

1 John 4:1-6

Don't Believe Everything You Hear

I. INTRO

- A. Every day we are bombarded with advice, wisdom, and counsel.
 - 1. Friends, Family, Podcasts, YouTube, Social Media
 - 2. News, Books, Counselors, Teachers, Even Preachers
- B. Everyone is trying to tell us how to think, how to live, how to raise kids, etc.
 - 1. But how do you know if it's good advice, wise counsel? Even true?
- C. It's a proven fact that many people vote and make big decisions based on name recognition more than anything else
- D. So when an influential, charismatic person steps in, we are easily deceived.
- E. This was the situation in our author John's day.
- F. Although he is NOT named in the letter of 1 John, John's students a few years after this wrote about an opponent of John named Cerinthus
- G. Cerinthus claimed to be a Christian, but didn't believe that Jesus was God
 - 1. He taught that Jesus became divine, that he leveled up spiritually
 - 2. But that then that divinity left before the crucifixion
 - 3. He taught that heaven was gonna be a 1000 year party of pleasure
- H. Once people heard that last one they were like, "Sweet. I'm in."
- I. In John's day and age, false teachers, like Cerinthus, had entered the church claiming to speak for God.
- J. John's message to his disciples, to his church is simple: **Don't believe everything you hear. Instead, learn to discern what is true!**
- K. I want to read this in the NLT and then I am going to break it down in the ESV →
Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world. 2 This is how we know if they have the Spirit of God: If a person claiming to be a prophet acknowledges that Jesus Christ came in a real body, that person has the Spirit of God. 3 But if someone claims to be a prophet and does not acknowledge the truth about Jesus, that person is not from God. Such a person has the spirit of the Antichrist, which you heard is coming into the world and indeed is already here. 4 But you belong to God, my dear children. You have already won a victory over those people, because the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world. 5 Those people belong to this world, so they speak from the world's viewpoint, and the world listens to them. 6 But we belong to God, and those who know God listen to us. If they do not belong to God, they do not listen to us. That is how we know if someone has the Spirit of truth or the spirit of deception.

- L. Linear vs. Circular // Greek vs. Hebrew Thought // Construct this thought process
- II. "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." (1 John 4:1)

- A. John gives two commands and one reason why
 - 1. Don't believe every spirit.
 - 2. Instead, test every spirit.
- B. He's not talking about ghosts. The word "spirit" refers to the spiritual source behind a teacher or message. (ex: Zeitgeist), but he does literally mean spirits
- C. Some translate this verse, "Don't believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit..." → E.g. Don't believe everyone who claims to represent God
 - 1. If you go on YouTube and search for prophecy or new teaching, you can find thousands of videos from people claiming to speak "by the Spirit"
 - 2. How do you know what's true? How do you know what's God and what's garbage?
- D. John is not telling us to become skeptical curmudgeons who shoot everything down. He is saying that we need to become discerning & responsible.

E. BIG IDEA = Don't believe everything you hear.

- 1. Not every voice is from God – even if it claims to be spiritual or wise
- 2. That goes for the inner monologue inside your head and the people around you speaking into your life
 - a) Just b/c you think "I'm a loser" doesn't mean you are
 - b) Just b/c someone says, "That's a good idea" doesn't mean it is
- 3. You need to DISCERN to see if each & every voice is a voice of truth
- F. So 2 commands: Don't believe... instead test/discern... One reason...
- G. **Why?** *"...because many false prophets have gone out into the world." (v. 1)*
 - 1. A prophet is someone who claims to speak the words of God
 - a) We would more likely call them teachers, preachers, life coaches
 - 2. There are many false voices, and not everyone has your best interest
 - 3. Why do we need to be careful? Some voices are from the enemy (!!!)
- H. For John, this isn't a hypothetical warning.
 - 1. False teachers existed in John's churches, and they were actively sent from the Adversary (what Satan means) to undermine Jesus
 - a) Today, false voices are even MORE prevalent b/c of technology
 - 2. Not everyone who claims to speak for God actually does.
- I. So, who do they speak for? What spirit drives their voice?

III. *This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.*

- A. Johnny just made this so heavy! What's he saying? Behind false teaching is more than bad ideas → There are competing spiritual kingdoms!
 - 1. John is returning to something we unpacked a few weeks ago → Two kingdoms, two agendas: God's and the Enemy's (world)
- B. It's easy to think that issues of debate are just a question of opinion, but John is suggesting that they are actually spiritual opponents
- C. The Apostle Peter echoes this: *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8)* → He prowls... LIKE a lion... a ROARING lion... seeking to devour...
- D. What's the point?

