

BUILDING ON A SURE FOUNDATION (vv. 4-6)

⁴ You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. ⁵ They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶ We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

1. John uses the past (actually perfect) tense to describe the victory that his readers had already experienced. How had they “overcome them (the false prophets who denied Jesus had come in the flesh)?”
2. Who do those who are from the world listen to? Why?
3. How would you describe the viewpoint of the world?
4. How does it differ from the truth of the gospel?
5. Who do those who are from God listen to?
6. When John says, “whoever knows God, listens to us,” he is directing our attention back to the “us or we” of 1 John 1:1-4—Those who had seen and heard Jesus and had been commissioned by Jesus to proclaim his message to others (the apostles). Luke reminds us that the early church “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching (Acts 2:42). Paul speaks of God’s household as being “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20).”
 - a. Why are the apostles foundational to our understanding of Jesus and the gospel?
 - b. How do we devote ourselves to the apostles’ teaching?
 - c. What does it mean for Jesus to be the chief cornerstone?
 - d. How do we build on the foundation of the apostles and prophets?

KNOWING THAT WE KNOW HIM

GETTING THE GOSPEL RIGHT | JOHN 4:1-6

Several years ago, I attended a missions conference in downtown Los Angeles. To save a little money, I opted for a budget hotel. The hotel was within walking distance of the convention center, but it was in a rough neighborhood. The walk to and from the conference was always an adventure. I met some interesting characters along the way. I was able to share a burger with a couple of homeless guys and tried to avoid eye contact with the guy who confidently strode through the hood in a loincloth. Then there were any number of people who wanted to sell me something. One guy offered me a Rolex for a fantastic price. Another had a suitcase full of sunglasses he swore were Ray-Bans. Still, another was peddling Gucci handbags. I was more than willing to buy a pair of Ray-Bans if that is what it took to get out of the neighborhood alive, but I had severe doubts about the merchants and their merchandise. Either these were cheap knockoffs, or someone had just hi-jacked a delivery van. Either way, I did not want anything to do with them (or the guy in the loincloth, for that matter).

John encourages a similar skepticism when it comes to the gospel. Not everyone proclaiming Christ is proclaiming the Christ of the gospel. The world is full of deliberate and unintentional deceivers. In either case, the results can be devastating. To miss the gospel a little, is to risk losing it altogether.

John’s readers were hearing a gospel that had little in common with the one they had received from John. The teachers were persuasive. They used the right words. They spoke passionately about Jesus. They claimed the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Yet something was out of place. John refuses to pull his punches. He warns readers not to believe everything they hear and then tells them how to distinguish between truth and falsehood.

COPYRIGHT 2019 Paul Kemp and Christ Church, all rights reserved. Feel free to make copies for distribution in personal and/or small group Bible Study.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

THE NEED FOR DISCERNMENT (v. 1)

¹ Dear friends, 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. Rather than telling us, “do not believe every message,” John tells us, “do not believe every spirit.” Why do you think he refers to the spirit behind the message rather than the message itself?
2. What spirit or spirits does John have in mind?
3. Why is it vital for us to realize that there is a “spirit” behind every message?
4. Why is it essential to consider both the content of the message and the spirit behind the message?
5. Some deliberately distort the gospel, others carelessly get it wrong. Why are both dangerous? How does the enemy use both to his advantage?

THE PLACE TO BEGIN (vv. 2-3)

² This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

1. According to John, how can we recognize the Spirit of God?
2. The word, “Christ” is not a name, it is a title. It means “anointed one.” In the Old Testament, God’s anointed one could be a king, a prophet, a priest, or a deliverer. Over time the prophets begin to speak of “the Anointed One”—the ultimate prophet, priest, king and deliverer all rolled into one, the one through whom God would make good on all his promises. There are times when the coming deliverer was described as if he were God himself, and other times, he was described as one who was uniquely related to God (like a son or a servant). How does Jesus fulfill and surpass all of the Old Testament expectations of God’s anointed one?

3. In light of the Old Testament background, what does it mean to acknowledge “Jesus is the Christ?”
4. How does the New Testament build on the Old Testament vision of Christ?
5. The false teachers of Jesus’s day affirmed Jesus’s divinity but denied his humanity and his atoning death on the cross.
 - a. Why is it important to affirm Jesus’ humanity?
 - b. Why is it important to affirm his atoning death on the cross?
 - c. What role does Jesus’ humanity play in the atonement?
6. Many today affirm Jesus’ humanity but deny his divinity (as well as his atoning death on the cross).
 - a. Why is it important to affirm Jesus’ divinity?
 - b. What role does his divinity play in the atonement?
7. What are some other ways we tend to diminish the person and work of Jesus?
8. Why is it important to get Jesus right if we are going to get the gospel right?