God. And it's our responsibility not to be deceived, and the scriptures warn us repeatedly not to be deceived, so we must exercise our responsibility to say "no" when we hear error, and to search the scriptures to authenticate what we're taught, because every man (and woman) will answer to God for their own conduct, and being tricked by a false teacher will not excuse us from practicing sin or believing heresy. Just as we must willingly submit to those whom God has rightly put in authority over us, we must also just as enthusiastically reject those false prophets, as well as erroneous teachings, that Satan has sent to harm us. We are commanded to use our faculties of discernment to distinguish between the true and the false, and this is what John is doing in these verses.

Do Not Believe Every Spirit

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; 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 (NASB)

Verse 1:

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.

The tender hearted Christians are always reluctant to confront false teachings and create controversy. We want everybody to get along, and for peace to reign in our churches. Well, we want peace to reign on the earth also, but we know that doesn't happen, because not everybody is peaceful, and there are issues of life over which people will go to war. Our own country is a history of good men who were willing to take up arms for the sake of freedom from tyranny. In the secular world most of us understand this principle.

But in the church it seems that peace and harmony is very often considered more valuable than truth, and for the sake of harmony, truth will be sacrificed over and over again. While this might succeed in keeping the short term peace, it introduces error into the churches that continue to do the saints harm for generations. Just like freedom from tyranny was worth fighting for to our founding fathers, likewise, the truth of scriptures must be to us, far too valuable to surrender for the sake of short term peace and harmony. John tells the church not to simply believe everything they're told just because someone who's a church member says it. There are members who are true Christians but simply wrong in their assumptions, and then there are members who are not true Christians and are more than just wrong.

And it's these in particular that John is warning about. Those who are wrong because there's something behind their error that's of a spirit nature. John directly associates these false teachers (prophets) with the spirit that drives them. John starts the sentence with the warning not to believe every spirit, but ends up speaking of false prophets that have gone out into the world, and entered our churches. The false teachers (prophets) are motivated by a lying Satanic spirit, and if we know this we'll be less willing to give them a hearing, and spend our time trying to reason with them. There's no possibility of reasoning with Satan. There's no point of compromise with his deceptions for the sake of peace and harmony. His intention is our destruction, and our defense is the Word of God, rightly understood and strictly applied, without compromise.

There will be no lasting peace on earth until the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, returns to establish it Himself. This is a sad but true reality, and testifies to the condition of the hearts of humanity. We have, and will continue to be, called upon to defend our nation from hostile forces who wish to harm us, and if we don't respond, we'll lose everything we hold dear to us, just as the Jews saw their beloved nation, and beautiful Temple, burned and destroyed, as they were being carried away into slavery to the Babylonians.

Many of those things that hold true to a nation also apply to a church. When a nation, or a church, begins to take lightly those founding principles that made it what it was, then the outcome is both predictable and unavoidable. When the truths that established it are continually sacrificed, and liberals are permitted to redefine the meanings of traditional truths and virtues by the clever use of rhetoric, then the final result will be the loss of that entity's former identity and virtue. It will become something else, even if it has the same name.

The church was becoming something else under the heretical teachings of those false prophets, and John was determined to stop it from happening. And what did he say to do? To test the teachings of those false prophets by comparing them to what the scriptures teach. To search the scriptures carefully and diligently, not just superficially, and make sure that what they were allowing to be taught in their churches was completely true and accurate, because there were hostile forces (spirits) who were actively seeking to introduce damning heresies into the churches for the purpose of harming the saints of God, and the church seems to tolerate this readily, or even welcome it.

This is exactly what Paul was saying to the Corinthians when he was scolding them for their arrogance towards sinful practices and false teachings. He said sarcastically: *19 For you, being so wise, tolerate the foolish gladly. 20 For you tolerate it if anyone enslaves you, anyone devours you, anyone takes advantage of you, anyone exalts himself, anyone hits you in the face.* (2Cor 11:19-20) Paul was speaking of the church, not the world. In other words, they made no attempts whatever to resist false teachers, or their heretical teachings, from being introduced into their church, they just took it, with no examination or resistance, and as a result, that church had fallen into gross sin, to the point of seeing God's life terminating judgement upon some of its members.

