

CHILDREN OF GOD

1 John 4:4-6

Intro: The verses which we are going to consider today flow from, and actually are a part of the passage that we had last Sunday – the first three verses of 1 John 4. In those verses, 1 John 4:1-3, we have a repetition of what we have already considered in 1 John 2:18-23. It is what I have called *the doctrinal test* which we need to apply to ourselves along with the other tests that the Apostle John has given us by which we can be assured that we are really saved. There is truth in the world, and there is error. It is not possible for any person to be saved if he does not believe the truth, the truth which is revealed in God’s Word, and especially the truth about the Lord Jesus Christ.

From the beginning of time, the beginning of creation, there has been a battle between the truth and error. God told Adam that they were not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If they did, the Lord God told Adam that they would “surely die” (Gen.. 2:17). But when the Devil was tempting Eve, he told her, “Ye shall not surely die.” So we are told in the very beginning of the Bible that when God says one thing, you can expect the Devil to say just the opposite.

The battle between the truth and error has been constant throughout human history. For years we have been told by the emissaries of Satan that there is no absolute truth. This means that there is nothing that is always wrong, nor is there anything that is always right. It is a direct attack upon sin, and upon man’s need of a Savior.

The Lord had a lot to say by way of warning against false teachers and their teaching. I am indebted to Charles Simeon who lived back in the nineteenth century for grouping these passages together.

In Matthew 24:11 our Lord said this: “And many false prophets shall arise, and shall deceive many. And then in verses 23 and 24 of the same chapter we read that the Lord said this also:

23 Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not.

24 For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

Earlier, in our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, He had this to say in

Matthew 7:15:

15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

We have seen, and we are seeing here, how the Apostle John spoke out against the false teaching that was going on in his day. The epistles of Paul give us other warnings against false teachers who were prevalent earlier in his day. He wrote, for example in 1 Timothy 4:1-3:

1 Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;

2 Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;

3 Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.

After telling Titus that bishop or elders must hold fast to the faithful Word, he went on to explain why in Titus 1:10-11:

10 For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision:

11 Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake.

In 2 Corinthians 11 we see what Paul told the church at Corinth about false teachers. This is what He said in verses 13 to 15:

13 For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.

14 And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

15 Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works. (2 Cor 11:13-15)

From the reading of the OT we know how the people of Judah and Israel were not only deceived, but spent much time worshiping the false gods of the nations. God's prophets had their hands full trying to keep the people who claimed that they were God's people from worshiping heathen gods.

And we have it in our day too. The Devil does all that he can to keep people away from the Bible, and away from the living God and His Son Jesus Christ. And even with the people of God the Devil is always seeking to turn them away from the truth of God's Word, and from Christ.

Now I want to point out to you a series of prepositional phrases that the Apostle John used in the verses we had last Sunday, and then I want to point out how the same phrases are carried over into the verses we are looking at today.

In verse 1 of 1 John 4 notice that statement, “try the spirits whether they are of God.” Then notice the title of the Holy Spirit in verse 2. He is called, “the Spirit of God.” And then in the rest of verse 2 we have, “Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.” And then at the beginning of verse 3 we read, “And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God.” So notice what is “of God,” and what is “not of God.”

Now look with me for the same expression in verses 4 and 6. But you will notice another contrasting prepositional phrase in verse 5. Let me show you what I mean.

Verse 4 begins with a wonderful statement, “Ye are of God, little children.” The contrasting expression is in verse 5: “They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.” Going on into verse 6 we read again what the Apostle John said in verse 4: “We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth; he that is not of God heareth not us.” The word “of” is the same word in the original. It speaks of the class to which we belong. It speaks of how we came to be what we are. And it points to the distinguishing mark of all who are in either one of the two classes.

Note that the Apostle John does not speak of three classes, or groups. He speaks of just two – those who are “of the world,” and those who are “of God.” The Bible describes those of us who know the Lord and belong to the Lord with different expressions. But the one that we have here is the one that we want to emphasize. If you are a Christian, if you have been born again, if you are trusting Jesus Christ as your Savior, then you are “of God.” You are made out of Him. You have His life in you. In fact, you have Him in you. And you bear the marks of Him Who gave you life. You may not be all that you should be, nor all that you want to be, but what you are is traceable to God alone, the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are the people that the Apostle John has been describing in this epistle. This is the first point in our text. Read it over and over. Think about it. Ask the Lord to help you to understand what this means. How the Apostle John must have loved to say, “Ye are of God, little

children.”

