

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor
SwiftCreekBaptistChurch.com
18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834
Sunday, May 13, 2018

1 John 4:1-6 “Don’t Believe Every Preacher!”

Intro. A very important question that each person needs to know the answer to is this: How can I know which preacher or teacher is truly from God? With so many claiming to speak for God, how do you know which one is right? And what about all the different religions and cults out there? Many would say that all religions are from God. But anyone who has examined the claims of religions could not honestly believe that, for there are too many differences and contradictions among them to say that God is the author of them all. It is true that most religions have *some* truth in them, but even a broken watch is right two times a day!

So why are there so many religions? Why are there so many denominations and even cults that claim to be Christian? I believe it is because Satan is out to deceive you. Do you realize that? His deceptive work goes back to the Garden of Eden. Peter wrote that he walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). Satan’s primary work is to keep you from Christ by offering you counterfeit and substitute religions. And Satan has been very successful at this for thousands of years.

Have you ever been victimized by something counterfeit? Perhaps you received a counterfeit \$20 bill that turned out to be worthless. It is likely that you have bought a counterfeit name brand product, which turned out to be a cheap imitation of the real thing. I read that handbags and wallets are the top counterfeits in today’s market. Counterfeit pharmaceuticals and auto parts can be deadly. If you are on Facebook you have probably learned that you can friend someone who is not really the person you are thinking of, but someone has set up a counterfeit account to gain access to you. I realized that after I received an instant message from one of those so-called friends.

But God does not want you to be deceived, especially regarding spiritual truth. As you may recall, John wrote that one of the purposes for his epistle was to help them “concerning those who try to deceive you” (2:27). Furthermore, he doesn’t want you in bondage to a cult. Jesus said in John 8, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.” My text today will tell you how you can have victory over those who would deceive you and lead you astray. John gives us some important ways by which we can know if a teacher is from God or if he is influenced by Satan.

My message tonight has two main sections. I will talk about the responsibility of believers and then I will talk about the victory of believers. So first of all, I want to point out to you:

I. THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF BELIEVERS

In v.1 he gives 2 commands which we are responsible to obey. First:

A. Do Not Be Gullible - John says in v.1, “Do not believe every spirit.” Actually, it can be translated, “Stop believing....” Evidently, some of his readers were beginning to believe some false teachers. John is telling Christians not to accept everything they hear as the truth, even though what they hear may come from supposedly Christian sources. True faith is not blind faith. True faith examines its object before putting confidence in it. Usually, we will not eat something unless we know it is good for us. Even so, we should not allow the poison of false doctrine to penetrate our souls by believing it.

John implies why we should not believe every teacher that comes along. Now there are two reasons why we should not believe every preacher or teacher:

1. Because There are Many False Prophets - John says in the last of v.1, “Because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” Likewise, Jesus and others clearly warned that there would be many false prophets, especially in the last days. For example, Jesus said in Mt. 24:11, “Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.” In 2 Pet. 2:1 the apostle Peter said, “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them.”

Since the Bible warns of false prophets, we cannot and must not be gullible. We must not quickly believe every preacher or teacher that we hear on TV, radio, the Internet, or in person, including me! And just because something is written in a published book does not mean you should believe it.

2. Because of the Activity of Demons - Notice that John did not say, “Do not believe every teacher or preacher.” Instead, John calls them “spirits” (cf. also v.3, 6b). The reason he does this is that there is a spirit of some kind behind most religious teaching. Demonic spirits speak through the false prophets just as the Spirit of God speaks through the true prophets (2 Pet. 1:21). Paul said in 1 Cor. 10:20 that the gods of the ancient world were actually demons. Paul also said in 1 Tim. 4:1 that some would depart from the faith and give heed to “seducing spirits and doctrines of demons.” If you will study cults and false religions carefully, you will discover that there are signs of satanic influence.¹ For example, in the film “The Godmakers,” you can see some clear evidence of satanic involvement in the formulation of Mormon doctrines and practices. For example, in Genesis 3 the serpent told Eve, “you will be like God” (v.5). Well, Mormonism teaches that Mormon believers eventually become gods.

