

1 John 4 – Part E

1 John 4:4-6, Part 2

1Jn 4:4 You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. 5 They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. 6 We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

In v5, John says that the “**false prophets**” of v1 and the “**spirit of Antichrist**” in v3 “**are of the world**” – which should be obvious to any discerning Christian. He continues to say that because they are “**of the world**” that they also “**speak as of the world and the world hears them**”. So, John makes three simple statements concerning these false prophets.

1. False teachers “**are of the world**”.
2. False teachers speak worldly things.
3. Worldly minded people listen to false teachers.

Now, it is important to keep in mind that John is addressing issues within the early New Testament church, not issues in the world. The false teachers had invaded the young church. So when John makes statements like these, the context necessitates that the declaration that “**the world hears them**” is specifically talking about those individuals who are in the church, but who are not true believers. If John had been speaking of actual believers who were listening to the false prophets, he would not have used the word “**world**” to describe their character. What John is doing is addressing the character of both the false teachers as well as those who listen to them. Those who listen to them are just as much a part of the world as are the false teachers. Obviously, true believers can also be deceived by false teachers, but the emphasis is on those who have not overcome the false teachers, but rather have been overcome (v4). This passage should be a great encouragement to every discerning believer.

First, John says that false teachers “**are of the world**”, which is a phrase that is in contrast to v6 where John says that we are “**of God**”. In both cases, the little word “**of**” is a preposition that denotes origin and source. It is a word that lets the reader know from where something comes. False teachers come from the “**world**”, have a worldly mindset, and are not from God, so their message and their methods will have a very worldly nature to it. Their message will appeal to worldly appetites and worldly desires. If the “source” is worldly, then the message and the methods will be worldly. Once again, please do not be deceived by their use of biblical words and terms. Every false teacher will package their message with biblical words and biblical verses generally removed from their context. So, the result will be a message that sounds biblical, but actually is unbiblical, and that is exactly why a high level of discernment is needed. They are called “**false prophets**” for a reason.

When John speaks of the “**world**”, he is speaking of the present order of things that is in opposition to the kingdom of God. It is a word that refers to gaining one’s satisfaction and gratification from what the world offers rather than from what God offers. Please appreciate that the church can be a very worldly place itself if what it is offering to its members are all of the comforts and conveniences that the world offers. It should be very obvious to someone who is discerning that the music in many contemporary churches has a very worldly essence to it and unfortunately it has often become the primary drawing

card of the modern church, and certainly the emergent church. Certainly not all contemporary music is bad, but too often the music prevails over the Word of God. People attend for the “worship experience” and the actual teaching and exposition of the Word of God has taken on a secondary role and importance.

John is contrasting the world with that which is spiritual and eternal. I.e., whatever is of the world is transient, temporary, and ultimately has no value. Notice how Jesus characterized the value that the world adds to life when He said the following in [Mark 8:36](#),

Mk 8:36 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?

What an amazing statement – that a man can have anything and everything that the world offers and in the end lose the only thing that matters. In [Galatians 4:3](#) Paul makes a remarkable statement concerning his perspective on the world.

Gal 4:3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.

Paul said that the world and all of the various “**elements**” that characterized it held him “**in bondage**”. He characterized the impact of the world on his life as one of slavery, oppression, and captivity. The Greek Interlinear translates it as being “**enslaved**”. The NIV and AMP actually use the word “**slavery**” or “**slaves**”, and the ESV uses the word “**enslaved**”. The impact of the “**elements**” of the world on a person’s life is one that actually oppresses them, deceives them, and devalues their life. The word “**elements**” refers to the various principles and ideas from which the world actually operates in contrast to the great truths presented in the Word of God. It refers to those ideas, mindsets, and vain speculations that are able to bring an individual into bondage. As a whole, the charismatic movement is “**enslaved**” to false teaching that is derived from the world and carnal thinking.. [Colossians 2:8](#) says this,

Col 2:8 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

The word there for “**cheat**” means to take someone captive, or Paul’s idea of placing someone “**in bondage**” to false and deceiving ideas.¹ One obvious example would be Darwin’s theory of evolution as opposed to the teaching of Scripture on creation. It’s deceiving effect on men cannot be overestimated. In [Galatians 6:14](#), Paul reiterates his perspective on the “**world**” when he says,

Gal 6:14 But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Paul is clear that he has died to all of the ideas and philosophies of the world and that his mindset is one that is practically and eternally focused on the amazing work of Christ. John clearly understands that the world has its own wisdom which has no regard or concern for the true things of God. Those who are of the world are completely satisfied with religion, but not with Christ. [1 Corinthians 2:12](#) states that the world has a certain kind of “**spirit**” or perspective to it.

1Co 2:12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

The influence of this worldly spirit is one of utter moral corruption and spiritual delusion.² John has already told his readers to “**not love the world or the things of the world**” in [1 John 2:15-17](#),

1Jn 2:15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that *is* in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world. ¹⁷ And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

Secondly, John says that the false prophets speak **worldly things** – “**they speak as of the world**” (v5). Please notice that John does not use a spiritual language here that indicates deception and falsehood. Obviously, deception, especially for monetary gain, is very prevalent in false teaching or it would not be called false teaching. However, what John is saying when he indicates that false teachers “**speak as of the world**” is that their teaching is based on worldly principles and worldly philosophies. Often times it is extremely cultural rather than biblical. You have to think about this for just a moment because the flesh derives its satisfaction from that which is worldly and carnal. The flesh enjoys worldly success and worldly philosophies and ideas. It is so easy to couch worldly ideas with biblical words. That is what makes it false teaching.

