

1 John 4:1-6

Beware of Deception

Image Church // First John: Week 7

Introduction

Welcome guests... **Celebrate David and Lenny and the stage!**

If you have your Bible, turn to 1 John...

- *If you don't have a Bible, we have one for you at the Connection Center!*

We're going to be in chapter 4...

Summary:

- 1 John is written so that we can have **assurance of our faith...**
- John does that by showing us what it looks like to be a Christian...
 - He shows us that being a Christian means that we are a **Child of God**, and that we have the **Spirit of God** in us that gives us a new heart...
- **The Spirit has opened our eyes to the truth of God!**
 - Jesus in our place...
 - This is not just a truth that gives us entry into the Christian life but also the truth that we cling to every day in the Christian life...
 - We don't go after the things of this world, we don't live how we want to live, and we surrender to the God of this world...

This is why his call is to **remain in the truth of Jesus!** *He uses that word some 14 times so far in 1 John...*

And the **evidence** that we're **remaining** in Jesus is shown by our love for one another... Christ's love to us, Christ's love through us...

And when we fail in doing this rightly when our hearts are exposed, we go back to Jesus, we confess our sin, and He is faithful and just to forgive us...

- God is greater than our hearts... He can do what we can't, and that's bring about change in our lives that reflects what he's done for us...

Remaining in Jesus means that we keep coming back to the person and work of Jesus, allowing His love to shape our love for one another...

- This becomes a tangible expression to each other and the watching world around us...

We finished last week with John saying: **believe in Jesus and Love one another**...

- This is evidence that **we're** remaining in Jesus...
- And then he says we can know that **Jesus remains in us** is through the Holy Spirit that He's given us...

The Spirit gives us the ability to believe in Jesus and to love like Jesus... This is the fruit that the Spirit produces in us that gives us confidence that we are in Christ!

Now, here's the thing we have to understand that John shows us... There's opposition to all of this...

- There's **a spirit of deception** at work in the world... With the purpose of trying to deceive people away from the truth of Jesus and the implications that He has on our lives...

This is why John warns us **not** to love the things of this world, because worldly living is full of deception...

And then John goes on to tell us about a group of people that were deceived away from the truth of Jesus and walked away from the church...

- And John says watch out for people trying to deceive you do the same...

*And here's what we learn from John, ***and we're going to see if more definitively this morning***, and that's that what's underneath all of this, the deception, the rejection of Jesus, is the spirit of the antichrist at work in the world...

Remember we talked about how John seems to show us that a singular ***antichrist*** will come in the end... But in the meantime, the ***spirit of the antichrist*** is at work in the world today...

- And here's the continual goal of the ***antichrist***...
 - To distort and diminish who we see Jesus to be...
 - To deny that Jesus was God... Diminish Jesus' work... ¹
 - To deny that He's the Savior of the World and Lord overall...

Here's why this is so important... Because what we need to understand is that there's a very real spiritual world around us...

- And I know for some of you, this is hard to wrap your mind around, but ***to not believe that there's a real spiritual world around us is to not believe the Bible...***
- *Literally from cover to cover...*

Jesus certainly believed in it... In fact, His very coming was announced by Angels who were spiritual beings...

- In **Matthew 4**, He's led into the desert by the Holy Spirit to be tempted by the Devil...
 - And He was served by angels after His temptation in the desert...
- He talks to demons and casts out demons all throughout the gospels...

- Angels were present at the tomb after His resurrection, and they were present at His ascension...

All throughout the Bible, we see a conflict between the ***One True God*** over the world, and *the false god in this world...* ²

- **Ephesians 6:12** says that: *our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens.*
- **1 Peter 5:8-9** *Be sober-minded, be alert. Your adversary the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in the faith...*
- **James 4:7** *Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*

I think the danger is for many professing Christians, they're not aware of this reality and think that it has little to no impact on them at all...