A well known preacher recently commented on the seemingly endless array of absurd faith healers, health wealth and prosperity preachers, self-esteem preachers, and every sort of bizarre concoctions; all asking for you to "sow a seed into their ministry" and you'll get whatever it is you're looking for. Healing, power, wealth, prosperity, happiness, acceptance, breakthrough (whatever that means), or release from demonic spirits; these are just some of those things they promise, if you'll send them your money. There's no shortage of these charlatans filling the television airwaves. The only shortage is of those who are willing to call these people false prophets, frauds, hucksters, scam artists, which is precisely what they are. Even the secular world recognizes their nonsense, but the Christian community seems to be the last to stand up and openly declare that these people are not of God but of Satan, and are being led by his influence. Why is it that we make no effort to distance ourselves from these Christ dishonoring, church defiling, fraudulent imposters? Shame on us!

When I listen to some of the absolutely blatant absurdities that these people portray, with a straight face, I cringe to think that there might be some people out there who actually think these people really are Christians. Let me say for the record that they are not. They are not. They do not represent Jesus Christ, or His church. They are exactly what they look like and sound like; they are hucksters, they are false prophets, spreading heresies for the sake of personal gain, and using the guise of Christianity as a cloak to cover their own deceptions. But on the larger scale, they are painting their own image onto the church of Jesus Christ, and defaming His good Name by their depravity. And for this, every true Christian should be rightly upset, and ready to publically take exception to such associations. But we're not doing that.

We Christians are strangely silent on this issue. We don't *test the spirits to see whether they are from God* or not. Instead we seem to willingly accept anything and everything that uses the name of Jesus. But I tell you truly, if what we see on television today is really representative of true Christianity, then God help us all, because we are ruined. What used to be a reverent worship service has become a 3-ring circus, complete with clowns. Obviously phoney healings, people falling on the floor when the preacher touches their forehead, people spewing our gibberish and calling it the gift of tongues. Churches using artists and mimes during the sermon as background entertainment, and the list goes on and on.

But on behalf of Narrow Gate Baptist Church, I wish to openly and publically declare with certainty and clarity that what we see on television is Not the real Christian church. Neither are those liberal and charismatic churches in our towns the real Christian churches. So we must not be discouraged by all this glitzy deception that's being put out by false preachers and scam artists, even though that's what gets the most media attention, and draws the biggest crowds. Of course it does, that's the way it was intended to be in the plan of God, who chose a small remnant of humanity to be His own possession. Satan and his family were granted this worldly attention and recognition, but, concerning Jesus Christ and His church, neither His kingdom nor ours, is of this worldly age. (Jn 18:36)

It's become unloving to think critically, and outright opposition to heresy has become unthinkable. We hold to a doctrine we call the priesthood of the believer, which we've wrongly redefined to mean that everybody has a right to interpret scripture however it seems right to them, and conflicting, even contradictory beliefs are just fine, as long as we all accept each others right to their own interpretations. So our churches can't preach absolute biblical truth from their pulpits, they have to vaguely skim over it without being conclusive. Therefore, to keep the peace, the church has reduced the New Testament scriptures to one single issue, evangelism. The church members can all believe anything they want on biblical doctrines, as long as they all support evangelism, and this is the 20th and 21st century Baptist church. There's only one truth, and that's evangelism; and sanctification, transformation, spiritual maturity, Christlikeness, strict obedience to biblical mandates, and knowledge of the truth are all nice endeavors for any who are so inclined, just as long as they keep them to themselves.

