

Sermon Notes

Series on First John

First John 4:1-6

“How To Spot the Devil’s Kids”

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Introduction: How good are we at spotting phonies? Phony people, phony money, bootleg DVD’s, phony ID cards, etc? John’s words are designed to help believers in spotting the devil’s kids. The great plague of the earth throughout human history has been that of false doctrine because Satan and his minions spend the vast majority of their time corrupting the Word of God and confusing the minds of people about what is true and what is false. Believers are reminded by Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:14 that *Satan disguises himself as an angel of light*. Then we need to be reminded that the very first temptation, in the Garden of Eden, was an effort to corrupt the very Word of God. Satan attacked God’s Word through doubt (read Genesis 3:1); then Satan attacked God’s Word through distortion (3:3); and finally through denial (3:4). In the same way today, Satan and his minions attempt to use doubt, distortion and denial to affect what people think of the Word of God. It’s unfortunate that in our day, too many Christians tend to accept uncritically all teaching that sounds Christian without even checking it out—without *testing* to see if it lines up with the Bible. Sometimes Christians think that because the word Christian is tacked onto something, it’s believable and true. Numerous very popular radio and TV teachers and preachers as well as so called Christian authors fail to teach accurately according to the Bible. The Bible contains the ultimate standard for *truth*, for all that is known of God is contained within its pages. Yet there are many people who just cannot accept the Bible; others who accept distorted views of it; and there are some who deny it all together. All three add up to deceit and Satan is busy deceiving people about *truth* which is the focus of the Apostle John’s words in First John 4:1-6 as John is contrasting *truth* and *error* (4:6b). These verses form a unit on the conflict between those two spiritual realms, *truth* and *error*. Prior to this John had introduced conflicts: (1) In 2:18-28, the conflict between *truth* and *error*; (2) in 2:29-3:12 the conflict between the *children of God* and the *children of the devil*; & (3) in 3:13-24 the conflict between *love* and *hatred*. Transition: In First John 3:24, John had written about God’s *Spirit*, the Holy Spirit. The mention of the Holy Spirit causes the Apostle John to pause briefly to sound a warning about false teaching, fakes and phonies in order to tell us how to spot the devil’s kids! Chapter 4:1-6 is a break in John’s argument and has no close connection with what follows. The Holy Spirit is not the only *spirit* that is working in our world today. In these verses we will see that the Apostle John is stating how important it is to discern and distinguish the Holy Spirit from other *spirits*; *true* from false. John is urging believers to *test*, discern, to use judgment to determine whether a Bible teacher, writer, evangelist or preacher is speaking the *truth* or *error*.

#1 CHARGE TO CHRISTIANS; TEST 4:1-3

Verse 1: Verses 1-3 charge believers to put to the *test* the messages that are heard and/or read. Like a loving pastor, the Apostle John opens this section by addressing his readers with that very tender and favorite term of his, *beloved*. John begins by giving believers a command; specifically ‘don’t believe everything’ *but test the spirits to see whether they*