- Now, to be clear, there's a balance, we also don't want to be obsessed with the spiritual world...
 - *People blaming everything on the enemy... You just made bad choices...*
 - *We want to be aware and vigilant but not obsessed with it...*
- But I think for most, there's a lack of awareness, and what this leads to is apathy in the Christian life, ***when it should lead to vigilance and perseverance in our faith...***

I think there's a big miss on the spiritual reality in the Church in America... ***If we really got this***, then it would change the way that we view the church... We wouldn't just view it as an option or an event that we attend when we can...

- If we really go this, we would see the church for what it is, ***a refugee to help you resist the schemes of the enemy and cling to the power of Jesus...***

¹ John Piper, *Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you.*

² Thoughts in this section credit to David Platt, *Waging Spiritual War*

This is the setup for where we're going to be this morning and what we're going to be talking about...

1 John 4:1-6

¹ Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Remember the context... People had walked away from the church they had been deceived away from the truths of Jesus... Paul's saying don't let that be you, be on guard....

And what we see clearly here is that there are spirits that come from God, and there are spirits that do not come from God...

- It's the spirits not from God that are behind the deception... And we'll see in a minute that this is the spirit of the antichrist...

So in the midst of the legit spiritual reality that we live in, John says don't fall to deception... And, the way that we don't fall to deception is by TESTING everything we hear and experience...

Illustration: Men's laundry smell test, ladies hair washing test, men you'll spend hours in golf galaxy testing clubs..., ladies you'll spend hours in the dressing testing new clothes... WHY??? Because we want to know it will work, it is correct, or it is the right thing to do

Test is a word that was used to describe examining the purity of a metal... It means to examine, observe, carefully inspect something... To find out its quality and origin...

- We are to do that when it comes to what we hear or experience...
- Asking where does this come from? ***Is it a spirit from God or not?***³

You have to understand the importance of this... We have to test everything...

- Because the reality is you're either hearing from God or from the devil, this is a big deal...

Illustration: AI software can mimic what is real, even voices... It's vital to know who you're really talking to... Seen on shows on Netflix, so it has to be real, that people can pretend to be your kid...

- You should have a safe word for your kid...

There's going to be so much that you will hear that will **mimic** parts of Christianity, but it's not Christianity...

Look at some of the warnings that we get:

1 Timothy 4:1-2 *Now the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will depart from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons,² through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared.*

2 Timothy 3:13 Evil people and impostors will become worse, deceiving and being deceived.

Matthew 7:15 Jesus says: *Be on your guard against false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravaging wolves.*

Ephesians 5:6 *Let no one deceive you with empty arguments, for God's wrath is coming on the disobedient because of these things.*

James 1:16 *Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters.*

Acts 20:29-30 *I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.³⁰ Men will rise up even from your own number and distort the truth to lure the disciples into following them.*

We have to test everything we hear and everything we experience...

³ Ibid.

*Every podcast, every news outlet, every forum, every blog post, every Instagram reel, everything...

Even now, you should be testing what I'm saying...

- **BTW:** This is why I just cling to the Word of God... Why I teach it the way that I do... Walk through it...

Illustration Story: Would you buy a **flat-screen TV for \$250**? Would you buy **an oven door with a cord and a remote control for the same amount**? Several people in **South Bend, Indiana**... They thought they were getting a good deal on a flat-screen TV but instead learned a hard lesson about "getting what you pay for." The girlfriend of one of the unsuspecting buyers told reporters later, "If you're going to buy something from someone, make sure you open it up first. Especially if you're not buying it from the store." Authorities say the fake TVs were packaged so professionally, victims had no idea they made a bad purchase until they got home and opened the merchandise.⁴

We have to test everything... Open the box, what's at the core?!?

- **1 Thess. 5:21** says it like this: *test all things. Hold on to what is good...*

The question is, how do we know what is good? How do we actually test what we hear and experience? How do we know what is from God and what's not...

*That leads us to verse **Verse 2**, John says:*

² This is how you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,³ but every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming; even now it is already in the world.

The way that we know what is from God and what's not is by holding it up to who Jesus is and what He's done...

