

Mercy Hill Church

1 John • Discerning Truth From Lies • 1 John 4:1-6 • No Date

Main Point

An accurate understanding of the Word of God is the best protection against false teaching.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

If you had to make an important life decision tomorrow, who are three people you would ask for their opinions?

Why did you choose those people? What about them makes them trustworthy sources of advice?

What about spiritual counsel? What kind of person would you trust to guide you spiritually?

We must be careful who and what we listen to. If it's true in the case of ordinary pieces of advice, how much more should we be careful about messages concerning the most important truths in the world. To that end, John wanted to emphasize the need for discernment in Christians. Though God gives the Holy Spirit, and He is the Spirit of truth, there are also counterfeits that come in the form of many false prophets. Because of the reality of false teachers and spiritual lies, we must as believers test all teaching to see if it's authentic.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Have a volunteer read 1 John 4:1-3.

How does the fact that John called his readers “dear friends” influence the way you read what comes next?

Are false prophets and teachers always easy to recognize? Why or why not?

What is the first test we should place on any teaching?

A vast majority of people in the world would readily agree that there is a god of some kind in the universe, but the real litmus test of truth is what a person believes about Jesus. For John, what a person believes and teaches about the nature of Jesus is the dividing point between authenticity and lies.

Why is the nature of Jesus “ground zero” for determining whether a teaching is truth or a lie?

What does this indicate about the importance and centrality of the person of Jesus Christ?

Why is recognizing the humanity and divinity of Jesus at the same time the foundation for determining all truth?

Read John 14:6. Why is it significant that Jesus called Himself “the truth”? How does that make Jesus distinct from any other religious figure in history?

Every other major religious figure in history claimed to know the truth, but Jesus embodied the truth. He is the very manifestation, in His person, of the truth. As such, Jesus doesn't just show the way; He actually is the way. Jesus accentuated His centrality and exclusivity in His statement that He is “the” truth; not “a” truth. If we want to know whether a message is true, then we should examine what that message says about Jesus. In the case of John, the false teachers of the day were denying that Jesus was actually human. Today we must be on guard against any teacher or teaching that seeks to lessen or departs from what we know to be true about Jesus who is at once both human and divine.

What are some teachings you have encountered that have either stated or implied that Jesus is less than He claimed to be?

If Jesus is less than He claimed, what implications does that have on the rest of Christianity?

How would you counter someone who denied that Jesus actually came in the flesh?

Time and time again, we must return to the basic truth we know about Jesus. As we do, we will be able to hold firm to truth if it falls in line with Jesus. If it does not, we must be on guard against it. Because Jesus is so completely central not only to Christianity but to everything we know as true, John rightly puts teaching to the test by holding it up to the ruler of the Son of God.

| Have a volunteer read 1 John 4:4-6.

What is the confidence of the believer based in according to verse 4?

How does remembering that God, in the Holy Spirit, is in you give you comfort and courage right now?

How does remembering that fact give you comfort when examining teaching to see if it's true or false?

Conflict might be uncomfortable, but it is necessary when we contend for the truth of God. As we recognize, confront, and reject false teaching, our confidence is not in how much we know but Who we know. Because the Holy Spirit lives in us, we can know that He has already overcome any and all who come against Him.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:12-14. How does this verse help us understand the nature of false teaching?

How does this passage emphasize the necessity of being an active part of God's church?

John offered the second test of false teachers and teaching, and it's pretty simple: Does the world listen to them? If the answer is yes, they are from the world. Believers, meanwhile, are from God. These verses not only help us discern between truths and lies, they also remind us of the important to be in and with the people of God so that we might fill our minds and hearts with the truth from God and His Word.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Are there any messages you need to put to the test that are currently being allowed into your mind and heart as truth?

How central is Jesus to the way you define truth in your life? What part of your thinking needs to be realigned to make Him more central?

What is one area of your life in which we can pray for you to trust the message of God more fully?

Pray

Close your group by thanking God that He is trustworthy. Thank Him that He is greater than any in the world. Pray that you and your group would be able to spiritually discern the difference between truths and lies.

Commentary

| 1 John 4:1-6

As John began chapter 4, he urged Christians to show discernment because every voice they hear cannot be trusted. The test for the validity of a teacher or the spirit behind a teacher is their treatment of Jesus.

Apparently, false prophets in the church at Ephesus were denying that Jesus is fully human and fully divine. This test was specifically set up for this situation: Does the teacher accept Jesus' full humanity and full deity. If not, his entire teaching is to be rejected.

This is not the only test a teacher must pass. An eloquent teacher of God's Word might agree to the divinity and humanity of Jesus, but have other things so out of bounds in his theology that he still might qualify as a false prophet. Jesus himself said that not everyone who called him "Lord" would enter the kingdom.

In this context, the person who acknowledges or confesses that Jesus has come in the flesh is from God. Those who don't are the spirit of the Antichrist, which John had already warned his readers about (2:18-27; see 2 John 7). Every teacher belongs in one of the two categories: true prophet of the Word or Antichrist.

Warnings might make us question if we have listened to false teachers and become Antichrist. No! You have overcome the antichrists, for you have successfully resisted the lure of the false prophets. The one who is in you (the Holy Spirit; Rom. 8:9) is greater than the one who is in the world (Satan; 1 John 5:19), who is called "the prince of this world" (John 12:31).

The antichrists and false prophets are cut out of the same piece of cloth as the world. As a result, they speak to the same values as the world, so the world listens to them. They are from the world, but we are from God. So when the apostles (and possibly other true witnesses) speak from God, those who are born of God listen to them. The Holy Spirit convicts of sin (John 16:8), calls to righteousness (John 16:8), and illumines the mind to the truth of Scripture (1 Cor. 2:12-14).

The world does not listen to the things of God. The person without the Spirit "does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). The ministry of the Holy Spirit lets us discern the spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood. Therefore, prayer, meditation, and spiritual sensitivity are the primary factors that protect us from being deceived by false doctrine—not raw intelligence or academic learning.