



## **17 Do not be deceived - 1 John 4:1-6**

What an amazing journey our loving Father is taking us on through His precious love-letter written with us in mind. He knew 2,000 years ago how tough it would be to live in the frantic, stressful, disturbing Twenty First Century so He had John write all these encouraging words to show His great love for us at the same time as showing us how to trust Him for protection in dark times. In **Lesson 8** we looked into 'warnings against the Antichrist'. We were looking at signs of the end times and the near return of Jesus Christ. We were also challenged as to whether we are ready to face up to meeting Jesus if He was to

come today?

John now reinforces his message of **chapter two** and shows us how we can be protected from being led astray by all forms of deception using the gift of discernment that God has given us by the Holy Spirit. It is not wise to have a gift and not to use it, especially as we are warned that this is the time we need it. There are so many different ways that the devil has to deceive us. There are people all over the world who undermine the Truth of the Word; they question it and leave new followers of Jesus uncertain as to its truth. There are people in elevated positions in Christian circles who live lifestyles that do not match up to the Word. Many of us know or have heard of Christian leaders who have twisted the Truth or who come out publicly and say they now no longer believe some part of the Christian faith. We cannot afford to believe every persuasive speaker that comes along. This all helps to undermine the Church and fulfil the devil's plan to try and destroy the Church.

One of the greatest problems in the Church in the West today is that there are so many CDs, DVDs, Christian TV and Radio stations that we can constantly be listening to teaching and preaching but we don't take time to check out what we are being taught. If they throw in a few miracles we are really hooked on the sensational and spectacular, so we follow blindly. When a baby is brand new we don't question him being fed by his mother as and when he needs it, but if a ten year old still needs his mother to feed him we do recognise there is a problem. So, as Christians, we have to grow up and receive our teaching directly from the Holy Spirit, **1 John 2:27**. If we do not do so we open ourselves up to being led astray as we rely on the hype of an emotional talk rather than the 'still small voice' of the Holy Spirit. The first encourages us to live our lives on our feelings, whilst the second teaches us to live by the Spirit, **Galatians 5:16**.

**In Acts 8:9-25** when Philip had been proclaiming Jesus in Samaria and many miraculous signs had happened, Simon the Sorcerer had boasted to all that he was great and many followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic. When the people believed in the name of Jesus Christ and were baptised, Simon himself did the same and followed Philip closely. Peter and John came to Samaria and prayed for the followers of Jesus to receive the Holy Spirit as they had 'only been baptised into the Name of Jesus'. When they received the Holy Spirit, Simon thought he could buy this gift to elevate his position, so Simon asked to 'cut a deal' with Peter. He was given a very sharp rebuke 'May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps He will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.'

This is a very powerful picture for us of Peter testing the spirits, using the gift of discernment but then loving Simon enough not to leave him, but telling him very firmly what he needs to do to be right with God. Simon now has the opportunity to be delivered of his past, to be humbled by the Truth, to be right with God and to be filled with the Holy Spirit, but it will only come through repentance to Jesus and letting go of his position in society. How many today love the excitement of a Church full of spectacular things happening every week, but do not have a personal relationship with the Living God for themselves often due to laziness or wrong priorities, or even because of their position in society. There are just so many excuses!

The Truth is we cannot afford from an eternal point of view to live in the world of today not having a clean conscience and an open heaven to hear the still small voice of God moment by moment of each day; that is not for our glory but for the Glory of God only.

When Jesus was alive John told Him that he had stopped someone from casting out demons because he was not one of us / our team / gang / or denomination! Jesus quickly told him not to stop him as if he is not against us he must be for us, **Mark 9:38-41; Luke 9:49-50**. Does this ring a bell? What a lesson for us as we look on any other Christian organisation and are so quick to criticize how they do things. We must not just test the spirit of the organisation but we must look at the fruit. If we are not sure, we are better to keep our mouths shut, pray for them, and do not follow them until we have reassurance from God that they are not against Jesus. Remember no one person has complete Truth, so we need to be discerning.