⁴ Jim L. Wilson and Jim Sandell, "Buying a Fake TV for \$250," in 300 Illustrations for Preachers, ed. Elliot Ritzema (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015).

The thread that runs all throughout Scripture is connected to Jesus... Everything points to Him, He's the hero of the story, He's the deliverer of the world...

- Jesus is God in the flesh who came to do what we could never do for ourselves...

Clear GOSPEL... *Sin and separation to restoration through the Spirit...*

- None of this is contingent on us... None of this is about what we can do or what we can bring to the table...
- It's all about Jesus...

And Jesus is the one who now rules and reigns over our hearts and lives... He's the one who shapes how we live...

- That is the message of the gospel...

Every other religion teaches a message counter to this...

In **Islam**, for example, **Muslims** completely deny that Jesus is God in the flesh. When I was in NYC, I spent a week with Muslims, and they believe that Jesus is a prophet, but He is not God.

That's not just in **Islam**. It's true with many who claim to be Christians, like **Mormons** or **Jehovah's Witnesses**, who both would claim to be Christians!

Jehovah's Witnesses teach that Jesus was created as the archangel Michael before the world existed, that Jesus is a created man and a lesser God Who never physically rose from the dead and has already come back invisibly to the world in 1914.

Mormons officially teach that Jesus was the firstborn spirit child of the heavenly Father and a heavenly mother.

- That Jesus is a secondary God, under God the Father. He didn't possess deity in Himself, but He progressed to deity in the spiritual.
- They teach that, like Jesus, we can become gods by keeping the Mormon rituals.

None of these teachings are from God, in fact, all of them were started by a man who, in some way, used a distorted version of actual Christianity as a part of their creation ...

- **Islam** was founded by **Muhammad** in **610 AD**... *You're late!*
- **Mormonism** was founded by **Joseph Smith** in **1830**- it's not even 200 years old!... 193 years to be exact...
- **The Jehovah's** Witness movement was started by **Charles Russell** in **1870**!...

Here's the thing, there's billions of people who believe false teachings about Jesus, and the sad part is that many of them are giving their lives more than we are to spread their message.⁵

This is the spirit of deception at work in the world in a tangible way giving evidence to what John's talking about...

Would you see the truth of Jesus that's counter to every other world religion...

- **1 John 2:2:** *[Jesus] himself is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world.*
- Any other message than that where you help, world, or do is not from God!

This was the issue the church was facing that John was writing to... People were teaching messages that opposed Jesus as fully God and fully man that came to make us right with God...

*Here's the thing I want you to understand, everything in your life hinges on what you believe about Jesus...*⁶

- If you believe that Jesus is who He said He is, then it changes everything for you down to the core of who you are... And it brings transformation in your life through you're worship and surrender to Him!

- Meaning this has implications on your marriage, your job, how you raise your kids, school, your relationships, your dating life, how you spend your time, your money, how you use your talent... How you think about life, your purpose, your plans... Where you find hope...
- *All of it hinges on what you believe about Jesus!*

So we are to test what we hear and experience by holding it up to the person and work of Jesus...

- Is what I am hearing or experiencing Christ-exhausting or self-exhausting?
- Does this make me the hero or Christ the hero?
- Is it in line with the things of Jesus?
 - The things of Jesus are God honoring...
- Is what I am seeing or hearing in line with the obedience that God's called us to?
- Is my relationship with God contingent on me or on Jesus?

Here's the thing it's not just other religions that the spirit of deception works through...

Appeal, we live in the age of technology and messaging... There are constant messages that are put out that are not from God!

- That point to things that are counter to the message of Jesus...

*In 2005, Apple co-founder Steve Jobs gave the commencement address at Stanford University. Toward the end of the speech, Jobs said, "And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary."*⁷

- This is the opposite of the message of Jesus, who says your heart is wicked, you need a new heart, believe in me and follow me to find who you can become...