One of the obvious issues with false teaching is that it detracts from the work of Christ and focuses on worldly benefits that spiritual enthusiasm and boldness can give to an individual. The health and wealth gospel, the seed-faith movement, the Third Wave movement, and the Name It and Claim It movement are by-products of this false teaching. Very often the teaching emphasizes the idea of receiving a kind of spiritual power, but without mentioning Christ at all. It actually makes Christ to be our servant. The teaching is not only man-centered, but it is also very experience oriented. It is unscriptural for a believer to base their life on spiritual experiences rather than biblical truth. The reason is because the flesh will embrace the experience and trump the truth. Much false teaching claims that the individual must have some kind of extra special experience, but the teaching of the New Testament is that Christ alone is sufficient and is enough for the believer. Obviously, that does not negate the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s life because more than anyone else He is constantly exalting Christ to the believer. However, please never lose sight of the simple fact that Christ is central, is enough, and is all in all.³ **1 Corinthians 1:30** says the following,

1Co 1:30 But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God--and righteousness and sanctification and redemption-- ³¹ that, as it is written, *"He who glories, let him glory in the LORD."*

In **1 John 4:4** John iterates that the work of the enemy is great. He fashions the world spiritually to his liking and in the process he finds those who will appropriate and teach what he desires. The enemy uses false teachers who create an unbiblical appetite within the church for false teaching. The entire world lives and moves and has its being in the enemy. He is actually called the “**god of this world**”. He dictates the world’s spiritual perceptions and its worldly pursuits. He creates false pleasures, amusements, and spiritual diversions. He creates sensuality and unbecoming indulgences. In fact, his domain is consistently referred to in the New Testament as “**darkness**”. **John 3:19** says,

Jn 3:19 And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

The enemy is incredibly subtle in what he does. His purpose is to get the church to accept a kind of deluded image of the person of Christ in contrast to the reality of godliness.⁴ The enemy understands

that the world needs a kind of religious structure, so he inspires his teachers to draw much of their inspiration from the world rather than from the Word. Clearly this has been seen within the church and its adoption of worldly music styles, performance oriented services, and the creation of the large structures and programs that is thought to point to its success. However, none of this can be found in the New Testament, yet it has become the marker of achievement and spiritual pride within the church. No wonder the false teachers “**speak as of the world, and the world hears them**”.

Thirdly, worldly minded people listen to false teachers. It is the idea that “birds of a feather flock together”. The message of the false teacher is always a man-centered message, so it has an appeal to people with a worldly mindset and perspective. It appeals to people who really have no intention of being a committed follower of Christ. It must be kept in mind that the world is religious. It has ever changing religious whims and notions and fashions. If the world wants a golden calf, the enemy will find an Aaron. If the church does not like the old wine and is growing weary of it, then the enemy will brew up a new batch and help them to justify and overlook their weariness with God’s word. If in any church there springs up a craving for excitement or a demand for novelty for which the preaching of the cross of Christ fails to satisfy, then the enemy will provide that needed excitement and novelty. If what the church craves are gifts, miracles, signs, and wonders, then it will not be long before the enemy has a sustainable teaching core that saturates the church with false teaching to satisfy this unbiblical craving. This is the work of Satan within the church and he is great at what he does, and especially in a religious environment that lacks discernment.⁵

However, [1 John 4:4](#) communicates that the work of the Holy Spirit is much greater than anything the enemy can create. The Holy Spirit gives the believer a spiritual intelligence and insight into the things of God and especially into the person of Christ. The Spirit of Christ in the believer is strong and He makes the believer strong in the Lord. [Ephesians 3:16-19](#) boldly declares what is the work of God in the believer when it says,

Eph 3:16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height-- ¹⁹ to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

He helps the believer to “**hold fast**” to the things of God. [2 Timothy 1:13](#) and [Hebrews 10:23](#) state the following,

2Ti 1:13 Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.

Heb 10:23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

He helps believers to “**contend earnestly for the faith**” in [Jude 3](#). He who is in us is God. He is God abiding in our life and giving to us the very spirit of Christ. It is not that He is just with us, but also that He is in us, and He is “**greater than he who is in the world**”. The Spirit of Christ gives the spiritual intelligence, insight, and discernment by which we as believers can recognize the truth as well as that

which is false. He is in us to create a deep conviction of sin when our life moves outside of the will of God. He is forming the character and integrity of Christ in every believer. He is creating oneness and intimacy with Christ. He is shaping in the believer an ongoing and deepening of their love for the person of Christ and for the truth. In their heart the believer now fully recognizes that the Lord reigns and is supreme and sovereign over all things. He strengthens the believer in their inner man and conforms them to the image of Christ Himself.

Because of all of these things, believers should be more than willing to “**test the spirits**” to see if they are of God. If they are not of God, then the never ending effort of those false spirits is to dilute your love for Christ and create a deeper love for self and for the things of this world. It is God in you that is the decisive factor for being victorious over the false spirits. He is the pivotal difference to help the believer to overcome the “**spirit of the Antichrist**” that is in the church. As John has clearly delineated in this passage, “**many false prophets have gone out into the world**” and saturated the church with “**the spirit of error**”. This is the reality of the modern church environment and culture.

It is important to ask the question as to what is the believer’s protection from this kind of spiritual deception. Well, it should be more than evident that it is not a religious head knowledge, or a pragmatism and logic that so pervades the church age in which we live. It is not religious rhetoric and cultural philosophies. It is not found in creeds, catechisms, and confessions. To the contrary, nothing will do but God in you, Christ in your heart. It is Christ dwelling in you and giving you His Spirit that is the believer’s sole source of victory over sin, Satan, and the world. I love how John states all of this in v6 when he simply declares “**we are of God**” because “**we know the spirit of truth**”.

ENDNOTES

¹ Strong, 1387.

² Zodhiates, 881-882.

³ Lloyd-Jones, 417-418.

⁴ Candlish, 370.

⁵ Candlish, 371-373.

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