

1 John 4:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.

Analysis

They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. John contrasts false teachers with true believers. "They are of the world" (autoi ek tou kosmou eisin)—false prophets belong to the world system organized in rebellion against God. Their origin, allegiance, and values align with the world, not God. This explains their teaching's character and reception.

"Therefore speak they of the world" (dia touto ek tou kosmou lalousin)—their message originates from and reflects worldly thinking. They speak the world's wisdom, values, and priorities, not God's truth. Their teaching may sound sophisticated or appealing to natural human thinking precisely because it conforms to fallen perspectives rather than challenging them with divine revelation.

"And the world heareth them" (kai ho kosmos autōn akouei)—the world listens eagerly to these false teachers because their message resonates with worldly thinking. Like attracts like. Those who belong to the world find worldly teaching attractive; it confirms their existing beliefs rather than confronting them. This explains false teaching's popularity—it appeals to natural desires, requires no repentance, and offers benefits without the offense of the cross. Jesus warned His disciples that the world would hate them but love its own (John 15:19). When teaching is universally popular and inoffensive, suspect whether it truly originates from God.

Historical Context

The pattern of false teaching's popularity versus true teaching's offense pervades biblical history. False prophets in Israel proclaimed peace when judgment was coming, and people loved it (Jeremiah 5:31, 6:14). Jesus faced rejection while religious charlatans gained followings. Paul warned Timothy that people would accumulate teachers to suit their preferences (2 Timothy 4:3-4). The Johannine community experienced this—Gnostic teachers gained popularity by offering sophisticated philosophy and claiming special knowledge without demanding holy living.

This pattern continues throughout church history. Heretics often initially attract larger followings than orthodox teachers because error tickles ears while truth confronts sin. The prosperity gospel, theological liberalism denying biblical authority, and cultural accommodation all demonstrate this principle—worldly teaching attracts worldly hearers. Faithful preaching often faces smaller audiences and stronger opposition precisely because it challenges rather than confirms fallen human thinking.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How can you discern whether a teacher's popularity indicates God's blessing or worldly compromise?
2. What contemporary Christian teaching seems designed to appeal to worldly thinking rather than challenge it with biblical truth?
3. If the world eagerly hears certain teaching, should this make you suspicious rather than impressed by its popularity?

Interlinear Text

αὐτῶν	ἐκ	τοῦ	κόσμος	εἰσίν·	διὰ	τοῦτο	ἐκ	τοῦ
They	of	G3588	the world	are	therefore	G5124	of	G3588
G846	G1537		G2889	G1526	G1223		G1537	
κόσμος	λαλοῦσιν	καὶ	ὁ	κόσμος	αὐτῶν	ἀκούει		
the world	speak they	and	G3588	the world	They	heareth		
G2889	G2980	G2532		G2889	G846	G191		

Additional Cross-References

John 8:23 (Parallel theme): And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world.

John 17:14 (Parallel theme): I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

John 17:16 (Parallel theme): They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

John 3:31 (Parallel theme): He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all.

Revelation 12:9 (Parallel theme): And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

Psalms 17:4 (Parallel theme): Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer.

2 Timothy 4:3 (Parallel theme): For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;

Jeremiah 5:31 (Parallel theme): The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?

Micah 2:11 (Parallel theme): If a man walking in the spirit and falsehood do lie, saying, I will prophesy unto thee of wine and of strong drink; he shall even be the prophet of this people.

Jeremiah 29:8 (Parallel theme): For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Let not your prophets and your diviners, that be in the midst of you, deceive you, neither hearken to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed.

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