The problem with this is that there's no defense against heresy and false doctrines. There's no spiritual maturity among the members that equips them to recognize false teaching if they hear it. So eventually, liberal teachings that sound loving replace *"testing the spirits to see if they are from God."* The test is now, does it seem loving and tolerant, not, is it biblically correct. The remarks we hear in our churches now are *"well that doesn't seem wrong to me"*, or *"well, I believe ..."*, and church practice is determined by personal feelings and opinions, because we've decided to ignore biblical doctrines for the sake of avoiding any testing of the spirits, and reduced the New Testament teachings to nothing beyond evangelism. But you can't really have one without the other. Concerning the **divine purpose** of the church, meaning those individuals who were successfully evangelized and now comprise the church, who constitute the body of Christ, Paul said this:

11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 14 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; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Eph 4:11-16 (NASB)

And let's make it clear from the outset that the growth, the building up of the church being referred to by Paul in this verse is not numerical but spiritual. The growth of the body is spiritual growth in the knowledge of the whole truth about Jesus Christ, until the church body measures up to the stature that belongs to the fullness of Christ. It is for this that we evangelize, not simply to see how many people we can keep out of hell. And for this kind of growth to happen, in a hostile world of intentional deceptions, testing the spirits to see whether they are from God is indispensable. And controversy is unavoidable, and enthusiastic polemics (debates) are essential to that process. Eliminating debates that call for a clear and unified conclusion, by intentionally avoiding such discussions, is a sure and certain path to eventual error and deception.

The idea that everyone who is willing to call themselves a Christian must actually be one is very sweet, but obviously it isn't true, and the scriptures, as well as our own experience tell us this. John tells the churches that they are commanded to test the things they are taught against the holy scriptures, and then come to a definite conclusion, then they are to appropriately act upon that conclusion. It accomplishes nothing to rightly identify error or heresy, if we then simply tolerate it and make no effort to expose and correct it. Paul says the same thing in 1st Thessalonians where he writes:

19 Do not quench the Spirit; 20 do not despise prophetic utterances . 21 But, examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; 22 abstain from every form of evil.

1 Thess 5:19-22 (NASB)

Paul tells the church not to quench the spirit, by which he means not to attempt to prevent the saints from openly speaking about the things of scripture. The next words clarify this, as he says, do not despise prophetic utterances. In other words, do not despise controversy but let the saints speak on the things of scriptures without attempting to stifle prophetic debates regarding the proper meanings and interpretations. The he adds a great big 3 letter word, "But." He commands us to allow prophetic discussions BUT then we are to examine them carefully, or "test the spirits" of those utterances, and come to a conclusion as to their validity. Upon that examination, that "testing of the spirits" we are then to either hold fast to them, if they are good and true, or reject them and abstain from them if they are evil.

This is proper church life in action, working as it was intended, and failing to do this for the sake of peace and harmony is a recipe for disaster. When polemics, the testing of the spirits to see if they are from God, are labeled divisive, and despised, then the Spirit of God through His holy Word has been quenched, and the protection from error has been abandoned, and that church will begin to degrade into liberal worldliness. All the evangelizing in the world will not save that church from the intrusion of secular teachings, and behaviors, and ideas.

The abandonment of critical thinking, and the loss of appreciation of the benefits of sound, in depth biblical examination, might be the trademark of the church for the last century. Pitifully shallow teaching, fast and loose treatment, intentional out of context applications, and a general disregard for the authority, and nature, and sufficiency of scriptures is rampant. And the result is that the churches look very much like the nation of Israel looked just before going into Babylonian captivity. Just like Israel did, We still have the form and ceremony, even perhaps bigger and better than ever, but our hearts are truly far, far from Him. And our treatment of His scriptures are a testimony to that fact. The scriptures command us to be discerning, to be critical, to be skeptical of everything that's introduced into our churches, and keep our guard up against false prophets and their heresies, because they are among us. Now let's move on to the next verses:

Verses 2-3:

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; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.