**Who is this Jesus Christ? 1 John 4:2.** This is the most urgent question today for the whole world. Jesus Christ is God Himself who has come in the flesh, born of a virgin. He is both man and God. He is not simply a spirit that passed into a man and then returned to heaven. He is Almighty God Himself, Who made Himself fully a man and came into the world two thousand years ago. As a man He ascended again into heaven and this same glorified man, Jesus Christ is alive today and sits at the right hand of God in Heaven, **Hebrews 1:3**. But when Jesus became a man He did not stop being God. He was God in the flesh – that is He was God in the form of a man and so He remains God today, **John 1:14; Philippians 2:3-8**. He did not live as God even though He was God. **Philippians 2:6**. Therefore all men who acknowledge Christ have the true Spirit of God, **Romans 8:11**. They have true faith.

#### **How to test the spirits 1 Thessalonians 5:21**

**Number one:** What do they say? There is one easy way to tell what kind of spirit is in a man, ask that man what he thinks of Jesus Christ. According to his answer we will know whether his spirit is born of God or not. Of course a man could lie but in time the truth will be seen by the man's actions, **John 15:5**. Does the message from his mouth encourage people to worship God and obey Him or does it encourage idolatry? The test is not whether it feels right but whether it is true? The plumb-line of God's revealed Truth in His Word must be checked out against everything we hear. Just stop and listen as it can save you from so much trouble and deception. All prophesy must be checked out like this as many false prophets have gone out from the Church but not without causing a lot of trouble and heartache to all parts of the Body of Christ. We have been warned that these deceptions will increase in the 'last days'. God would never send a Word through one of His servants that was contrary to the written Word. We cannot rely on leaders to discern for us, each individual has to know for themselves whether this word or teaching or sermon is Truth, **Proverbs 14:15**.

**Number two:** How do they live? Belief and behaviour are inextricably linked so we can tell who the focus of someone's life is by their actions and their talk, **2 Corinthians 3:2-3**. If there is arrogance, if they neglect their husband/wife and children or if there is selfishness and self-centredness, swearing, a critical and negative attitude and a lack of love then you could ask which spirit was in control of that person's life. If we recognise that there is a problem the next step is to discern what God is telling us to do with that information.

**Discernment** is a gift of the Holy Spirit (**1 Corinthians 12:10**) and vitally important today as we test all the spirits around us both in the Church and in the world. We cannot afford to be moved by the outward appearance of any person or organisation as many Churches have fallen apart after following a misleading personality. The ability to discern God's will, the move of His Spirit and being able to know what is from God can save our spiritual lives. Discernment is the ability to know right from wrong, good from evil especially in a spiritual sense, **Proverbs 8:12-14**. It is also very useful when making decisions for which we need divine guidance, **Philippians 1:10**. Discernment helps in being an effective leader as we can discern what is going on in secret.

With this gift comes also a responsibility as to what to do with the information that the Holy Spirit has given. The first point is to pray asking God to confirm through His Word if this is correct. Give God time! Then ask God to show you if there is anything He wants you to do with the information. Do you need to approach the person? Never do this unless you know for sure

you are walking in love with that person and only want their best. We must never do this from the point of 'I'll sort him out'. That is God's job through the power of the Holy Spirit. Usually God expects us to pray for some time using this information and most likely God will bring about the needed change without us having to say anything to that person, **1 Corinthians 4:3-5**.

Discernment is not an excuse for having a judgemental attitude (usually behind people's backs), that tears **them** apart, in order to build **ourselves** up. This usually comes from our own insecurity. We are called to be discerning not negative.

At the heart of discernment we must want what God wants, not caring about our own reputation. We must train our senses and spirit to recognise temptation before it traps others or ourselves. It is vital that we can tell the difference between a correct use of Scripture and a mistaken one. As our spiritual life grows we know God more deeply, therefore He is able to share what we discern in someone's life. He knows He can trust us to use the information for His Glory not for our own.

Discernment can also help our prayer life as we ask God how we should pray and His Spirit directs us. When we are baby Christians we just ask for what we want but as we mature we see our Father's love and know His will is best so we listen more for His instructions. Start walking in discernment in an area of your life where you sense there is a problem and see what God says to you then obey.