Then, look at v.3, where John says, “and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the *spirit* of the Antichrist...” John repeats the words “spirit” in reference to these false teachers, but here he speaks of the “spirit of antichrist” working in our world. The word “anti” Christ carries two meanings and both apply: first, *anti* mean “against.” Satan is constantly working against Christ. But how does he do it? The answer is found in the second meaning of “anti.” The word in the Greek especially means “in place of, a substitute for.” Satan works against Christ by offering substitutes. Some of the hardest people to win to Christ are those who are deceived by the cults. So since Satan and demons are involved in substitute religions, we should not be deceived by the following:

(a) Performing of signs and miracles - In Mt. 24:24 Jesus said of the last days, “For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.” (cf. also Dt. 13:1-3; 2 Th. 2:3, 9-10; Rev. 13:13-15). But another thing to remember is this: many so-called miracles are nothing but tricks. Deceiving gullible people with magic has been going on for thousands of years.

(b) They make predictions that come true – With the help of Satan a false prophet certainly will have the ability to predict future events most of the time. Yet a true prophet will be right all of the time. Deut. 18:22 says, “when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.”

(c) They appear to be religious and sincere - Paul said in 2 Cor. 11:14-15, “...Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his

¹ I may want to point out that not everyone involved in a cult is “evil”. Many are simply deceived.

ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness....” Jesus said in Mt. 7:15, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing....” (cf. also 2 Tim. 3:1, 5). Don’t be fooled by appearances! They can wear holy garments. They can put on a big smile. They may speak in a friendly or religious tone, but it is all done to deceive!

So don’t be gullible. Now notice with me John’s second command:

B. Put the Teacher to the Test – In v.1 John said that we should “test the spirits whether they are of God....” Likewise, Paul said in 1 Th. 5:20, “Do not despise prophecies.” On the other hand, he went on to say in v.21, “Test all things; hold fast what is good.” Instead of believing everyone that claims to have a Word from God, we should put teachers and preachers to the test. Now here is a good guideline to follow: “Before you trust them, test them!” The word translated “test” (*dokimadzo*) was a common word for testing metals, for example. You must test them.

I remember in the days when many were questioning the liberalism in our seminaries. One common response was that we should just trust our seminary leadership. Well, that’s not what John says. They should be willing to have their doctrine and beliefs put to the test.

So with this in mind, John gives us three tests that we can use to test the religious claims of someone:

1. Doctrinal Test - Now in order to discern truth from error, you need a standard of truth by which to measure a religious claim. You need an outside authority. Opinion is not good enough. For example, you may claim that you have lost 5 pounds. One way to verify that claim is by stepping onto a good scale. Now when it comes to spiritual truth, the authority that we turn to is the Word of God. We have a great example of this in Acts 17:11, which says, “These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.” That is why you ought to bring your Bible when you hear me or anyone else preach. If what they say disagrees with the Bible, don’t listen to them anymore.

Now the first and fundamental test of every spirit claiming to be of God is, “What do you think about the Christ?” (Mt. 22:42). That’s because cults and false teachers are always wrong about Jesus Christ, who He is and what He came to do. They usually will talk about Jesus, but when you pin them down as to what they believe about Jesus, you will find errors in their beliefs. Notice how John applies the test in reference to Jesus. In vv.2-3 John says, “By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God.” The word “confess” literally means, “to say the same thing,” or “to agree with.” So ask, “What do they believe about Christ and other fundamental doctrines of the Bible?” Do they agree with the clear teachings of the New Testament, or not? Every major cult is in error concerning the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So what are some of the truths that they should confess about Jesus Christ? John states two important truths. First, the fact that Jesus Christ “came” in the flesh implies His pre-existence. Jesus is God the Son. He is fully God (cf. I Tim. 3:16). Secondly, the main point of doctrine John focuses on is the incarnation of Christ. The words “in the flesh” are emphasized in the Greek. It is worth noting that John wrote “in” (*εν*) and not “into”, for many Gnostics taught that the divine Christ descended upon the man Jesus at His baptism and thus came “into” flesh at that time. The false teachers were trying to adapt Christianity to Greek philosophy, which taught that the body is evil but the spirit is good. They could not accept the essential union of God in human flesh. So they taught that the Christ spirit temporarily came upon the man Jesus. “Is come,” a perfect tense, means