We must keep this sentence in its proper context or we'll open the door to various difficulties. John is speaking specifically to the church, not to the secular world, and in the church all of the vital tenets of the Christian faith, and the attributes and accomplishments of Jesus Christ, are taught and held in strict faith and confidence. Now, within this context, John can then say that all those who confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and those who don't are not. Not that this single aspect, all by itself alone, determines whether one was of God or not. That isn't what John intended them to believe, and it isn't what we believe. John is saying that among those who hold and confess all the other essential tenets of the faith, this issue is a conclusive evidence of Godliness. Within the church, to deny or accept Christ's literal, bodily incarnation, is a deal breaker.

We all know that there's many who will affirm His bodily incarnation, but then deny His literal death on the cross, or His actual bodily resurrection, or His sinless life, or His virgin birth. John isn't even trying to list all the numerous other heresies, but rather endeavoring to make the absolute certainty of this particular issue abundantly clear. You cannot be a child of God and deny the bodily incarnation of His Son, Jesus Christ, period. And every person in whom resides the Spirit of God will confess that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, no exceptions. This is John's whole point on this issue. He states it from the positive, and then from the negative. He says those who affirm Christ's bodily incarnation are from God, and then that those who do not confess His bodily incarnation are not from God. They are not born again of His Spirit. This is a clear line of demarcation. It separates the true from the false.

Now, lest someone argues that anyone can simply be mistaken about a particular point, let's establish the significance of this point. This is a point of faith, in fact it's what faith actually is. When someone says they "believe in Jesus," and for this reason they are saved, they are saying that they believe that Jesus is the divine Son of God, who came to earth in bodily form to be both the propitiation for our sins, and the source of perfect righteousness for our salvation.

This is what “faith” means, it means we believe what He says about Himself. Many believe that there was a man named Jesus, but they aren’t saved because they don’t believe His testimony about who He is and what He’s done. In his epistle to the Romans, Paul put this perfectly when He wrote:

1 Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. 3 For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Romans 8:1-4 (NASB)

Do you see what this means? The very essence of “saving faith” is the belief that there is now no condemnation for those who believe that Jesus came in the same likeness of our sinful flesh, but remained sinless Himself, and by doing so He met the requirements of the Law in His flesh body, thus rightly qualifying Himself as both a suitable sacrifice for sinful flesh, and as a source of imputed righteousness to all those who believe this about Him. This is the very essence of what “faith” is. You cannot hold a belief that’s contrary to this and have saving faith at the same time, they are mutually exclusive. You might believe many things about Jesus, but missing this is missing the very essence of saving faith.

Therefore, John can say with absolute certainty that those who deny that Jesus came in the flesh, as a real tangible human being, are not from God, because they demonstrate that they have not the very essence of saving faith. But then he goes on to identify the source of this error. It isn’t just misinformation, it’s the influence of the spirit of antichrist. What is it that Satan wants people to believe, or should we say disbelieve? That Jesus was the divine Son of God who overcame him and his evil influences and lived a perfect sinless life in the flesh. Believing this is a disaster for Satan, who wants the world to believe that he is its true savior, so they will worship him instead of Christ Jesus. His spirit is, and has been working at this since his rebellion and rejection from heaven, and will peak at the end of this age, when he rises to his highest position of popularity, but then is crushed instantly by a mere word from the mouth of Jesus Christ at His glorious return to earth. (Rev 19) The antichrist, in incarnate human form, is coming eventually, but his spirit of influence is already working in this world. And rejecting the fleshly incarnation of Jesus Christ is the work and spirit of antichrist, doing its job in preparation for his eventual, but brief appearance. But then, John moves his focus back to the true believers in the next verse, where he says:

Verse 4:

4 [But] *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*

John says that the true believers, those who are from God, have overcome those false prophets and their lying spirits, because greater is He who is resident within them, meaning the Holy Spirit, than he, meaning that antichrist spirit, that is working his lies in the world. This is another plain indication of the forces that are behind this controversy. Those who believe the testimony of Jesus Christ do so because there is One within them that is greater than the one who is in those of the world. It isn’t about which of us is wiser, or smarter, or better educated, it’s about Whom it is that resides as the controlling force over our thoughts and beliefs.