are from God. *Test* is a verb meaning “to examine,” “to approve” or “to prove;” the Greek present imperative verb, used only here in Johannine writings, is δοκιμαζετε, dokimazete, from the root verb δοκιμαζω, dokimazo. By John’s choice of verbal tense, John is saying that *testing spirits* is a standing duty of all Christians (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:21 same thought). John is stating that every Christian should *test* and not just the pastor and/or church leaders. Alfred Plummer comments that the verb *test* “commonly implies a good, if not a friendly object; to prove or test in the hope that what is tried will stand the test.” [Plummer, Alfred, The Epistles of S. John, Cambridge University Press, p. 141.] There is another New Testament Greek verb that John could have used, πειραζω, peirazw, which also has the general meaning of *testing*, but generally implies a negative expectation; with the hope that the object *tested* will not pass. This other Greek verb is commonly translated “to tempt.” Another Greek scholar observes that the Greek word that John employs in this verse is never used of Satan’s work [Richard Chenevix Trench, Synonyms of the New Testament, Eerdmans, p. 281.] Believers ought not to be gullible, but to distinguish God’s Holy Spirit from false *spirits*, that is, those *spirits* that teach/preach contrary to the Word of God. God’s purpose for our *testing the spirits*, is to determine the source from which these *spirits* derive their power for their message—to *see whether they are from God*. That question must be asked because deception can happen easily and/or quickly. Peter writes that true prophecy is never of any private interpretation (2 Peter 1:20-21). Even false teachers claimed to be empowered by God’s Spirit. From 1 Corinthians 12:10, we learn that *discernment* is a spiritual gift but the Apostle John is probably not referring to this supernatural ability. The word *spirits* is not a reference to the Holy Spirit but John instructs believers not to trust every pastor, preacher or Bible teacher but to check out their message. Notice that John does not say that we can tell false *spirits* by their works. John writes that we can identify whether they are true or false by their message. Isn’t that the same acid *test* in the Old Testament? (Read Deuteronomy 13:1-5). Moses gave the Jewish people this criterion by which they were to *test* anyone claiming to be a prophet. The Apostle John is addressing false teaching in his day, specifically, the Gnostics. Gnostic teachers apparently were trying to conduct an itinerant ministry in some of the churches overseen by John. John’s main concern in his epistle was the Gnostic denial of the humanity of Christ. The root of the problem was the Greek idea that the spiritual and material (physical) realms are entirely separate and have nothing to do with each other. In this line of thinking, spirit is good but matter is evil. Some false teachers, therefore, argued that the spiritual Christ could not have actually become human. The Gnostics denied Christ’s humanity in two ways. Some, called Docetists, claimed that Jesus had only the appearance of flesh, without substance or reality, like a phantom. Docetism comes from the Greek word, δοκεω *dokeo*, meaning “to seem” or “to appear.” Jesus’ suffering and death on the cross, they said, was not real, for the body was not real. Other Gnostics, following the lead of Cerinthus, believed the spiritual Christ entered into a physically human Jesus at the time of His baptism in the form of a dove and left the human Jesus before the crucifixion. History reveals that Cerinthus lived in Ephesus toward the end of the first century, which was also where the aged apostle John lived. Irenaeus (AD 130–

200) tells us that John specifically directed his Gospel against Cerinthus (read John 1:14 & 20:19–31). John’s epistles also effectively refute Gnostic heresy (read 1 John 2:22; 4:2–3; 5:1; 2 John 7). John expresses his loving concern for believers then and now as all face the subtle danger of false *spirits*. For example, today, charismatic teachers and preachers come and go; *false prophets* may be brilliant and can quickly capture the attention of people with their words, manner and actions. Very often they are attractive, dramatic, forceful and popular and gain a huge following. Believers must check them out to ascertain whether *they are from God* and whether their message squares with the Word of God. John’s words, *do not believe every spirit*, addresses a gullibility that’s prone to believe *every spirit* that claims to be *true* and right and biblical. John’s negative with the Greek present imperative, *do not believe*, generally means “stop believing.” Is it possible that some of John’s readers were showing a tendency to accept some of these other *spirits* that were not *from God*? Is it possible that some of John’s readers were showing a tendency to accept some of these other *spirits* without critically checking them out? In the remainder of verse 1, John expresses the necessity to *test* the message of Bible teachers: *because many false prophets have gone out into the world*. Notice that John says...*many!* Not one or two, but *many false prophets* are all around us which heightens the necessity of *testing* the message. The Lord Jesus Christ specifically prophesied that there would be an explosion of *many false prophets*; Matthew 7:15-16; 24:11, 24; & Mark 13:21-23; cf. Paul’s warning words about false teaching in Acts 20:28-30 and Peter’s in 2 Peter 2:1. Peter, Paul, Jesus and the Apostle John’s warnings are all about *false prophets* whose message is doctrinally wrong; a *false* message (cf. its use also in Luke 6:26). Here’s John’s point: he’s not stating that they are merely teachers with a *false* message **but**, in addition; that they are speaking under the inspiration of Satan himself--*antichrist!* Wow! Think about that! Consider this quote: “When you are looking for Satan be sure to look for him in the pulpit.” That quote comes from one of the greatest pulpiteers and Bible teachers of the last century, Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse. (By the way, when I was a child living in New Jersey, my parents would drive our whole family into New York City every Monday night to listen to Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse at the 10th Presbyterian Church.)