1. The devil is a deceiver. He's the father of lies, and his influence spreads into every corner of the world
 2. John says that those false teachings are from "the spirit of the antichrist" → that's INTENSE! His words, not mine
 - E. They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. (v. 5) → the world doesn't see anything wrong with any of it
 1. The world has its own wisdom, and if you ask it, it has an answer for everything: marriage, sexuality, identity, money, parenting, etc
 - F. The question is not, "Does the world have advice?"
 1. The question is, "Is the advice from God?"
 2. B/C every voice out there is trying to shape you & your family
 - G. John says, "Test it." How do we test it? Let's jump back to v2
- IV. *"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 the antichrist..." (vv. 2–3)*
- A. John doesn't say, "Follow your heart" → Your heart is deceptive above all things
 - B. He doesn't say, "Trust your gut..." → Your gut is built on your experiences not necessarily truth or accuracy
 - C. He doesn't say, "Go with what's popular"
 - D. Instead, he begins with one question → What does this voice say about Jesus?
 1. Everything rises or falls on Christ
 - E. Why? Because every false teaching eventually attacks Christ.
 - F. If you track any false teaching (sociological, spiritual, political, philosophical) and you keep going down the rabbit hole all the way to the end of the journey, eventually they will be in opposition to Christ. <repeat> Want some examples?
 1. **His deity** – Islam, Jehovah's Witnesses, Rationalism
 2. **His humanity** – Christian Science
 3. **His authority** – Moral Relativism
 4. **His sufficiency** – Self-Help Religion // Legalism
 5. **His exclusivity** – New Age Crunchy
 - G. False teachings, on the surface, just seem like different ideas, but when you track them all the way to the end of the rope, you find a denial of Christ in some form
 - H. Like I said, Cerinthus was the problem in John's day, and his teachings denied that Jesus was God. So what does John say, *"...every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God..."* → b/c that's what Cerinthus was denying. But what is true? What does the Bible teach?
 1. Jesus Christ is one Person. Fully God. Fully Man
 2. The One born in Bethlehem is the One who died on Calvary.
 3. This act, called the incarnation, was not temporary or an illusion
 4. We needed a "God Man" to accomplish salvation
 5. Only one who was 100% God and 100% Man could bridge the gap
 - I. So **First Test: Does it deny Christ?**

- V. John continues, They are from the world, but *"We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error."* (v. 6)
- A. The "we" and the "us" here refers first to the apostles.
 - 1. Today we hear the apostles through Scripture.
 - B. Every message – whether it is from me, a counselor, an author, a youtuber, or a friend – must submit to the Word of God and the Apostolic Gospel (explain)
 - 1. If someone's advice is out of sync with the Word, reject it
 - 2. If someone's counsel is in opposition to God's truth, ignore it
 - C. Scripture judges every voice, and no voice is higher than it
 - 1. God will never reveal something to someone that is out of step with his revealed Word
 - 2. Which is why the world doesn't want you to read it
- D. Second Test: Does it agree with Scripture?**
- E. Before accepting advice, ask:
 - 1. What does this assume about Jesus?
 - 2. Does this agree with Scripture?
 - 3. Is this the wisdom of God or the wisdom of the world?
 - 4. Will this lead me toward Christ or away from Him?
 - F. This is why we need to be IN the Word. It's why I **love** to teach you the Word. Why I want to show you HOW to read the Word.
 - G. The most important thing we do hear at Revolve besides preach the gospel is to teach YOU HOW to READ the Word
- VI. John ends with encouragement to his readers who might be in panic mode thinking they've been deceived.
- A. *"Little children, you are from God..."* (v. 4)
 - 1. **Truth #1 — If you are a follower of Jesus, you belong to God.**
 - 2. If you are in Christ, your identity has changed.
 - 3. You belong to another kingdom.
 - B. *"...and have overcome them, because he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."* (v. 4)
 - 1. **Truth #2 — God's Spirit is greater.**
 - 2. Our confidence isn't found in our intelligence.
 - 3. It is found in God's power to draw, to teach, to protect, to preserve.
 - 4. The Holy Spirit enables believers to recognize truth.
 - 5. Discernment is spiritual before it is intellectual.
 - 6. Which is why we should PRAY for wisdom and ASK godly counsel
 - C. *"They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us..."* (vv. 5–6)
 - 1. **Truth #3 — God's people recognize God's truth.**
 - 2. The world recognizes its own voice; it resonates with them
 - 3. Lies and falsehood, don't sit right
 - 4. God's people recognize God's voice because they know the Shepherd.

5. Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." (John 10:27)
6. The more we know Scripture, the easier it becomes to recognize counterfeit voices, take them captive, and throw them away

VII. Application

- A. Who has the loudest voice in your life? Who are you allowing to speak counsel into your life about your identity, how you parent, how you function as a spouse?
- B. Who is giving you wisdom in dealing with your anxiety, your panic, your worry, your fear, and on and on?
- C. Now ask this: Is this voice from the Lord? Does it align with Jesus and his Word?
- D. Now this isn't to say that you should only listen to Christians, but I will say this...
 1. There are godly people who can teach you about parenting, being a spouse, how to handle your money, business, anxiety, and on and on
- E. How does God speak? God speaks by his Spirit
 1. Through his Word
 2. Through his people (who are in his Word)
- F. Consider this: Someone is speaking into your life. Who is it?
 1. Weigh Everything
 2. Don't ask first, "Does this sound helpful? Does this work?"
 3. Ask, "Is it true? Is this God's advice?"
- G. This is yet one more reason why we need one another.
 1. You and I need other believers who can speak TRUTH into our lives
- H. Our front table is littered with resources about how to read the Word of God effectively. Grab some items on your way home
 1. Bookmarks about what and how to highlight
 2. Information on the Discovery Bible Study method
 3. How to journal
 4. And remember, we are only a text message away
- I. Let us pray that we would be people who hear from God, obey what he says, and share it with others