that the incarnation is an abiding reality, a permanent, not a temporary, union of God and man. The fact that there was a real incarnation is essential to the atonement. If he was not truly a man, if he did not literally shed His blood on the cross, of course all that was done was in appearance only, and the whole system of redemption as revealed was merely a splendid illusion.

Now in v.3 he states the opposite: “and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God.” Now in John’s day there were teachers entering the church who denied these basic truths (“in the flesh” is not repeated in v.3, since “Jesus” has a definite article, “the Jesus” just mentioned). They taught that Jesus was the Messiah, but that the Son of God only *appeared* to be a man.

By the way, false teachers are also going to be wrong on the doctrine of the atonement. John does not mention that important doctrine here, but he does elsewhere in this epistle at least three times, including v.10 (see also 1:7; 2:2).

One lesson we must draw from this is the fact that we need to know the truth so you can identify the counterfeit. Jesus told the Sadducees, who did not believe in a bodily resurrection, “You do err, because you know not the Scriptures” (Mk. 12:24).

Now a second way we can know whether someone is a false teacher is by:

2. The Test of the Spirit – In v.4 John said, “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.” The One who is “in you” is the Holy Spirit. He indwells every believer (Rom. 8:9). Now due to human weakness we can be deceived. But that fact that the Holy Spirit “is greater” means that He cannot be deceived. So He can help you discern truth and error. Jn. 16:13 says, “When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth.”

A missionary to the American Indians was in Los Angeles with an Indian friend who was a new Christian. As they walked down the street, they passed a man on the corner who was preaching with a Bible in his hand. The missionary knew the man represented a cult, but the Indian saw only the Bible. He stopped to listen to the sermon. “I hope my friend doesn’t get confused,” the missionary thought to himself, and he began to pray. In a few minutes the Indian turned away from the meeting and joined his missionary friend. “What did you think of the preacher?” the missionary asked. “All the time he was talking,” exclaimed the Indian, “something in my heart kept saying, ‘Liar! Liar!’” That “something” in his heart was “Someone”—the Holy Spirit of God! The Spirit guides us into the truth and helps us to recognize error. This anointing of God is “no lie,” because “the Spirit is truth” (1 John 5:6). [Warren Wiersbe]

So the Holy Spirit will give you an uneasy feeling about a false teacher. Or he will bring a Scripture to mind that contradicts what they are saying.

3. Popularity Test - Note who listens to the teacher? There is a contrast here. Six times John says “of God.” Two times he speaks of those who are “of the world.”

a) The world listens to a false teacher – In v.5 John says, “They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them.” Just because someone preaches to thousands of people every week does not mean they are speaking God’s Word. Here in v.5 we see that false teachers can be very successful in terms of popularity. John gives a reason for this, “They speak (literally) “out (εκ) of the world,” i.e. the world is the source of their message. They tell the world what they want to hear. The world listens to those who express its own thoughts. 2 Tim. 4:3-4 says, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” This is why Jesus said in Luke 6:26, “Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers

to the false prophets.” It is interesting, however, to note that virtually all of the false prophets, while they are very congenial toward the world, are very hostile and uncongenial toward the true church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And by the way, John also gives the other side of this. In v.6 he says that the non-Christian does not listen to the true teacher of God. They have no interest in it. John no doubt had felt the cold, indifferent, and hostile stare of the worldling as he preached. Of course, the preacher needs to make sure he is not at fault if people do not listen to him.

b) True Christians listen to a true teacher – In v.6 John says, “We are of God. He who knows God hears us....” It is wonderful to preach the Word of God to people who believe in Jesus and believe in His Word. There is something in the heart of a Christian which responds to a faithful proclamation of the Word of God. According to this verse, the level of your interest in hearing the Word of God indicates something about you, doesn’t it?