Verse 2: In verses 2 & 3, the Apostle John presents the criteria by which believers are to judge teaching from this pulpit or any pulpit. John’s *test* question to determine whether the Holy Spirit or a false *spirit* possesses a person is this: **what does the person believe about Jesus?** John states that if a pastor, preacher or teacher’s theology about the Lord Jesus Christ is convoluted—if that person’s Christology is wrong, that pastor, preacher or teacher is straight from the pit of hell! Note John’s choice of words, *the spirit of the Antichrist* in verse 3. With the phrase, *by this you know*, John is appealing to his reader’s mental knowledge which he has already done in First John (cf. 2:29 & 4:6). John is stating the criteria by which a believer is to *test the spirit*. As stated above, in John’s day, the Gnostics questioned whether Jesus had come in a real body of flesh and blood because, as they believed, God could not have anything to do with impure material stuff like the flesh. They had a hard time believing that Jesus was a real man. Today, there are many churches, cults, preachers, pastors who deny that Jesus is really God *in the flesh*; such as Mormons,

Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslims, Unity, etc. Dr. Townsend (my former roommate at Dallas Theological Seminary) summarizes the *test* well: "What is the biblical version of Jesus Christ.? Jesus is both God (Jn. 1:1; 5:18; 20:28; Heb. 1:8) and man (Jn. 1:14; 1 Jn. 4:2). The Living Bible renders 1 John 4:2—"the way to find out if their message is from the Holy Spirit is to ask: Dose it really agree that Jesus Christ, God's Son, actually became man with a human body?" [Townsend, James A., The Epistles of First John & Jude, p. 36]. When John writes, *every spirit*; he's showing the comprehensiveness of this *test* as all *spirits* are either approved or rejected when the *test* is applied. John uses the verb *confesses*, which in the Greek is $\omicron\mu\omicron\lambda\omicron\gamma\epsilon\iota$, *homologeoi*, from the root verb $\omicron\mu\omicron\lambda\omicron\gamma\epsilon\omega$, *homologeoo*, and means "to say the same thing as;" denoting not merely a verbal acknowledgment but also an open declaration of the message of what a person believes. In addition, John uses a present tense of the verb which indicates that such a person who *confesses that Christ has come in the flesh* is continuing to hold to that belief. I believe that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh; that's also the doctrine of Grace Community Church. Believers ought to be passionate about this doctrinal belief—Jesus is God in the flesh. (Read Romans 10:9-10 and 1 John 2:23 & 4:15). The phrase, *has come in the flesh* uses a perfect tense Greek verb to assert that when Jesus came to earth the first time, He took on a real human body and not a phantom appearance as a man as the Docetic Gnostics of John's day believed. John's use of this perfect tense is designed to affirm Jesus' incarnation as having an abiding reality—He is still God in the flesh. If someone rejects Jesus' incarnation, that He *has come in the flesh*, then they are rejecting a cardinal doctrine of Christianity and the Bible. The incarnation of Christ implies both His deity and His humanity alike. Statistics: In the past I've shared with you reports from www.barna.org that researchers have examined the beliefs of pastors all over the country concerning where they stand on issues. Clergy beliefs, January 12, 2004, from website www.barna.org: 'In his recently released book and a subsequent research report on worldviews, author and researcher George Barna made waves by citing statistics showing just 9% of all born again adults and just 7% of Protestants possess a biblical worldview. That information pricked people's curiosity regarding the worldviews of the nation's religious leaders, prompting Barna Research to conduct a national survey on that topic among Protestant pastors. The numbers are now in - and the outcome may again shock many people. Based on interviews with 601 Senior Pastors nationwide, representing a random cross-section of Protestant churches, Barna reports that only half of the country's Protestant pastors - 51% - have a biblical worldview. Defining such a worldview as believing that absolute moral truth exists, that it is based upon the Bible, and having a biblical view on six core beliefs: (1) the accuracy of biblical teaching; (2) the sinless nature of Jesus; (3) the literal existence of Satan; (4) the omnipotence and omniscience of God; (5) salvation by grace alone; (6) and the personal responsibility to evangelize, the researcher produced data showing that there are significant variations by denominational affiliation and other demographics. "The most important point," Barna argued, "is that you can't give people what you don't have. The low percentage of Christians who have a biblical worldview is a direct reflection of the fact that half of our primary religious teachers and leaders do not have one. In some

