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WHEN FALSE RELIGIONS DECEIVE

A photograph of a white, rectangular sign on a sidewalk at night. The sign has a black border and contains the text 'Psychic' in a large, black, cursive font. Below it, '\$10' is written in a large, bold, black sans-serif font. At the bottom, 'Special' is written in a smaller, black, cursive font. The background is dark with some blurred lights.

Psychic
\$10
Special

*What's the most unusual scam
you've seen or heard about?*

QUESTION #1

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE **117**

THE POINT

Truth is grounded in the reality of who Jesus Christ is.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Sadly, we have a new phrase in our American lexicon: “fake news.” At one time, news publishers made large financial investments in reporters, editors, marketing, and printing presses. But today, thanks to the Internet and digital technology, virtually anybody can set up a professional looking online newsletter that rivals the websites and digital newspapers of legitimate news sources. One person can twist the facts, express his views as factual, and present it in a way that seems legitimate. Even though it looks good or sounds legitimate, it’s still fake news. But that doesn’t keep people from passing the stories along—especially when it falls in line with what they believe. The fake news continues to spread.

A religious leader can sound equally convincing. His doctrine may carry an air of legitimacy and even contain elements of truth, but if it is not grounded in Scripture, it’s fake. And people will flock to such religious teaching if it appeals to what they want to believe. It doesn’t matter how many people believe it, if a religion is not grounded on the truth of God’s Word and the reality of Jesus Christ, it’s false—and dangerous.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

1 John 2:18-20

¹⁸ Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. ¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. ²⁰ But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge.

In the first century AD, the apostle John warned, “it is the last hour.” We can’t sit here in the twenty-first century and think John was sorely mistaken. Throughout the New Testament, references to “the last days” (2 Tim. 3:1-5; 2 Pet. 3:3-4) or the last hour speak about a period of time. These refer to the time between the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ—the beginning point of salvation—and that moment when He returns and brings the culmination of that salvation.

In the last days also comes the “antichrist.” John was the only New Testament writer to use this word, but he used it in different ways. Sometimes it referred to one person, and sometimes it referred to many.

- ▶ **One person.** Sometimes the word refers to one individual. Daniel called him “the prince who is to come” (Dan. 9:26). Paul called him “the lawless one” (2 Thess. 2:9). John referred to him as the “beast” (Rev. 13:1). Whether the antichrist is alive now or not, we do not know, so there is little benefit to trying to identify him.
- ▶ **Multiple persons.** The world also has “many antichrists”—those who live by the false idea that Jesus is not the Christ. Anyone who opposes Christ and biblical teaching about who He is can be called an antichrist. In verse 18, John mentioned “antichrist” but his focus was on the group of people who had risen up to tear apart the church with their false teachings.

What are some specific teachings that make a false religion false?

QUESTION #2

These antichrists “went out from us,” abandoning the church. Since these individuals stand against Christ, they have no reason to be a part of His church. We’ve all seen people who claimed to follow Jesus for a time but eventually leave the church. Their departure is not just evidenced by their absence and lack of involvement; they abandon truth or twist God’s truth to fit what they want to believe—and their “truth” is a lie. Additionally, many also abandon biblical morality.

These antichrists are not Christians who lost their salvation. They were involved in the external things of the church and the Christian life, but were void of any internal transformation. They were never saved to begin with. When they “went out from us” they proved “they were not of us” in the first place.

What keeps the child of God from falling for the lies and half-truths of the antichrists? We “have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge.” Non-truths, partial truths, and distorted truths are everywhere. Just like you’ve heard of a lie detector, we have a truth detector! When we get saved, God puts His Holy Spirit in us. When we let the Holy Spirit fill us, we become increasingly sensitive to His truth. Like a red warning flag, He helps us discern something that is not true.

How can we demonstrate respect for others while opposing their beliefs?

QUESTION #3

1 John 2:21-25

²¹ I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. ²² Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. ²³ No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. ²⁴ Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. ²⁵ And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life.

TRUE OR FALSE?

From the list of statements below, circle the statements that are false. Then answer the questions.

1. There are 24 hours in each day.
2. Koalas are cute, little bears.
3. Corn and peas are starchy vegetables.
4. The Atlantic Ocean is the largest ocean in the world.
5. Delaware was the first state in the United States.

How can you know if a fact is true or false?

How can you know if a religion is true or false?

(Answers are found on page 124.)

"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth."

—JOHN 16:13

False teaching and false teachers are everywhere. Their doctrines can vary, but they universally deny one core truth. They twist and even deny what the Bible tells us about Jesus. They may express their denial in a variety of ways: they do not believe the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one; they want to add to the teaching about Jesus; they want to take something away from the teaching of Jesus; they believe Jesus is fully God but was never a man; they believe Jesus was a man and nothing more.

To deny *any* or *all* the truth about Jesus is to deny the Father. No one can say they love and follow God without loving and following Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself stressed this truth:

- ▶ “Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me” (John 6:45).
- ▶ “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’” (14:6).

Later in this epistle, John told us how we could discern false teaching. We test teachers on the core truth that Jesus is fully man and fully God. He invited us to “test the spirits” (1 John 4:1). “Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God” (vv. 2-3).

The truth of Jesus—fully man and fully God—is central to the gospel and to salvation, and we are never to lose sight of that. “What you heard from the beginning abides in you.”



What disciplines have helped you remain in Jesus?

QUESTION #4

1 John 2:26-29

²⁶ I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. ²⁷ But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him. ²⁸ And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. ²⁹ If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

No one likes to be deceived; then again, that's what makes it deception. If we knew deception was happening, we wouldn't be deceived! John gave us the remedy in dealing with "those who are trying to deceive you." The remedy is to rely on God's Holy Spirit who lives in us. "The anointing that you received from him abides in you." Because of the presence of God Himself, John said, "You have no need that anyone should teach you."

John did not mean human teachers are unimportant. Even as the apostle wrote this, for example, he was teaching his readers! What John was saying, however, was that the same Spirit of God who anointed him to teach and inspired him to write these words, lives in all who are saved to help us discern the truth.

To stay in tune with what the Spirit is doing and teaching, we must "abide in him." I once heard Tony Evans explain this principle by comparing it with making hot tea. People make hot tea either by dipping a tea bag in hot water or by letting the tea bag remain in the cup. Dipping the tea bag will give you tea, but it's weak. But if you let the tea bag fully submerge in the water and leave it there, you come away with stronger tea.

We must remain in His Word and in His Spirit. As false teachings arise, we can rely on the Spirit of God to show us what is right and to help us overcome so that we may help others do likewise.

How does knowing Jesus is coming back encourage yet challenge you in your walk with Christ?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

We must rely on the Holy Spirit and the truth of God's Word to overcome and stand strong in the face of false teaching. Choose one of the following applications:

- ▶ **Pray.** Ask the Lord to reveal to you any lies you may have believed. Ask that His Spirit would make it clear when the enemy tries to get you to believe things that aren't true.
- ▶ **Study together.** Immerse yourself in the study of God's Word. Surround yourself with other Christians in group Bible study. Encourage one another as you grow deeper in your knowledge of the truth.
- ▶ **Research.** If a certain cult or religion is prominent in your area, do some research and learn where they differ from the truth of the gospel. A good place to start for information is at 4truth.net.



There are many ways to be led astray these days. There really always have been. But the Truth remains the same—and His name is Jesus.

My thoughts

Answers from page 121:

1. True; 2. False. They aren't bears at all.; 3. True; 4. False. The Pacific is the largest ocean in the world.; 5. True.