



# To Whom Do You Listen?

1 John 4:1-6

## Actions and Truth

- ❑ In Lesson 6, we considered the command to love one another (*1 John 3:11*). John writes, “Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth” (*3:18, NIV*). Genuine love is shown through our actions, and our actions show that we “belong to the truth” (*3:19*). In the Christian life, truth and love cannot be separated.
- ❑ Read 1 John 3:23. John states *two* actions, but includes them in one, single command. This is significant. True Christianity involves both belief and practice.<sup>1</sup> To *truly* believe in Christ is to believe the truth about him and to entrust one’s life to him, and that includes obeying him.

## Who Teaches Truth?

Read 1 John 4:1-3. John writes, “do not believe every spirit,<sup>2</sup> but test the spirits to see whether they are from God” (*4:1a, NIV*).

1. Some teaching comes from the “Spirit of God” (*4:2*) while other teaching comes from the “spirit of the antichrist” (*4:3*).<sup>3</sup> How can we recognize the difference?<sup>4</sup>
2. What are examples of false prophets or false teachers today? Have you been confronted by them? How would you recognize that their teaching is “not from God?”<sup>5</sup>

## Where Are We From?

3. Read 1 John 4:4-6. John writes that some people are “from God” (*4:4, 6*) while others are “from the world” (*4:5*). How can we recognize them?<sup>6</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Some say that they believe in Jesus Christ, but they fail to love others. Other people try to reduce Christianity to the one command: love others. For them, it does not matter what you believe, if you love other people, then that is ‘Christian.’ However, genuine Christianity involves both belief and practice.

<sup>2</sup> ‘spirit’ – a person (or teaching) inspired (moved) by a spirit. Every ‘prophet’ is the spokesperson for some spirit.

<sup>3</sup> ‘spirit of the antichrist’ refers to inspiration by God’s great enemy - Satan (the devil) (*1 John 3:10*).

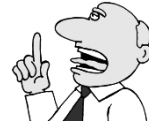
<sup>4</sup> ‘acknowledge’ (in verses 2-3) – to admit to be true, confess, put faith in; *not* merely to know intellectually (*James 2:19*). ‘Jesus Christ has come in the flesh’ (v. 2) includes both his pre-existence and incarnation (*1 John 1:1-2; John 1:1, 14*). The eternal Son of God (God the Son) took on human flesh as a unique, one-time (but continuous) identification with humanity. Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully human. False prophets denied this, and still do.

<sup>5</sup> A ‘false prophet’ claims to speak God’s truth, but actually speaks falsehood concerning at least some fundamental truths. There are various groups that claim to be ‘Christian’ but their teaching concerning Jesus Christ is contrary to the Bible (e.g., Jehovah’s Witness, Mormons). See *Are They Christians?* on the ICF website. Of course, someone may ask, ‘How do we know God’s truth?’ This leads to other questions: Is the Bible God’s word, as Christians claim? Have other ‘revelations’ superseded the Bible? These questions are beyond the scope of this lesson. In any case, true Christianity is based on the Bible, and Christians have good reason to believe that the Bible is God’s unique revelation of truth. See *The Reliability of the New Testament* on the ICF website.

<sup>6</sup> John’s statements may sound arrogant to the non-Christian. However, his statements are based on the conviction that the apostles’ teaching is the teaching of God in Christ. Today’s teachers must uphold the apostles’ teaching.

4. John writes that his believing listeners have “overcome” the false prophets (that is, they have not accepted the teachings of the false prophets) (4:4). As Christians, how do we overcome the false teaching that confronts us?<sup>7</sup>

5. What should we do if false teachers approach us or come to our door?<sup>8</sup>



### *Reflection/Application*

- What do *you* believe about Jesus Christ? What is the source of your knowledge?
- Whatever you believe, it is important to know the difference between the Christ of biblical Christianity and the “Christ” of false Christianity and other religions. See resources on the ICF website and in the ICF library, and ask Jay if you have any questions.
- As a Christian, do you have a churchgoing or truth-seeking friend who is being influenced by teaching you know to be untrue? Pray for God’s guidance, and seek to help your friend.<sup>9</sup>

## A Statement of Faith<sup>10</sup>

### We believe in...

- One God, existing eternally in three persons as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- Jesus Christ: His deity, true humanity, virgin birth, sinless life, atoning death, bodily resurrection, ascension, and visible return to earth.
- The Holy Spirit, Who convicts humans of sin and sets apart the believer to a holy life.
- The Bible as the Word of God, fully inspired, inerrant in the original writing, and of absolute authority in faith and life.
- The sinfulness and helplessness of humans and their inability on their own to produce any act worthy of God's acceptance.
- Salvation as a gift of God's grace apart from human merit, received on condition of faith in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- The Church in its universal form, composed of all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Its visible form is the body of believers organized locally for worship, prayer, teaching, edification, service, and evangelism.

<sup>7</sup> As Christians, we overcome false teaching with the help of the Holy Spirit in us (2:20; 3:24; 4:4). The Holy Spirit gives us the knowledge and the ability to recognize false teaching, and also the power to overcome the temptation to accept false teaching. He (the Holy Spirit) who is in us is greater than the one (Satan) who is in the world (4:4). Of course, overcoming false teaching also involves regular study of the Bible, prayer, and Christian fellowship.

<sup>8</sup> Nonbelievers may not distinguish ‘false teaching’ from ‘the truth’ because they are still not convinced that the Bible presents the truth. Nonetheless, they should understand the difference between biblical Christianity and *other* teaching to avoid being misinformed and misled. As a Bible teacher, I advise them to avoid false teaching. Believers may see encounters with false teachers as a good opportunity to share the truth, and that is generally true. However, the believer should be aware that false teachers are well-trained, including their ability to misuse the Bible, so preparation is helpful. There are many resources to help. Finally, beware and take care! (1 John 2:20-27)

<sup>9</sup> This may be difficult to do, but pray about it, and ask a mature Christian friend for advice.

<sup>10</sup> Almost all Christian organizations have a ‘statement of faith.’ It is important to know what supposed Christian organizations believe. If they do not have a statement of faith, it is reasonable to question what they believe. The statement of faith printed here is adapted from the Blacksburg Christian Fellowship website.