



**1 John 4:4-6**  
**Victorious Little Children**

We've spent a great amount of time these past few weeks speaking about the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Trinity. And that's because John has been telling us that there are at least ways to test our identity as a Christian – three items of evidence to be considered as proof of being in Christ. The first is obedience to God's commands – do you have a desire to obey what God says? The second is love for fellow Christians. And the third proof is that the Holy Spirit abides in you. God Himself takes up residence in your transformed life.

And so three weeks ago we looked at what it means for that happen – what does it mean for God to dwell in me? Two weeks ago we looked at how we can frustrate the process: we saw that can resist, grieve, and quench the Holy Spirit. Last week we looked at how we can know it's the Holy Spirit talking, and now all of that culminates in what we find this morning. You need to know everything we've been talking about recently so you can get the full effect of this. Read with me:

**1 John 4:4** You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

"He who is in you, is greater than he who is in the world." Christian, you need to know that. In today's day and age, with today's headlines, with all the stuff you're worried about and wondering about, you need to know that.

And you need to know what it means. You need to understand that "He who is in you" is the Holy Spirit. You need to know that "he who is in the world" is Satan and everything else under his power. You need to know, and to remember, every single day, that there are two separate streams flowing through this earth – one is headed for God's eternal kingdom, and the other is not.

You need to know that so that life makes sense. You need to know that to understand why things go the way they do and turn out the way they do. You need to know that so you understand why people act the way they do. You see, of all the people you live next to, or live with, drive by, sit next to on the bus or train, the people you work for, the people who grade your paper, the person who stole your phone – only some of them are living for God. The rest are not.

There is a division in this world, not just between the haves and the have nots, but between the saved and the saved nots. There is division and there is disagreement and there is conflict, but "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."

Now, we'll come back and take a look at all that means in a minute, but first, we need to see what else John has to say as he highlights the difference between the two sides:

**1 John 4:5** They are of the world. Therefore they speak *as* of the world, and the world hears them. **6** We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

So, if you're taking notes, you might want to jot this down: the first thing we seen in our passage this morning is confirmation of the conflict. It exists. It *is* us versus them. John says we know the spirit of truth, and they have the spirit of error. This is divisive language, and it's that way for a reason.

Originally, John was talking about the conflict between the teaching of the apostles and a group of false teachers who came along behind them claiming that they had some new truth about God that ought to be accepted too. When John says "**We are of God. He who knows God hears us**" he's talking about the apostles, the ones Jesus entrusted His church to. They are "**of God.**" After all, Christ had called them to be His disciples, taught them privately and explained his public teaching to them in greater detail, and then after His death, He commissioned them to go and share what they had been taught with the world. And those whom God was calling into salvation received them and their message.

The book of Acts tells us that the early church would gather regularly to be instructed in the apostle's doctrine, they would have fellowship with one another, pray with and for each other, and share common meals including the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42).

And then, as time went on and the apostle's teaching was written down, the church canonized it, or received it as Scripture and formed the New Testament portion of our Bible.

From the very beginning there were other teachers and writers that the church did not accept – and every now and then someone in the media likes to bring them out and say, "Look at this hidden teaching that we've found about Jesus!" And the church says, "No, actually we've known about the Gospel of Thomas, or the Gospel of Judas, or whatever for a long time, we just never accepted them as Scripture because we are of God and we don't hear His voice in that, we hear the spirit of error instead."

Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice" (John 10:4-16). And He had already told other very religious people, "**He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God**" (John 8:47).

He made the point again just hours before His death as He spoke with Pontius Pilate. Good Friday, when we will pause to remember the crucifixion, is just a few weeks away – we'll be having a service here that night at 7PM and we encourage you to come out for that, and bring a friend. But for now, will you turn with me in your Bibles over to John 18 and let's look at what was said that morning. We'll find Jesus confirming the conflict Himself – saying "Yes, some

people accept Me, and some people don't." It's not because they don't know what I've said, or don't understand what I've done, they hear Me, and they intentionally reject the Truth."

**John 18:28** Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover. 29 Pilate then went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?"

30 They answered and said to him, "If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you."

31 Then Pilate said to them, "You take Him and judge Him according to your law." Therefore the Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death,"

32 that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled which He spoke, signifying by what death He would die.

33 Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?"

34 Jesus answered him, "Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?"

35 Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?"

36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."

37 Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?"

Jesus answered, "You say *rightly* that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth.

Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

38 Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I find no fault in Him at all.

39 "But you have a custom that I should release someone to you at the Passover. Do you therefore want me to release to you the King of the Jews?"

40 Then they all cried again, saying, "Not this Man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a robber.

Did you catch that? Jesus said, "Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." John, Jesus's disciple, says **6** We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

So, yes, we see confirmation of the conflict – there are two sides – those who hear and those who don't, but we also see another piece of evidence in the life of the true believer, and that is the ability to hear God. Do you hear God's voice? I don't mean an audible booming voice speaking to you from above. This isn't about decibels and audiograms. It's hearing in the sense of understanding. Does the Word of God speak to you? Does it convict you? Does it move you?