denominations, the vast majority of clergy do not have a biblical worldview, and it shows up clearly in the data related to the theological views and moral choices of people who attend those churches." **Denominational Distinctions:** The survey of pastors included ministers from more than four-dozen denominations, each of which was represented in proportion to the number of churches it has in the U.S. That enabled the researchers to analyze the responses of seven denominational segments more closely. There is considerable variation in the worldviews held. An example of the gap among churches is reflected in the outcomes related to the nation's two largest denominations, the Southern Baptist Convention and the United Methodist Church. (Of the nation's 320,000 Protestant churches, more than 42,000 of them are Southern Baptist and more than 35,000 are United Methodist; these two denominations alone account for roughly one-quarter of all Protestant churches in the U.S.) The Southern Baptists had the highest percentage of pastors with a biblical worldview (71%) while the Methodists were lowest among the seven segments evaluated (27%). Among the other segments examined, 57% of the pastors of Baptist churches (other than Southern Baptist) had a biblical worldview, as did 51% of non-denominational Protestant pastors, 44% of pastors of charismatic or Pentecostal churches, 35% of pastors of black churches, and 28% of those leading mainline congregations. **Demographic Differences:** The survey brought to light some unexpected differences based on pastoral background. The most intriguing of those relates to theological training. Educationally, the pastors least likely to have a biblical worldview are those who are seminary graduates (45%). In contrast, three out of five pastors who have not attended seminary operate with a biblical worldview (59%). The largest gap related to gender. Whereas 53% of male pastors have a biblical worldview, the same can be said for just 15% of female pastors. Overall, just 6% of all Protestant Senior Pastors are women. Another huge gap was based on race. White Senior Pastors were nearly twice as likely as black Senior Pastors to have a biblical worldview: 55% versus 30%, respectively. Age and experience entered the picture. The youngest pastors in the nation (those under age 40) are more likely to have a biblical worldview than are their older peers (56% versus 50%). Similarly, pastors who have five years or less experience in leading churches have a higher rate of biblical worldview possession (58%) than do other pastors. Even geography is related to worldview. Fewer than half of all Senior Pastors in the Northeast (43%) and Midwest (49%) have a biblical worldview, compared to majorities in the South (57%) and West (58%). In fact, of the nine geographic divisions defined by the Census Bureau, the one with the highest proportion of pastors giving evidence of a biblical worldview was the Pacific division – California, Oregon and Washington. Although the people in those states are among the most liberal in the nation, nearly two-thirds of Protestant pastors there (64%) have such a moral and spiritual compass in place. **A Worldview Is Taught As Well As Caught:** Referring to the multi-year research project that formed the foundation of his recent book on the subject of worldview development (*Think Like Jesus*), Barna suggested that people do not get a biblical worldview simply by regularly attending church. "A biblical worldview must be both taught and caught - that is, it has to be explained and modeled. Clearly, there are huge segments of the Christian body that are missing the

