

The Power Of A Single Verse: 1 John 4:1

In my beginning steps walking with Jesus, I was vulnerable to deception from false teachers, as most baby Christians are. 1John 4:1 became a powerful verse for me—even before I understood its full context—in that it reminded me in my youth to be careful what I watched and listened to. As I have matured as a believer through the years, this power verse has become my modus operandi for discerning truth from error.

To begin, allow me to relate a couple of personal stories in line with this week's power verse.

Some years ago, my wife and I were invited to come hear a certain prophet/preacher. It occurred to us to bring our Bibles, in order to test what the preacher was preaching against Holy Scripture. This testing had not been our practice in our formative years—as is the case with most baby Christians, to try and eat everything in sight! As the preacher spoke, much of what he said did not line up with our limited knowledge of God's Word. The service concluded with plates being passed around to collect the people's money. Of course, the whole sermon was tailored to a prosperity gospel. We seemed to be the only ones in the crowd who discerned that this event had been an unholy cash grab! We gave zero dollars and zero cents, followed our common sense, and left.

A good friend of mine, who had brought me to Christ and was a deep influence in my early Christian walk, once shared how a famous prophet and teacher he followed had betrayed his trust. Go figure! My friend had collected all this teacher's books, videos, and materials, believing he was anointed of the Lord. That is, until he declared a dated prophecy that never came to pass:

Deuteronomy 18:22

When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.

From this Scripture my friend discerned immediately that he had been following a false prophet. He gathered all the teaching materials of his former spiritual guru, put them in a cardboard box, and threw them away. Good for him!

In order for us as believers to know what is false, we first need to know what is true—that is, God's unchanging Word. We each have a responsibility to be established in the Scriptures—and subsequent obedience to it—so that we can discern truth from error when we hear it.

1John 4:1

(KJV) Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

(NIV) 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.

*QUESTION FOR MEDITATION: Have you been in the practice of testing all the teachings you have received? What would that process look like, and how would it function in real time?

*STUDY POINT: Beginning with today's power verse, compile a list of twenty-five New Testament Scriptures that would help you fortify your discernment of truth and error. Meditate and memorize on each of these powerful verses, even as you apply them to your walk with Jesus.

We know by the tone of this letter, and specifically this verse, that John is a true pastor with a heart for his sheep. He desires that they grow in the Lord (2 Peter 3:18) and he has been in the practice of protecting his sheep against wolves—namely the false prophets who had begun to infiltrate his sheepfold. These secessionists were promoting a different Jesus, One Who did not come to earth in a physical body—a purely spiritual Jesus.

The context of 1John 4:1 provides us with a Scriptural litmus test—one that John employs here to discern truth from error:

1John 4:2-3

Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

So, yes, Jesus came to earth and walked in our shoes. That's the truth!

And so it is, beloved, that we must test all teachings against God's Word, identifying and discarding all counterfeits and outright falsehood. Even our spiritual and earthly experiences must be tested:

2Peter 1:16-21

For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

A more sure word. Pretty clear, right? God's Word usurps experience.

Within our church families—and importantly within the pastoral leadership of our local assemblies—all teachings brought into the church or presented from the pulpit must be tested. False doctrine abounds in our day and has the real potential to divide and scatter

God's sheep. Our Father in heaven loves His children and hates those who cause His kids confusion and division:

Proverbs 6:19

A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.

We conclude with this harrowing warning from Scripture:

Matthew 18:6

But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

Amen.

~ Reverend Darren McClelland