There are only two forces identified in this battle, there is the Spirit of God, and the spirit of the antichrist (Satan), and one or the other has control over our thoughts and beliefs. There are no free agents identified. Every person that is not a child of God is the property of Satan, and is under his deluding influence; but every person who is a child of God has a greater influence resident within them, and they are not deceived about the person and work of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Now let’s just add a reminder that all of this discussion is within the context of the debate over whether Jesus Christ actually came in the flesh, or He was just some kind of apparition. The greater power of the Holy Spirit affords the right answer to this specific question, that’s the point being made. This verse is very often used well beyond the legitimate boundaries of the true and immediate context in which it’s presented in this epistle. The children of God are indwelt by the Spirit of God for the purpose of believing the truth of God concerning His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. (Repeat that) Anything beyond this, especially like miraculous powers and gifts, is presumptuously inferring much more than this verse rightly implies.

This verse is among the most popular ones used by Christians, but much more often than not, it's used regarding some kind of action or ability or presumed power over evil influences. Now the Holy Spirit is endowed with the power of God to do miraculous things at His discretion, but perhaps the most important is the power to disseminate the saving truth of Jesus Christ to the chosen children of God. Hence His title used in verse 6, and several other places - "the Spirit of truth." (Jn 14:17, 15:26, 16:13) And what truth is that? It's the truth that Jesus Christ is the divine Son of God, who came in the flesh as a propitiation for the sins of fallen fleshly men, and, establish the righteous requirements of God for our entry into His eternal kingdom. Tell me if you will, what is a greater power than that? What is a greater, more significant miracle?

From now on, when you hear this verse quoted, or misquoted, remember the true context, and thank God that He has indwelt you with One who is greater than he who is in the world. And by this you know, and believe, the saving truth about His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. And whether you can perform earthly miracles or you can't, is of very little significance, in fact, probably none at all. If you really believe the truth about Jesus Christ, then greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. That's John's message in these verses. Now John reverts back again to the other side and speaks of them, saying:

Verse 5:

5 They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them

The "they" being referred to here, are those who do not confess that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, and therefore are not from God. And if they aren't from God then they're of the world, which has been put temporarily under the authority of Satan, because of the disobedience of humanity, beginning with Adam and Eve. Because these people are still of the world in their beliefs, therefore they speak accordingly. They feel perfectly free to speculate to their heart's content, and aimlessly explore the possibilities of every hare-brained idea, regardless of the implications or ramifications it carries with it. Those who are willing to entertain every notion that comes along, without critically thinking it through, are the ones who are from the world, so they think and speak the same as the rest of the people of the world, and the things of God are really no more significant to them than anything else. They're ready to accept anything that sounds okay regardless of how it impacts the teachings of scriptures. And feelings and opinions carry as much, or more weight than does the word of God.

These people speak just as the world does, so the world is willing to listen to them. They can fill churches up with visitors because they know how to speak their language, and capture their interests. They understand how the world thinks because that's how they think also. We have multitudes of churches that are headed up by worldly preachers speaking to worldly congregations who are willing to listen to their idle babblings of human logic and fleshly emotions. They're popular and they get the attention. And, they're usually the ones that are used to be the examples to the rest of us as to how to conduct a church service. And as long as they continue to speak as the world speaks, they can maintain their popularity, and their congregations will continue to listen to them.

They do not believe, nor understand the things of God, so there's little risk of alienating their congregations with genuine truth, so they go on and on practicing useless man-made religion, based on the popular things of the world. This is a true assessment of the condition by the Apostle John. And today, it's the apostate preachers and denominations that get all the media attention when an issue of morality hits the news, and they seek someone to interview for a religious opinion. This is the way it was then, and this is how it is now, and this is how it will continue to be, until the return of Messiah. But now, John jumps back again to the believers to further explain his contrasting point. He says:

Verse 6:

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.

