

August 18, 2024

1 John 4: 1-6

## Opening Prayer

1 John 4: 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. <sup>2</sup> This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, <sup>3</sup> but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

<sup>4</sup> You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. <sup>5</sup> They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. <sup>6</sup> We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit<sup>[a]</sup> of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

This message is as relevant today as it was when it was penned.

Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits and see if they are from God or not.

### **Commentary on Verse 3.**

John reminds his followers that Jesus had warned that the Antichrist would come. It is now John's painful duty to announce that in the false teachers the spirit of antichrist is already present. By this the community was warned that the conflict between the false teachers and John was not a "leadership" or "personality" one. The Gospel itself was at stake. The struggle they were facing was not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers. Hence, whatever success the opponents had had within the community resulted from satanic inspiration.

We need today, as well, to realize that the battle is spiritual, and it has been unleashed.

This is the bad news, but there is great and wonderful news and truth in the next verse.

4. John returns to dear children, so as to include all of them from new believers to mature saints, are from God and are "Born of Him"

Then goes on to pen possibly one of the most sloganized statements in the Bible. "He that is in you is greater than he that is in the world"

I think sometimes we use this as a platitude.

**Platitude: a remark or statement, especially having moral content, that has been used too often to be interesting or thoughtful:**

Do we really understand what John is saying here?

I want to focus for a bit on this concept and develop the richness of it.

Jesus is greater than Satan.

Creator is greater than created being. Not by just a little – Potter and clay

Clay does not make the decisions.

This does not say “he that is in ME is greater”

Potter and clay again – we ask according to His will and it will be done.

Sometimes we get arrogant or flippant and think that we are in charge, we are not.

**John 16** <sup>23</sup> In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.<sup>24</sup> Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.

<sup>25</sup> “Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father. <sup>26</sup> In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. <sup>27</sup> No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. <sup>28</sup> I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father.”

<sup>29</sup> Then Jesus’ disciples said, “Now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech. <sup>30</sup> Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God.”

No other religious leader can level up to Jesus

If you are the greatest, people (not followers) want to be associated with you.

They want to “glom” on to greatness their own selfish purposes

Story of MJ and Horace Grant, “I will remember this as the night me and MJ scored 70”

They want to come along side and seem “spiritual”, but not Godly.

There must be an original in order for there to be a counterfeit

Counterfeits will try to get as close as possible, so as to deceive

Counterfeits will work to cast doubt on the real and claim to equal to it.

Verse 5

They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them.

So what makes this relevant for today?

Religions are clamoring to be considered equal to Christ, which is not possible.

So they work toward the least common denominator –

If everything is special, nothing is special.

God created us to have different strengths that work together, Individuals

Not all the same being average at everything – that is not effective community.

**Religious Pluralism.** This is for illustration purposes only, I cannot endorse this movie as a wholesome choice.

If you want to understand the dogma of religious pluralism, consider a scene from the comedy movie *Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby*. If you haven't seen it, Ricky is a professional race car driver whose car crashes during a race.

Thinking he's on fire, he runs around the track crying out, "Help me, Jesus! Help me, Jewish God! Help me, Allah! Help me, Tom Cruise! Use your witchcraft on me to get the fire off of me! Help me, Oprah Winfrey!"

In other words, when it comes to god, you'd best hedge your bets. One god doesn't necessarily exclude the other gods, so don't limit yourself to just one when you can believe in all of them at once! This concept has its roots in Hindu and eastern philosophy and has largely been adopted in Western culture. It can be found in several popular versions:

**Rabbi Shmuley Boteach** - I am absolutely against any religion that says one faith is Superior to another. I don't see how that is anything different than spiritual racism

**Mahatma Gandhi** - My position is that all great religions are fundamentally equal.

**Oprah Winfrey** - One of the biggest mistakes humans make is to believe there's only one way. Actually, there are many diverse paths leading to God.

Pluralism's basic premise is that all religions are true, or at least partially true; and have value.

And in our culture, it is considered narrow-minded and judgmental to believe anything else.

Let's go back to verse 4. You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, **because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.**

What qualifies John to make this statement? **John knows who Jesus is.**

John is somewhat uniquely qualified to make such a statement.

He states to begin this book, which is accepted as Scripture;

That which was from the beginning (Jesus)

He states to begin his gospel account (also Scripture) –

In the beginning was the Word (Jesus) and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. And thru Him all things were made.

He walked with Jesus and was one of the 3 from the inner circle

He was there at the transfiguration.

Luke 9: <sup>28</sup> About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup> As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. <sup>30</sup> Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. <sup>31</sup> They spoke about his departure,<sup>[a]</sup> which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup> Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. <sup>33</sup> As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, “Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what he was saying.)

<sup>34</sup> While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. <sup>35</sup> A voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.”

Medieval cartographers (mapmakers) sketched *hic sunt dragones* (translated "there be dragons") on the edges of their maps. Those three words were used by the medieval cartographer of the famed Lenox Globe (c. 1503-1507) to describe the outer boundaries where knowledge ended, and speculation began. After drawing on all of his knowledge, the mapmaker could only write those three provocative words to convey that these areas were at best unexplored, and at worst, perilous.

Photo of the Psalter map (c. 1250)

Yet maps of that era often held another image—Christ. For instance, *The Psaltermap* (c. 1250), so called because it accompanied a copy of the book of Psalms, featured dragons on the bottom, as well as Jesus and the angels at the top. Such a map reminds us of the availability of "true north" as followers of Christ: Yes, there be dragons; but there is also Jesus and the angels. And we can follow him—and find our way.

*Adapted from James Emery White, Christ Among Dragons (IVP Books, 2010), page 11*

Jesus is greater than the world, because as John states, HE MADE IT.  
This is great news and not just a platitude.

Verse 6 We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

In his book *Fuzzy Memories*, Jack Handey writes:

There used to be this bully who would demand my lunch money every day.  
Since I was smaller, I would give it to him.  
Then I decided to fight back. I started taking karate lessons.  
But then the karate lesson guy said I had to start paying him five dollars a lesson.  
So I just went back to paying the bully.

Too many people feel it is easier just to pay the bully than it is to learn how to defeat him. *Sherman L. Burford*

Paying the bully is spiritual – Defeating the bully is Godly

As individuals/church we are in the process of learning how to defeat the bully:

Biblical Literacy and understanding. – Daily time with the Lord.

Focused prayer for our nation – God’s spirit poured out/ repentance/ reconciliation

Understanding, **He that is in me to be greater than he that is in the world.**

Repenting of sin/getting our lives in alignment with God so that the authority He gave is intact

Authority comes from the Author (God is the author and has it to give)

Can I suggest a couple areas that may need visited for repentance and alignment.

Inappropriate viewing/reading (Movies, TV, Pornography, Romance novels)

Marriage dynamics – are we loving our spouses well

Being “prayed up” so when we need to use the authority we are prepared

Respecting and honoring others by hearing them out/willing to be influenced

How about stubbornness

Addressing any “Elephants in the room” – No topic off the table

Sometimes it is easier to just pay the bully – But that is not what God has called us to.

Discussion Questions:

Are there areas of life that I have embraced Religious Pluralism?

Do I really believe - He that is in me is greater than he that is in the world?

We know a lot of things, but we live what we believe.

IF so, what is the evidence or fruit of that?

Are there issues that you need to address to reestablish your authority?

(Be as open as you feel comfortable and pray for freedom in these areas)