

5 They are from the world. That is why they speak from a worldly perspective and the world listens to them. 6 We are from God. The one who knows God listens to us, but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. That is how we can distinguish between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

The Germans have an interesting term that they use. It is “Weltanschauung.” It literally means, “worldview.” Weltanschauung can be completely different from one society and one age group to the next. I think about what happens in Eastern countries where men think that if a woman walks alone then she deserves to be raped and is asking for it. It is their Weltanschauung, which is completely different from ours. This is why many people are cautious over who we let into our country. Do they have a completely different way of viewing the world? Will it be a threat to our people and our democracy or our way of life if they start to have the majority?

What is Your Weltanschauung?

When God welcomes people into His kingdom, there is different Weltanschauung that He wants us to have. How do you view the world? How do you live in your society? How do you view humanity? Music? Politics? War? Sex? Within our Lutheran faith we do not dictate who you should vote for. We try not to be legalistic when it comes to clothing or hairstyle. Yet there is a Weltanschauung that God wants you to have, to drive the decisions that you make in life.

John wanted to make sure that God’s people KNEW what God had to say about a lot of these things. **“We are from God. The one who knows God listens to us, but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. That is how we can distinguish between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.”** The spirit of this world would disagree with this very premise - that there is a definite truth or a definite error - or that anyone has the right or the ability to tell me what is right or wrong and that I need to listen to it or obey it. So that battle begins right away. The Biblical Weltanschauung says God is the master. My feelings are not the arbiter of right and wrong. God’s Word is. So we need to teach God’s Word and preach God’s Word and do our best to make sure you know it WELL. It might seem like overkill to some that we require people to go through 15 Bible studies in order to commune here, or for a student to have to go through at least two years of catechetical training and an examination prior to allowing them into communicant membership. But God’s Word says this is important, so that with a solid foundation we can make distinctions between the truth and lies.

Think more about the American Weltanschauung. According to the popular American mindset, there is no such thing as sin. The only sin you can commit is to tell someone they are sinning. This overflows to Christians living here as well. Most don’t really seem to think that God gets angry about anything, and He definitely doesn’t damn people to hell. Love and acceptance is the gospel, not a God on a cross. Being “spiritual” doesn’t mean studying the Spirit’s words and knowing God’s Word. It simply means that you like to sit and contemplate deep things and wonder about the mysteries of the world. You might also tend to speak in softened tones and speak very tenderly to people. Then you would be designated as “spiritual.”

During John’s time, their version of “spirituality” involved the idea that any material or physical things were bad. The body was a prison for the soul. So in order to escape it, you had to transcend the physical through

meditation. Some became very abusive of their bodies by depriving themselves of any physical pleasures. Others went to the other extreme and figured that as long as their bodies were only prison for the soul, they might as well live it up and abuse it by eating, drinking and being merry. This was popular thinking of his day.

Our catechetical training combats this type of spirituality. We start out with a view of the Ten Commandments, and we remember that we have a demanding God who ultimately demands perfection. He is God. He uses threats and promises as He tells us exactly what He commands. He calls on us to repent and submit to Him, to bow before the throne and ask for mercy. Ah, but then we turn our attention to the Creed, and we remember how our Triune God uniquely and perfectly created this physical world with His all powerful Word. We see how His Son redeemed this world through His death on the cross. We understand how the Holy Spirit uses the Word and sacrament to lead us to Christ. The foundation of Christianity focuses on the God who took on flesh to die for the world. So we worship God and pray to Him for all that He does for us.

The Lutheran and Biblical worldview is not taught to despise God's creation. God's Word teaches us to find the spiritual in the physical Jesus and the physical sacraments. God's Word speaks to us and tells us where to find God and forgiveness through God's Word and His sacraments. It reveals the mystery of life and salvation in Jesus Christ and tells us to seek Him first. It also tells us that this world is going to suddenly perish someday soon. It is all going to burn on Judgment Day, and the only way that we can escape from being sent into eternal hell is to cling to Christ.

We want God's people to use this foundational training so that they can take a careful look at the things of this world - to be able to decipher good from evil. John wrote, **"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."** There are MANY false prophets that have gone out into the world, John wrote. He also said, **They are from the world. That is why they speak from a worldly perspective and the world listens to them.** The devil knows how you think. He knows your society. He knows what sounds good and attractive to you. He also knows that if he can speak to you from a worldly perspective, he can make evil sound good and good sound evil. I think of the arguments that are made time and time again to excuse sin -

- "It is how God made me."
- "Don't judge, lest you be judged."
- "Love doesn't label."
- "God wants me to be happy."

I was listening to a sermon by the former bishop of the Episcopal Church in America, Katherine Jefferts Schori. She was speaking in a sermon about the time Paul chased a demon out of a slave girl who could tell the future. Instead of praising this wonderful miracle, she condemned Paul for judging this poor girl and depriving her of her gift of being able to tell the future. Yes, Paul was guilty of failing to value diversity, to see the slave girl's beautiful "difference." She had a DEMON in her! But this is where our world is headed, where a bishop of a denomination has no clue of what good or evil is.