When I was 16-17 years old I was beginning to grow in my faith. There was a preacher in town who was despised by the religious liberals, and hated by many of the sinners in town. He was preaching against sin and most teenagers were not interested in hearing him. But after some initial reluctance, I *wanted* to hear that preacher. I didn’t mind it if he was stepping on my toes. Yet all he was doing was preaching verse by verse through books of the Bible. God’s people would hear him gladly.

False doctrine is so deceptive and widespread. Is there any hope? Yes!

II. THE VICTORY OF BELIEVERS

As we have indicated, Satan is out to deceive you and lead you astray. He has succeeded in the lives of most people. But in our text John speaks of those who are victorious over the deceivers. In fact, several other times in I John and in Revelation, the apostle John speaks of Christians as being “overcomers.” So let me conclude by challenging you to share in the victory. Note first of all:

A. The Present Reality of Victory – In v.4 John said, “You are of God, little children, and have overcome them....” (cf. Rom. 16:20). For the Christian, victory over Satan is not simply for the future. It is something we have now. Most of John’s readers had frustrated or thwarted all the attempts of the false prophets to turn them away from the truth.

Even so, you can avoid deception, and overcome Satan. As you do battle with Satan over temptation, sin, and error, you should never despair, for God will insure you of victory if you trust in Him. Even if you stand alone for the truth, remember that one with God is a majority.

B. The Sources of Victory

1. Our Relationship with God - In v.4 John said, “You are of God....” It is our opportunity as children of God to have a Heavenly Father who cares for us and sees to it that we understand that which is true and are able to detect that which is false.

2. The Holy Spirit within Us – In v.4 John says, “You ... have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”

3. Knowledge of the Word of God - The way to recognize a counterfeit is to know what the genuine article looks like. Even so, you must know the truth of the Word of God in order to recognize false doctrine. In Mt. 24:24 Jesus said that the deception of the coming antichrist is so strong that “if it were possible” he would deceive the very elect of God. Jesus implies there that Satan should not be able to deceive true believers. And part of the reason for this is found in the

very next verse (v.25), “Behold, I have told you before hand.” God wants us to know the truth. We can know the truth. And by knowing the truth of God’s Word, which was once for all delivered to the saints, we can avoid deception.

So I challenge you to read the Bible daily. Be involved in at least one weekly Bible study. Hear the preaching of God’s Word on a regular basis.

Conclusion: So don’t be victimized by Satan. Be victorious over Satan.

Sources: Albert Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes on the Old & New Testaments: James – Jude* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975 reprint); Guy H. King, *The Fellowship: An Expositional Study of 1 John* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1954); H.A. Ironside, *Epistles of John & Jude* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers 1931); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); A.T. Robertson, *New Testament Word Pictures, Vol. VI* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931; Curtis Vaughan, *A Study Guide Commentary: 1,2,3 John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970); Jerry Vines, *Family Fellowship: An Expository Experience in 1 John* (Dallas: Crescendo Publications, 1976); B.F. Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1883, 1966 edition); Kenneth S. Wuest’s *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament, Vol. 2, 1 John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1954). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

ABOUT THESE SERMON NOTES

© Dr. Stephen Felker. These notes may be used and even shared for personal study or ministry, but not for commercial purposes. The author credits the sources listed above and footnotes for much of the content. The “live” recording of this sermon will be more completely in the author’s own words. To obtain an audio recording of this message, you may listen free at www.sermonaudio.com/pastorFelker. A video of this sermon may be available at <http://swiftcreek.church/>. Dr. Felker’s email address is S+Felker&2@aol.com (remove signs).