What else did John say? He said that those of us who are of God, “have overcome them.” To whom was he referring by the word “them,” that we (to make it personal) “have overcome them.” This speaks of a victory. And it is a victory that was won in the past, and it continues into the present, and will go on for all eternity. This does not mean that we won’t have any more trouble with the Devil, that he won’t try to mess us up in some way, but it means that our victory is secure. We can never go back and be “of the world.” The Lord Jesus had told the Apostle John and all of the other apostles many years before John wrote this epistle,

19 If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you (John 15:19).

Notice that we are not liberated from the world by anything that we have done, but it all goes back to when the Lord chose us. That precedes creation, before the foundation of the world. He chose us, He called us, He drew us, and He claimed us for His very own. We are “of God.” And it can all be summed up in the last words of 1 John 4:4: “Because greater is He that is in us, than he that is in the world.” Who is in us? This could apply to any One of the Three Persons of the Godhead. The Father dwells in us. Christ lives in us. And the Holy Spirit has been given to us to abide in us and with us forever! But the reference here is most likely to the Holy Spirit. And who is in the world? That is a reference to the Devil. So we have overcome the Devil, not by our own efforts, but “because greater is He that is in us, than he that is in the world.”

Any Member of the Godhead is greater in every way than the Devil who is in the world. God is the Creator; the Devil is a creature. God is greater in power, greater in wisdom, and greater in His presence. He cares for His people wherever they are twenty-four hours of every day. The Devil with all of his wisdom and power, is nothing in comparison with God. He is already judged, and he knows that his time is short. God with without beginning and without end. When we understand our God, we know that we are eternally safe in His hands.

In verse 5 we read, “They are of the world.” Who is the Apostle John referring to? Primarily of the false teachers including their chief, the Devil. But it applies to everyone who is not of God. We have already been told in this epistle that “all that is in the world . . . is not of the Father, but is of the world. And” that “the world is passing away, and the

lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever” (1 John 2:16-17).

False teachers always have a following in the world. The world hears them. The world supports them. The world hates those who are of God and all that they stand for. Since the world treated our Lord as it did, we should not be surprised that they will not listen to us, that they don't understand us, and are not interested in hearing from us. And there is nothing that we can do that will change this.

There was a time when we were “of the world.” The Apostle Paul described our past in Ephesians 2:2 and 3 in these words:

2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:

3 Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others (Eph. 2:2-3).

No more hopeless picture could be expressed than that in which Paul described what he himself had been, and what once was true about every person who is now “of God.” If we had been left to our own resources, or left to what others could do for us, we would have been hopeless, and doomed forever with the world. But what did Paul go on to say? Listen carefully to his words even though you may know them well enough to quote from memory, what I am about to read to you:

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,

5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)

6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:

7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:4-10).

How thankful we all should be for those two words in Ephesians 2:4,

“But God”! The difference between us and the people who are still “of the world, is GOD! It was His mercy extended to us while we were yet sinners. And the amazing fact about our being “of God” is that this was determined by God that we should belong to Him before there was any creation at all. So that as this passage tells us we were “quickened . . . together with Christ,” raised when He was raised, and made” to “sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, That in the ages to come He might show . . .”

What a lot of wonderful truth was behind those words which the Apostle John wrote for us to read when he said, “We are of God, little children.” By God’s mercy and grace we have gotten out of the world and into God, and He is going to see to it that none who are now “of God” can ever go back to find their lot with the world.

But as the Apostle John said at the end of verse 6, the very fact that there still are those today who are “of the world, and also those who are “of God,” proves that there still is “the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.” There still is righteousness, and there still is evil. There still is right, and there still is wrong.

But I want to make a suggestion that I have only supported by one translation. The only translation I found which supported me in what I am about to say, is the new English Standard Version. It capitalized the word “spirit” in the phrase, “the Spirit of truth.” If you turn back to John 14, verses 16 and 17 you will find that “the Spirit of truth” is a Name which our Lord gave to the Holy Spirit. Listen to what the Lord said:

16 And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;

17 Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you (John 14:16-17).

Now if “the Spirit of truth” is a person, then shouldn’t “the spirit of error” also be a reference to a person, and, if so, who is that person. If the “the Spirit of truth” is the Holy Spirit, then “the spirit of error” can be a reference to the Devil. And this would also confirm that when the Apostle John spoke of “spirit” and “spirits” he was speaking of real people.

Concl: How, then, can we tell where a person stands in his relationship either to God or the Devil? It is by what his response is when he hears the word of God. The only way that a person who is “of the world”

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can be made a person who is “of God,” is by hearing and believing and responding to the Word of God. If this describes you, that you have never really heard the Word of God in the depths of your soul, ask God to give you an ear to hear and a heart to believe and a will to submit to the Gospel of God’s grace which is expressed so simply in John 3:16. But you can see it also right here in 1 John 4:9 and 10. (Read.)