#### **Who are you living with? - 1 John 4:4-6**

John immediately changes the subject and encourages the reader to focus on the fact that they are indeed from God and have His Spirit to prove it. He does not leave them in any doubt spiritually, nor does he leave them insecure in their faith. John lets them know that his readers can face any opposition with real confidence by focusing on the victory they have in Christ. If we have the Holy Spirit we are drawn to people who also have the Holy Spirit and we listen to them. **Romans 10:9; 1 John 4:15**. People in the world are really happy to listen to the opinions of people in the world rather than people filled with the Holy Spirit who make them feel uncomfortable.

If you are a carnal Christian, (a born again believer who is walking in the flesh), being in disobedience can feel very uncomfortable in the presence of an on-fire Spirit-filled Christian. If we feel like this round Christians who are excited about Jesus and He is obviously the focus of their lives, we need to ask the question of ourselves 'What area of my life is not surrendered to Jesus?' 'Am I a real Christian or just religious?' 'Am I doing works, being a good girl to get to Heaven?' 'Am I a counterfeit Christian fooling everyone except the One who matters, God Himself?' While we are on earth we have the opportunity to do something about it. Repent, believe in Jesus Christ, and receive His Holy Spirit!

Today, as Christians, we are under attack from all sorts of free-thinkers, who claim to be Christians but preach a half-truth which is really an untruth. There are also liberal-thinkers who compromise the Word and tolerate everything, correct, incorrect or indifferent. The modern teachings of relativism and materialism surround us every day. The idea that nothing is of ultimate value and no religion can claim to have the whole truth is everywhere. There is the thinking that only what we get through the senses is good for us and actually is true and all else is open to interpretation. Scientists mock our faith and suggest we should live life in the real world, not worshipping a dead God.

However, there is nothing to worry about, nothing to shatter our confidence in the living God. However bad the world gets, be assured that we have the ultimate answer. John puts it this way:

**'Little children, you are of God [you belong to Him] and have [already] defeated and overcome them [the agents of the antichrist], because He Who lives in you is greater (mightier) than he who is in the world'. 1 John 4:4AMP**

Real Christians have no need to fear or be in doubt because the God of the Universe lives in us with all the power and resources we need to live life to the full and to have victory over every

demonic deception. If we really trust in, cling to, and rely on this Word from God we will be experiencing the life that Jesus paid for us to have, **John 10:10**.

**Meditate on these verses and allow the awesomeness of this Truth take over your whole person.**

'And if the Spirit of Him Who raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, [then] He Who raised up Christ Jesus from the dead will also restore to life your mortal (short-lived, perishable) bodies through His Spirit Who dwells in you,' **Romans 8:11AMP**.

When I am raised to life again, you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you. **John 14:20**

'I am in them and You are in Me'. **John 17:23**

'It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me'. **Galatians 2:20**

'So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith..... that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. **Ephesians 3:17-19**

## **17 Do not be deceived - 1 John 4:1-6 Challenge Questions**

### **Read all the notes on 'Do not be deceived' - 1 John 4:1-6**

1. What did you learn from **Lesson 8, 1 John 2:18-19** that you have reviewed in these verses?
2. Have you ever been persuaded to follow a certain teaching which you have since found out to be false? How does this make you feel?
3. Is the story of Simon the Sorcerer relevant to your life and why?
4. What do you feel about other people who follow Jesus in a totally different way from you? It could be in the area of worship or services or prayer or preaching or indeed other ways.
5. Sum up the '**test of the spirits**' from the notes.
6. Have you learnt anything new about the gift of discernment and will you use it more often? Any differently?
7. Did you meditate on the verses at the end of the notes? What spoke to you and why?

### **Read 1 John 4:7-12**

8. Where does love come from?
9. What does this passage tell us about the character of God?

10. What kind of love is John talking about here?

11. Do you think all the world's problems can be solved by this kind of 'love'? How?

12. Give reasons why God sent His Son according to these verses.

13. What does it mean in reality 'that we might live through Him'? **1 John 4:9**

14. If no one has ever seen God how can we ever know Him?

15. Why might some Christians find it difficult to love other Christians?

16. How do you feel about 'greeting each other with a holy kiss'? **2 Corinthians 13:11-13.**

17. Does this make a Church seem more loving?

18. Sum up in one short sentence what you have learned in this study.