



"A person with a biblical worldview experiences, interprets, and response to reality in light of the Bible's principles."

—David Kinneman

**29-Jun-18**

## **The Fifth Teacher (Part Three)**

As explained in Part One and Part Two, even though the Corinthian congregation had four exceptional teachers—including [Jesus Christ](#) Himself—its members' manifest carnality demonstrated that they were paying more heed to a fifth teacher than to God's servants. The [works of the flesh](#) on display among the members indicated beliefs whose source was outside of God's way. The teacher of these carnal beliefs was not a person but the [wisdom](#) of the time, whispered to them by countless voices throughout each day, overriding the truth and the way that [God](#) had revealed to them. In the same way, if we are aware of fruit in our lives that does not bring glory to God, there is a high probability that the fifth teacher is speaking to us as well, and his message is invading our innermost beings.

Consider how God has made us. The human body has a remarkable ability to adapt to its environment. Our eyes will adjust so that we can see in darkness, at least in part. Our noses will adapt so that an unbearable smell gradually becomes unnoticeable. Our ears will tune themselves according to the volume and tone of what they receive.

For better or worse, our minds operate similarly, adjusting to what is going in, both in quality and quantity. Businesses bet \$500 billion each year that they can influence our decisions. Their wager is called marketing, and it is not truly a bet but a sure thing. The very best marketers are rank amateurs, though, compared to the fifth teacher, for his "wisdom" comes from [Satan](#) himself.

He knows how many portrayals of [adultery](#) or fornication we can consume before we become numb to the immorality of it—when it stops being a big deal to us, and the beauty and sanctity of marriage are damaged. The fifth teacher knows how much violence we can watch or how many first-person shooters we can play before we become calloused to the loss of life. Not that we will carry out the next mass-shooting, but at a certain point we will stop valuing God's gift of human life. He knows how much profanity we can hear or read before those defiling words start popping into our minds and then become re-broadcast from our mouths or keyboards.

Our adjusting minds are the source of our conduct, so if we are aware of ungodly fruit in our lives, there is a good chance we are taking lessons—or have done so in the past—from the fifth teacher. Maybe we accepted a bit of his wisdom decades ago and now take it for granted, but it is still interfering with the activity of God's Spirit. Every show that we watch, every article, post, editorial, or commentary that we read, every talk-show, every song—especially the ones we put on repeat—will impart some wisdom of this age. Unless we actively guard against it, it will color our views of fashion, politics, beauty, parenting, health, leisure, masculinity and femininity, relationships, what we value, and what we despise. If we can be influenced in those areas, we can be persuaded in foundational doctrines as well.

This is not to suggest that we cloister ourselves in fear. If we spot ungodly fruit in our lives, though, a place to start is to evaluate where the fifth teacher is speaking to us—because he *is* speaking to us. After this comes the hard part of *choosing* to tune out what does not lead to life so that the truth of God does not become neutralized in our lives. The wisdom of the age saps our spiritual strength because it interferes with the words of spiritual life and the divine reality behind them.

Even reading God's Word every day and listening to the best human teachers—like in Corinth—is insufficient if the fifth teacher has our ear. The evidence will be found in our manner of life since we cannot walk in God's Spirit when our minds are constantly conforming to the wisdom of the age. Our minds adjust to the darkness, to the stench, to the drumbeat of a world that is passing away, and our thoughts move just a little farther away from God's.

In [II Timothy 4:3-4](#), Paul warns that the time is coming when believers "will not endure sound doctrine, but . . . will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth." Perhaps we have interpreted this warning too narrowly, applying it only to those teaching a religious message. But it can apply to *anyone* teaching us—advertisers, entertainers, bloggers, authors, talk-show hosts, social-media connections, etc. They can also be heaped up to scratch a personal itch, and over time, they can affect how clearly we hear the Word of God.

A high school biology teacher of mine was a dedicated, mainstream Christian, attending church [every Sunday](#) and Bible Study every Wednesday night. He held the Bible in high esteem. But, due to years of studying biology from books and teachers that pushed evolution, he came to believe in it himself—yet he also believed that God was the Creator. He reconciled these two opposing beliefs by concluding that God created the whole universe, including humanity, through evolution. Over the years, the words of scientists—just one voice of the fifth teacher, the "wisdom" of the age—sank in and neutralized the Word of God in that area of his thinking.

Those with [Worldwide Church of God](#) experience will remember how quickly the new regime introduced unbiblical doctrines after Herbert Armstrong's death. Many long-time members rolled over, accepting teachings they had disproved years earlier. Why? In the years leading up to the changes, the fifth teacher had gradually tuned many members' ears to accept the "wisdom" of Protestantism. Many, accustomed to his voice, were already spiritually weak from malnourishment. The false ministers and false doctrines were simply the endgame of a process that had been ongoing for many years in one small area of life at a time.

Although I Corinthians is a major warning against the wisdom of the age, outside influences eventually ravaged the [first-century church](#), and the second-century church bore little resemblance to the apostolic church. Something similar has occurred in the lifetimes of many of us—and it will happen to us if we fail to take meaningful steps to evaluate what we consume.

However, a catch-22 exists here that reveals the gravity of the principles involved: Our ability to discern spiritually and compare with the Word of God depends on how real the truth is to us—yet the truth will not be real to us if it is being drowned out by the fifth teacher. If our ears have already adjusted, we will be unable to discern the fifth teacher's many voices; it will sound perfectly reasonable and rational. With enough time and instruction from this false teacher, we may not even recognize the works of the flesh as anything all that bad.

One of the true teachers gives us the solution—simple to understand, yet increasingly difficult to implement amid the glut of information coming our way each day:

Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, *desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby*, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. ([I Peter 2:1-3](#); emphasis ours)

- David C. Grabbe

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## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

### [Conforming to This World](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

We must be willing to be team players, yielding our private ambitions and desires for the good of the team. It is the coach's prerogative to expect that we conform to his playbook. We are obligated to transform or change our game to please our coach. This mandate becomes challenging because the

world desperately wants to squeeze us into its mold. It is far easier to conform to the world than to conform to Christ. We must extricate ourselves from the walking dead and yield to God to renew our minds, living in the spirit rather than in the flesh. Four major warning signs caution us that we have come too close to compromising with the world. 1) We discover there is a serious change in our prayer and/or Bible study habits. 2) We find ourselves withdrawing from fellowship with the brethren—tantamount to withdrawing from God. 3) We find ourselves seeking praise from those in the world. 4) We begin to look to the world for solutions to problems. We need to remember that Christ, not our human reason, is the Way.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[The Beatitudes, Part Four: Hungering and Thirsting After Righteousness](#)**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

It is quite rare to see a person who truly hungers and thirsts after God's way, but this is the kind of desire God wants us to have. John Ritenbaugh explains what Jesus means in this fourth beatitude.

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