benefit of such a comprehensive and consistent expression of biblical truth. The research also points out that even in churches where the pastor has a biblical worldview," he continued, "most of the congregants do not. More than six out of every seven congregants in the typical church do not share the biblical worldview of their pastor even when he or she has one. This intimates that merely preaching good sermons and offering helpful programs does not enable most believers to develop a practical and scriptural theological base to shape their life. Our research among people who have a biblical worldview shows that it is a long-term process that requires a lot of purposeful activity: teaching, prayer, conversation, accountability, and so forth. Based on our correlations of worldview and moral behavior, we can confidently argue that if the 51% of pastors who have a biblical worldview were to strategically and relentlessly assist their congregants in adopting such a way of interpreting and responding to life, the impact on our churches, families and society at-large would be enormous." **Research Source and Methodology:** The data described above are from telephone interviews with a nationwide random sample of 601 Senior Pastors of Protestant churches conducted in November and December 2003. The maximum margin of sampling error associated with that sample is ± 4.1 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. In addition, telephone surveys were conducted with a national random sample of 2033 adults during September through November 2003. The maximum margin of sampling error associated with that sample is ± 2.2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. All of the interviews were conducted from the Barna Research Group telephone interviewing facility in Ventura, CA. Adults in the 48 continental states were eligible to be interviewed and the distribution of respondents coincided with the geographic dispersion of the U.S. adult population. Multiple callbacks were used to increase the probability of including a reliable distribution of adults. "Mainline" churches are those associated with the American Baptist Churches/U.S.A.; United Church of Christ; Episcopal Church; United Methodist Church; Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; and Presbyterian Church U.S.A.' (The Barna Research Group, Ltd. is an independent marketing research company located in southern California. Since 1984, it has been studying cultural trends related to values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors. The website is www.barna.org.) Did you notice #2—only 51% of the protestant pastors believe that Jesus was sinless which means that 49% of the protestant pastors believe that Jesus sinned! Today many religious leaders, pastors and people might *confess that Jesus has come in the flesh* but deny that He is the incarnate sinless God as the Bible teaches. The only way that believers can effectively *know the Spirit of God* is to read and search the Scriptures. Only then can we discern *truth from error*. Discernment—*knowing the Spirit of God!* There is a Persian proverb that sounds more like a tongue twister than sound advice. Maybe you had to memorize this in high school:

- He who knows not, and knows not that he knows not, is a fool; shun him.
- He who knows not, and knows that he knows not, is a child; teach him.
- He who knows, and knows not that he knows, is asleep; wake him.
- He who knows, and knows that he knows, is wise; follow him!

All four of these types can be found everywhere. They don't wear badges and introduce themselves accordingly. We'll never have someone walk up to us; shake our hand and say; 'Hi! I'm John! I'm a fool!' Likewise in spiritual truths; how are we going to know who to shun, teach, awaken or follow? The answer is right here in verse 2—*knowledge* or discernment; that skill and accuracy in *knowing* what the Word of God says. It's the ability to detect and identify the truth and the true. To *confess Jesus Christ* is more than simply to identify Christ. The demons do that—check out Mark 1:24 but it does not save them (cf. also James 2:19—*the demons also believe and shudder*.) True *confession* involves personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, in who He is and what He has done. It is a personal witness to what He has done for us (and if we've trusted Him then we have eternal life.) Interestingly, the Apostle John uses the combination of *Jesus Christ* 8 times in his epistles (1:3; 2:1; 3:23; 4:2 5:6, 20; 2 John 3 & 7). In 2:22 & 5:1, he separates the two names by writing Jesus is the Christ. Hiebert writes; "keeping the two names together best represents John's insistence that in the historical Person "Jesus Christ" is the abiding union of the human and the divine in the Incarnation." [Hiebert, D. Edmond, An Introduction to the New Testament, Moody Press, p. 325].

Verse 3: The opposite is also true, *every spirit that does not confess Jesus....* This verse views the discernment and *knowledge test* from a negative perspective. John doesn't say that *every spirit that denies* Jesus but *every spirit that does not confesses Jesus* is the *false spirit*—this is the criterion of the denial. It's one thing to speak with wonderful words about Jesus; it's another to deny that *Jesus is from God*. When *testing* a speaker's message, it's important to observe that heretical teachers often mask their false teaching by simply failing to affirm important biblical doctrines, such as the Person and work of Christ, salvation by grace, etc. To deny the true biblical Jesus, God incarnate, is the basis for *the spirit of the Antichrist*. While there will be a final *Antichrist*, a real person, during the Tribulation at the end time, the *Antichrist* is not just a man but includes an entire system of opposition to Jesus Christ and offers a substitute Jesus. John has already spoken about the *Antichrist* in 1 John 2:18-23. Anyone who denies that Jesus is God in the flesh is fueled by *the spirit of the Antichrist*. Someone has aptly said, 'the devil doesn't care at all if you know Jesus or love Jesus or pray to Jesus—as long as it is a false Jesus, a make-believe Jesus, a Jesus who is not there, and who therefore cannot save.' Notice that John adds; *you have heard that it is coming*—John's writing about the fulfillment of prophecy. When did John's readers hear this prophecy? While John's readers might have remembered the Old Testament prophecies such as in Daniel 7:8-11 and other places, I believe the Apostle John is referring to Jesus' teachings plus the teachings of the apostles. Paul also writes about the *coming of the Antichrist* in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 and Paul's epistles were written years before the Apostle John wrote his three letters. No doubt many of the believers of John's day had read those epistles or had heard the teaching of the apostles. Interestingly, the Greek perfect verbal tense, ἀκηκοατε, *akekoate*, *you have heard*, indicates that this truth about the prophecy of the *spirit of the antichrist*, was a regular part of the teaching in the early church about this *coming*. Hiebert adds, "The verb 'coming' is frequently used of the historical coming of Jesus Christ; the coming of the spirit of antichrist, is operating