In contrast, we who do confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, are from God, and all those who are from God will listen to us, meaning agree with us on this issue, as well as all vital issues. Those who are not from God will not listen to Godly persuasions, neither on this issue or other vital issues concerning Godliness and the person and work of Jesus Christ. Those who are indwelt with the Spirit of God will believe the true testimony of God, revealed in His scriptures, because the Holy Spirit has the power, authority, and duty to see to it that they do. As we said before, that's why He's called the Spirit of truth. Where He is present, vital truth essential to salvation is present.

The fact is that those who are not of God will not, because they can not, believe those things of God concerning His beloved Son. They won't believe because they have not the Spirit of truth who dispenses that belief by the grace of God the Father. And absent of this Spirit, they cannot believe. (Jn 6:44, 65) While we are commanded to preach the truth to the whole world, at the very same time we are told that not everyone will accept it, or want to hear it. And, we'll never be able to make them do otherwise unless the Holy Spirit dispenses that saving faith by the grace of God the Father. The world will not accept those things that we teach from the scriptures, because they are foolishness to them. (1Co 2:14) They are contrary to all the things they want and desire and seek after.

We preach biblical morality to unbelieving sinners and then wonder why they don't like us and won't listen to us. We hear well intentioned preachers call our country to return to our earlier biblical morality, and we all wish this could happen, but the scriptures unfortunately don't support this likelihood. Our country was populated in its early years with a disproportionate amount of believers to unbelievers, as so many fled religious and political persecutions to come to America. But that ratio was not sustainable, so the morality and virtue that was once common is no longer the prevailing condition, and we see the results of that working everyday. The vast majority of our country is not indwelt by the Spirit of God, even though many might claim to be Christian. We hear national polls that tell us that half or more of the population profess Christ, but the morality and practices and beliefs of those same people simply do not support that claim.

The only realistic expectation that a Christian could hold, based on biblical prophecies, is that which Paul told Timothy to expect as time went on and he continued his ministry. He said that the worldly unbelievers would get worse and worse, and he said that even the churches would eventually reject sound teaching and replace the pastors with ones who will preach myths, and nice entertaining things that they enjoy hearing. (2Tim 3 & 4)

I wish I could tell you otherwise, but biblically speaking, it's much more likely that the world, and our beloved country, will continue to degenerate into the condition that Paul described, which fulfills the necessary circumstances for the antichrist to eventually take his place on earth as a human being, demanding that he be worshiped as God, as John referred to in verse 3. I suppose a short revival is possible, and we'd sure like to see that happen, but it honestly doesn't seem very likely, given the prophetic teachings, and the prevailing trend of our country and the world over the last 100 years or so. But our hope is not for this world but for the next, because this world is passing away, along with all the sin, and violence, and lusts it so passionately desires, as John already told us in chapter 2, verse 17.

By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

And it is by this response that we know the spirit of truth from the spirit of error. By the willingness and ability to hear and believe the truth, we can know who is of God and who is of the Devil. Those who are of God will believe the things He says, and those who are not will have an endless stream of counter ideas and opinions, based on emotions, or feelings, or even on perceived scientific data, that suggest alternative possibilities to the straight forward truths of God as presented in the scriptures. They'll always be willing to negotiate over what is really the truth of scriptures, and quick to offer alternative interpretations, regardless of how absurd or bizarre, that accommodate their worldly affections. But not so for the children of God. They will be those who hold fast their faith to the end, and have unshakeable confidence in the Word and integrity of God, and accept His testimony concerning His beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

The children of God will be skeptical and discerning, but still teachable and willing to learn, the children of the devil would rather engage in endless debates and alternative possibilities that can never come to a conclusion. By this the spirit of truth and the spirit of error may be readily known. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

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