⁵ Thoughts in this section credit to David Platt, *Waging Spiritual War*. Esp. info on other religions.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Thaddeus Williams, 5 Reasons to not follow your heart.

There's pastors who preach messages that make you the hero, and yeah, it feels good...

- This is counter to the message of Jesus... HE IS THE HERO!

People saying that you don't need the church, that you can do Christianity on your own... That you can define Christianity how you want, that the bible is outdated... Treat it like a salad bar...

- **Eph 5** *The church is the bride of Christ...* **John 14:15** Jesus says: *If you love me, you will keep my commands...*

There are people teaching that you can do what you want with your body and your sexuality... That you can choose who you want to be and who you want to be with and that's how God made you and it's ok...

- This is the spirit of deception at work distorting what it means to follow Jesus...
- Following Jesus isn't about fulfilling your passions and desires...
- Jesus says in **Luke 9:23**... *If you want to follow me, die to yourself, your passions, and your desires...*

There are people teaching that your status, success, and career are the aim of this life... It's what will sustain you and fulfill you...

- **John 6:35** Jesus says *I am the bread of life, no one who comes to me will ever be hungry, and the one who believes in me will never be thirsty again...*

There are people teaching your best life now...

- **Matthew 16:26** Jesus says: *For what will it benefit someone if he gains the whole world yet loses his life? Or what will anyone give in exchange for his life?*

There's an undercurrent of teaching that says you're not good enough and you need to make yourself better... Self-help industry... *Something went wrong... That's why we need help...*

- The solution is not you or a better version of it...

- It's Jesus! **Matt. 11:28-30** *Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*²⁹ *Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am lowly and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*³⁰ *For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*

All roads lead to heaven, all religions are the same... I have the freedom to believe what I want to believe...

- Jesus is the most exclusive and inclusive king...
- **John 14:6**... I am the way, truth, life... **John 3:16**

Some of you are being deceived... These things are not from God, they are counter to the things of God...

Illustration: *Me nd Brian, class surveys at other dorms...*

And then here's the hope... Look at **verse 4:**

⁴ You are from God, little children, and you have conquered them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.

We are stronger and able to overcome the deceptions of things that aren't because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world!

You have the power of God in you...

This is how you don't fall to deception... **Not by being smarter or by knowing more, but through the power of the Holy Spirit that you receive through faith in the finished work of Jesus...**

Verse 5

⁵ They are from the world. Therefore what they say is from the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶ We are from God. Anyone who knows God listens to us; anyone who is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of deception.

The word of God helps us decipher whether things do or do not line up with the teachings of Jesus...

Remember, John describes Jesus as the Word (John 1), and John is saying that the Spirit of truth will line up with what he has taught from the beginning (1 John 1:1).

The Word of God is how we test whether things are in line with the person and work of Jesus!

- We have to be in it and we have to be about it... In it is life, assurance and hope in the midst of a deceptive world...

Conclusion [VAMP]

Let me bring all of this together with **Ephesians 2:1-5**

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins² in which you previously walked according to the ways of this world, according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit now working in the disobedient.³ We too all previously lived among them in our fleshly desires, carrying out the inclinations of our flesh and thoughts, and we were by nature children under wrath as the others were also.⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us,⁵ made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace!

Every day you're hit with deception in the world around you...

- The goal is to remain in Jesus!!

Ephesians 6. The way we arm ourselves is with the word of God...

We have what we need, the spirit and the word and the people...

The question is will you take this seriously or will you take this apathetically and drift away over time...

- Would you see Jesus as better and worth it...
- Call to believe and call to hold on...

Additional Notes:

Hinduism: A Hindu views the entire universe as God's and everything in the universe as God. Hindus believe that each person is intrinsically divine and the purpose of life is to seek and realize the divinity within all of us. The Hindu belief is totally non-exclusive and accepts all other faiths and religious paths.⁸

- No founder, a fusion of various beliefs...
- **Buddism** is an offshoot of **Hinduism...**

⁸ Hindu Association of the Northern Territory with the support of the Office of Multicultural Affairs