through these many antichrists, is likewise a historical reality.” [Hiebert, D. Edmond, An Introduction to the New Testament, Moody Press, p. 325]. Therefore, John's readers should not have been surprised, nor should we, that there would be this satanic operation then and in our day.

#2 THE CHARACTER OF THE CHRISTIANS, V.4

Verse 4: Again, John employs his favorite affectionate term for believers, *little children* [Greek is ΤΕΚΝΙΑ, teknia]; cf. 1 John 2:1. John begins by identifying the true character of Christians here—you are from God whereas in verse 5 John points out the identity of the false prophets—they are from the world. The contrast between the two different *spirits* is carried over into a contrast between two kinds of men, one from God the other from the world. The pronoun *you* is in the emphatic position in the Greek text to heighten the contrast. Believers have God as their source—you are from God which also speaks of ownership. And because we belong to Him we have His nature within which is the same truth Peter declares in 2 Peter 1:4—you are partakers of the divine nature. And that's the same truth that John declared in the previous chapter in 1 John 3:24 and will repeat also in 4:13. John focuses on this truth that we belong to Him, because John has just written that the *Antichrist is coming* and God doesn't want His own, us, to be seduced by the doctrine of demons, by the *spirit of Antichrist*. God has given us His Holy Spirit to live within us and His Holy Spirit is stronger than Satan. Every believer has (1) the Holy Spirit living within, 1 Corinthians 6:19; (2) the Holy Spirit is a gift, Romans 5:5, 1 Thessalonians 4:8; (3) the absence of the Holy Spirit is proof of being unsaved, Romans 8:9b; (4) believers may lose the filling of the Holy Spirit but never the indwelling, John 14:16. Consequently we have a moral obligation to the Giver and because He indwells us we belong to Him—you are from God! A believer will continue to abide in Christ because God's Holy Spirit keeps us from being seduced by Satan, his demons and his influence (read 1 John 2:20; 21—you know the truth; v.27). John MacArthur comments well on verse 4: “First John 4:4 is an implied test. If a man is a true teacher of God, his life will be transformed by the Holy Spirit and he will have an affinity for God's truth. When faced with some teacher who claims to be from God, ask these questions: does the Holy Spirit appear to be at work in his life? Does he love and obey the Word of God? False teachers will fail this test because they aren't regenerate.” That phrase, *and have overcome them* is a positive statement and not a wishful hope; really good news. *Them* refers to the false teachers who collectively constitute the *spirit of antichrist*. But John doesn't stop there but adds; the indwelling *Spirit* is greater *than he who is in the world*, that is, Satan, his demons, his false messengers, etc. These are encouraging words to us in that we believers have a resource for victory, the presence of the indwelling God, which makes victory possible. That is, if we resist Satan's temptations to doubt, deny, disregard and disobey the Word of God (read also Matthew 4: 1-11 & 1 Peter 5:9). *Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world* also encourages believers that there's no need for fear in our lives. We have many spiritual enemies and battles, but not one of them is greater than the Lord Jesus Christ who lives within! Let me add this thought because by this phrase, *greater is He who is in you*, I believe that the Apostle John is stressing not necessarily the identity of our divine Enabler,