Don't think it can't happen here either. You see it when parents want to protect their children from church discipline when they are living together or ignoring the Third Commandment. They act as if the church is evil for wanting to call their children to repentance and not just accepting their behavior. They say, "What about

this person? What about that one?" The goal is not for justice. The end goal is that no sin is judged, so that everyone can do whatever they want without any repentance and no ultimately no real faith and no authentic love. These are things to watch for! We need to beware of this mentality.

One of the most popular preachers of our day is Joel Osteen. So I decided to look up the Joel Osteen Twitter page. Here were some of his own quotes, just to give you a taste of what he gives.

- You have a destiny to fulfill. You have an assignment to accomplish. Don't waste your valuable time on something that's not moving you toward your purpose.
- Your faith, your courage, your victories can inspire others to believe for the fullness of their destiny.
- When you refuse to compromise and not be squeezed into society's mold, God will give you favor and cause you to stand out above the rest.
- Making excuses will keep you from your destiny. You have to take the hand you've been dealt and make the most of it.

Notice how he continually talks about some nebulous destiny that you need to fulfill. What is your destiny? It always gets back to achieving your goals and being successful in life. He is also the master of the illustration. I remember him talking about wanting to buy a huge house. He thought it might be too big. But when he flew over the house in his private jet, it looked small. So he said to himself, from God's perspective, it's small. So he went and bought the house. The illustration proved his point. If you want something that's big, don't let small thinking get in your way. Is that loving, to try and convince people how they can own big houses and think big for themselves? Where is the love of my neighbor? Where is the generosity? Where is the concern for what someone else needs instead of trying to achieve all of my goals for myself?

These are things that God wants you to watch out for. Don't get sucked in by them. Paul told Timothy the same thing in 2 Timothy 4, "**Correct, rebuke, and encourage, with all patience and teaching. For there will come a time when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, because they have itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in line with their own desires.**" So it is necessary for you to have a solid foundation on the Word of God. You have to know God's Law and God's Gospel. This is why we teach God's Word. This is why we try to be thorough in our instruction. This is why we want you to come to keep on coming worship and Bible study and to read your Bible at home so you have a different Weltanschauung - from the Holy Spirit's perspective.

It might sound unloving to point out all of these faults in the world, but without discerning the true from the false, we really won't know what love is all about. What about love? Actually, John has a lot to say about love too. **This is how God's love for us was revealed: God has sent his only-begotten Son into the world so that we may live through him. 10 This is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.** John was basically saying, "If you really want to know what love is, you have to look at this specific person at this specific place. You have to see Jesus dying on the cross. He died under your sins so that you could live in hope and joy both now and forever in heaven. You can't know what love is until you see Jesus crucified for you." Love is specifically defined by John in the sending of Jesus as the ATONING sacrifice. The word for "atoning" is "ἵλασμός" in the Greek. It is used to refer to the specific place where sins were paid for. This is true and authentic Christian theology, one that points to Jesus and says to you, "Believe in Him. Bow to Him. Trust in Him. Live in Him."

What kind of a Weltanschauung do you want in life? I see a young gal who went to Sem a few years back post a pic of herself flipping off the camera on social media. I see another person with a Catholic background post on Facebook with a rainbow flag behind herself. I speak to another who argues with me about why he doesn't need to go to church to be a Christian. He finds plenty of time to get up in time for work, go to concerts and entertainment and everything else, but he just can't make it up for church. It doesn't matter what I speak from the Third Commandment. These are different Weltanschauungs, foreign to the faith that we have been given from the Word.

We are in a constant battle for the hearts and souls of God's people. We want our children and our adults to have a firm foundation in the Bible, so they KNOW God's Word and look at life from a heavenly perspective. Maybe a part of the problem is that we don't take John's warning about false teachers seriously. Maybe a part of it is that we just aren't aware enough of the devil's tactics. Maybe a part of it is that we aren't taking personal responsibility for our own faith enough. Maybe we've bought the lie that we all end up in heaven anyway, because God doesn't really care about sin and Jesus died for everyone anyway. What is the result? The love of most is growing cold, just as Jesus predicted it would. In so many ways, the devil is winning.

Yet when I look at John's words, I don't find someone who was pessimistic and felt like the church was doomed. Far from it. He wrote, "**You are from God, dear children, and you have overcome the false prophets, because the one in you is greater than the one in the world.**" What a powerful reminder once again that when God who lives in us through the Word and sacrament, He can overcome the devil's lies. We have no reason to lose this battle. The God who conquered death is more powerful than the devil and his lies. Through these words the Holy Spirit can keep us faithful to Him in the truth, so that our focus in life, our Weltanschauung, is focused on Jesus. I will pray to this God. I will keep repenting of my sins. I will take His sacrament for the forgiveness I need. I will believe in Jesus as my Lord and Savior. God willing, I will keep proclaiming His Word. I will trust that this Word changes hearts and minds. I will keep on loving those who don't know His love, in hopes that they will see what love in Jesus is really about. This is my Weltanschauung. I hope it is yours as well, so that through faith in Christ this vision of the world will become reality in heaven. Amen.