Or do you, like Pilate, hear and then deflect – you know what's being said, there's certainly no confusion, you just don't want to hear, you don't want to accept. My friends, God is

merciful, He comes to us, and He speaks, but we must listen, we must hear, and we must obey.

This brings us to the second thing we can take note of this morning, and that is John's confirmation of your calling. Christian, he wants you to know, and to know with certainty that you belong to God.

Look at the first four words of verse 1John 4:4, **"You are of God."** If you pass the tests: if you're obeying God – and of course that all begins by obeying the Holy Spirit's call on your life to repent – if you receive the call instead of resisting it; and you have a desire in your heart to continue to know God and obey Him; and if you have a desire to love others rising up inside of you; and if you know the Holy Spirit has come to dwell in you, and if you're receiving the apostle's doctrine - if these testimonies are in your life, no matter how feeble, if they're there, you are a child of God.

And again, hear this correctly – because I don't want this to sound like a checklist of things you have to go out and do – but the question is: do you sense these things stirring in you? Other things in your life might be quenching them, or overshadowing them, disrupting them, or silencing them, but is any of this stirring, rumbling, gurgling down in your soul so that you can say, "Yes, that is what I want to be. I'm not like that all the time, or, I haven't been like that in a while, but yes, that IS what I want to be like!"

If that desire is in you, then my friend, no matter your age, you are a child of God. That desire in you is the proof that He is at work in your life.

And pay great attention to the wording here: **"You are of God, little children."** Little children. That's what the Bible calls you. That's what the Bible calls me. Now John knows we're more than children physically, he was writing to a mixed group – remember earlier he referenced young men and fathers as well – he's writing this to people of all ages, but he still addresses us as little children.

I think that's interesting. John uses that term "little children" seven times in this short little letter. It's *teknon* in Greek and it only occurs one other time in the New Testament – in John's gospel, in Chapter Thirteen, where Jesus, on the night before He was crucified had the Last Supper with His disciples. And once Judas had left the room to go betray Him, Jesus said to the other eleven:

**John 13:33** "Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, 'Where I am going, you cannot come,' so now I say to you."

Picture that. Here's Jesus – by physical standards he's probably in His early thirties and He's calling these other grown men "little children." It could come across so condescending, so belittling, so insulting, but of course, it's not. And it's not when John repeats it to us either. It's actually comforting.

Think about how we think about children. How we idealize them. We say, “Oh, to be a kid again... Oh, to be that carefree. Oh, to be that cared for – not to have to worry about paying rent or grocery shopping or dealing with the mechanic or dealership.”

Even if you had a rough childhood the only reason you know it was rough is because you had the expectation that it ought to have been better. We have this idea that being a child is supposed to mean a few things. It’s supposed to mean you’re taken care of, you’re able to have fun, you don’t have a bunch of stress in your life – you don’t have an email address or a calendar or a bank account – life is supposed to be good.

And why is that? It’s because your parents are supposed to be taking care of everything. They’re supposed to know your needs and to the best of their ability to provide for them. Not to spoil you – think about what we visualize when we imagine a happy little child – they don’t have a big pile of toys, and six gallons of ice cream – they’ve got a stick or a flower and they’re enamored with it. It’s the simple things that fill us with joy.

Well, that’s how God wants us to be. We get ourselves all worked up and all stressed out, over scheduled, over committed and under resourced. And God says, “little children.”

God doesn’t call you sir or ma’am, Mr. or Mrs. or Miss. or Ms., He doesn’t call you Doctor or Professor, or Director, or Sergeant or Colonel, He calls you “little children.” And one of the things that needs to happen this morning is that you need to hear Him say that. You need to be stopped in your tracks for a minute and called a name. A name that no one else calls you. No one else calls you a “little child”... unless they’re telling you to stop acting like one. But nobody ever calls you a child and means it in a way that’s supposed to remind you that Someone else has everything under control. Ultimately Christian, you’re not in charge, and you’re not responsible – you need to let Dad work it all out.

Because, check this out: [You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.](#)

You may be nothing more than a little child in God’s eyes, and yet, who has received the victory? You have. “Little children...have overcome.”

Not by their own planning. Not by their own strength or efforts, not through their own initiative, but they have overcome. Why? [“Because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”](#)

Wait! Wait! Wait! Did you catch that? HE who is IN you, is greater than he who is in the world – now do you understand why we’ve taken so much time to look at the indwelling of the Holy Spirit lately? Do you see why we slowed down so much to look at what it all meant? It’s because everything hinges on this.

[You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.](#)

If you're taking notes this morning our third point is: there is a confirmation of victory in Christ.

Now, again, we need to understand this in context. It was written to a certain group of people in a particular time and set of circumstances before it ever got to us. And what it meant to them was a reminder that God had and would continue to overcome the opposition of those who spoke from the spirit of error. If you remember from last week, John had told the church to test the spirits and see which ones were really of God. Getting back to that spiritual conflict we said was happening, Christians needed to know what was true and what was false.