but more specifically the superior greatness of God. Sure, Satan is strong but God is stronger. Our enemy, Satan, is the ruler of this *world* (John 12:31) and Jesus came to destroy his work (1 John 3:8). The verse ends with the mention of *the world*. John had written about *the world* and its threat to the believer's Christian life in 1 John 2:15-17. *The world* is not the global earth or humanity which God loves (John 3:16) but those who rebel against God and His Word. John is suggesting that there are forces of spiritual darkness that guide and influence *the world* (read Ephesians 6:10-18). Dr. Barker adds, "The term world (kosmos) is probably to be understood in two ways: as a system of thought antithetical to Christian belief and as a description of those members of the community who were led astray by the false teachers. That some members of the community were easily persuaded to forsake the truth of the gospel should not bewilder the faithful." [Barker, Glenn W., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, New Testament*, p. 341].

#3 CONTRASTS, vv. 5-6

Verse 5: The true believers of verse 4 are now contrasted with the false believers—*from the world*. Unbelievers, false teachers and preachers find all that they need in Satan's *worldly* system and *the world* listens to them. They are actually demonic mouthpieces! What they are, is revealed by: (1) their message—*they speak as from the world*, (which in the Greek text is literally 'because of this out of *the world* they are *speaking*'); the present tense of the Greek verb portrays them as continuing to present their false message; confirming Jesus' words in John 3:31 (also read Jesus words in Matthew 12:34). And what they are is also revealed by (2) their following—*the world listens to them*. The *world* hears the false teachers because they say what *the world* of unbelievers wants to hear. The teaching by false teachers has an appeal to *worldly* people because they are in the *world* and friends of the *world* and share the viewpoint of the *world* (read James 4:4). But never forget, believers have a tremendous privilege to take the gospel to those in *the world* who are being deceived by false teachers.

Verse 6: If verse 5 presents demonic mouthpieces, this verse presents godly mouthpieces, believers. *We* probably refers to the apostles and the apostolic eyewitnesses (cf. 1:1-4) and also John's faithful readers *who know God*. True believers know that we belong to God and *listen* to God's true messengers, in John's day as well as today. Then John states this striking contrast; *he who is not from God does not listen to us*. Jesus taught (1) that *His sheep hear His voice* (read John 10:4-18); (2) that *everyone who is of the truth hears My voice* (John 18:37b); (3) and that *he who is of God hears the words of God* (John 8:47). Perhaps this might partially explain why fewer people are drawn to a church like Grace Community Church where the message is all about the Bible and a verse by verse study of Scripture. In John's final phrase in this section, *by this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error*, the apostle is making it clear that *error* has a spiritual dynamic to it. Some really intelligent people can be influenced by this satanic *spirit of error*, which is opposed to the work of God's Holy Spirit. Jesus is *the Truth* (John 14:6; read also Galatians 2:5, 14; Ephesians 1:13; 4:21; 1 Timothy 2:4 etc.). The term *Spirit of truth* is used to denote the Holy Spirit in John 14:17; 15:26 & 16:13. The phrase *spirit of error* is only used here in the New Testament and the construction of the Greek sentence makes this a genitive of

description, to describe the relentless activities of Satan and his minions, the false teachers, preachers and workers. Someone has summarized this paragraph by commenting that ‘this warfare between the Spirit of truth and the spirit of deception is the climatic aspect of the conflicts in the Christian life.’

Conclusion: One night last week when I couldn’t sleep, I turned on the TV and watched a program on the history channel called, “Ancient Mysteries” as it focused on the life of the Old Testament David. According to those who produced this so called documentary, David actually never really did what the Bible states he did; he only wrote a few psalms/songs; his kingdom was rather poor; etc. *Error!* It was one hour of *error* and I sat there wondering how many people watched that program (at a more decent time) and bought it hook line and sinker without ever reading the Word of God, *the spirit of truth*.

Note: It is my prayer that these printed notes will encourage serious Bible students to do further study on this passage. If you find any typos, errors or have any questions, please contact me. Thank you. Pastor John A. Eastman