False doctrine and false teachers came flooding into the early church trying to twist everything Jesus had done and said to their own use. But the church resisted and they straightened things out over time. Satan was not able to distract Jesus from His mission, and nothing has been able to stop the church from hers either because God has been in us and with us.

But after that initial season of persecution and heresy that John was addressing in this letter passed, other seasons came and went throughout history and yet the church and its ministry has persisted *because* God has persisted in using us. The church has gone through horrible seasons of persecutions in various places and times throughout history. Parts of the church are still being actively persecuted today.

We even face uncertain times in our own country. The culture around us has been shifting at an alarming pace, the changes that have swept in over the past several years have been revolutionary and while we don't even fully understand what the consequences will be of the changes already made, more and more changes loom on the horizon.

So some people are concerned. Some Christians are concerned. They're alarmed; they're looking for someone to help them, to protect them, to change things back. And they're afraid the church is going to fade away, it's going to become irrelevant, it's going to lose its voice.

Friends, it is not. Oh sure, you see and hear reports that church attendance is in decline; it makes for great headlines. But I'm telling you, from a theological standpoint, it's nothing to freak out about. If anything, it's good news for the church, because it means there's a purifying going on. Because do you know where the decline is occurring?

It's declining among people who never really wanted to go in the first place – they just went because it was the thing you were supposed to do. There was a time in this country where if you wanted to be seen as upstanding citizen in the United States, you went to church on Sunday, it was practically a civic duty. But not any more, those people came because it was 'the right thing to do' no longer feel compelled to come. People feel like it's OK to go shopping on Sunday morning and get the rest of their errands run.

Now someone will say, well, yeah but there was a time when the stores weren't open on Sunday so people didn't do that. And I'll respond, you're right. But do know why they are open now? It's because people *wanted* them open on Sunday more than they wanted to be in church worshipping God. So, don't freak out about the headlines, nothing has really changed – it's just that people who didn't want to be in church back then aren't in church now – those are the numbers that are in decline.

And other times you hear stories about whole denominations that are in decline. Now, that I can confirm. Most mainline denominations in the United States have lost over half of their members since 1965. But what do you expect? Those churches have been trending toward liberal views theology for decades as well. (I'm speaking of liberal theology here, not politics – this is not a cut on any who identifies as a Democrat or anything else.) There's no such thing as a list of the 100 fastest growing liberal churches in America. You can't find them. They're declining.

Why? Because many of the historic denominations in the US have left God and the inerrancy of His Word behind and their churches have become little more than spiritual social clubs. And if the only reason you're going to church is to be told how to take care of the poor or help the planet or support your local community, you eventually realize there are a lot of other places you can hear about that, and now you can use your Sunday morning for shopping.

But I can show you churches that take God seriously, that take His Word seriously, that say hard things to hardened people, and yet they're growing. Non-denominational, independent churches like ours are now the third largest religious group in America behind the Catholic Church and the Southern Baptist Convention. And these local, independent churches are growing, not because they have a coffee bar, or a slick band, or a dynamic great looking preacher, but because there are people out there who really are hungry for the Word of God, they want to know what He says, the Holy Spirit is calling out to them and they're not resisting, they're surrendering and saying, "Tell me more!"

And God is adopting them, and coming to dwell inside them, calling them "little children," and they have overcome the world!

There is no doubt our country is slipping farther and farther away from the moral foundations it once had – but obviously there were a whole lot of people who didn't really like those foundations, who didn't really believe in them, they don't want them, they want to be free to do what they want to do.

Don't be afraid of that, church. It doesn't mean God has lost. It just means your Bible is about to make even more sense. You see, the pastor isn't going to have to tell you what it was like to live in Rome or Athens or Corinth with their immorality and sexual depravity, you're going to be seeing it more and more all around you. Far from being irrelevant, your Bible is going to start making even more sense.

Nations will come and nations will fall, parties will rise and parties will fall, laws will be passed and laws overturned, but the truth of God and the Church of God will go marching on.

**1 John 4:4** You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

We worship a God who created the world, who reigns over the world, and who will judge the world and who is greater than everything and everyone in it. And He has called you, He has come to dwell inside you, and He tells you, "Little children, don't worry about a thing."

There is a conflict, there is a spirit of truth and a spirit of error. There is a way that seems right to man but it ends in death. There are voices speaking to you that are whispering and shouting things that are not true. Don't listen to them.

Isaiah the prophet said,

**Isaiah 30:21** Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying,  
"This is the way, walk in it,"  
Whenever you turn to the right hand  
Or whenever you turn to the left.

Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice" (John 10:4-16).

Receive God's Word. Receive His Holy Spirit, do not resist. Recognize your true identity as a child of God, and rest in the knowledge that no matter how dark things may get, the victory will come. Jesus has gone to prepare a place for you, if was not so, He would have told you. In His Father's house there are many rooms. And one day, He's going to welcome you into that eternal home, wipe every tear from your eye, and give you rest.

Until then, keep the faith, fight the good fight of faith. Pray for those who do not believe, beg God for their souls, and be salt and light among a dying and perverse people who reject the truth of God.

Let's pray.