

III. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

In verse 6, the 'We' that John speaks of are the apostles.

John isn't saying, 'Anyone who knows God listens to ME.' He isn't even saying, 'Anyone who knows God listens to the church.' He says – 'Anyone who knows God listens to us.'

The 'US' he is speaking of are the apostles sent out by Jesus himself – and included into that group, are all those who then preach and proclaim on the authority of the apostles.

The final litmus test for whether a person has come from God and, at the same time, whether a person is of God, is the question of how they respond to the message of scripture.

Those who hear the Word of God and obey it, demonstrate that the Holy Spirit indwells them, and that they are from God. Those who proclaim the Word of God and conform to it, demonstrate that they are sent from God.

Those who seek to distort it or deny it, reveal their true identity.

As also do those who, hear the message, and then reject it.

Conclusion: Let me say in conclusion that there are a great many visible churches that are not 'from God'. The question of whether a church congregation or church pastor is of God is handled quite simply in this text – do they listen to the Word of God – or do they ignore it?

I read an article this week on Adfontes.ca about a church that had 're-launched' themselves as a community centre. They stated that their emphasis will be on 'belonging' rather than believing and activities such as workshops on urban ecology and roundtables on social justice will replace more traditionally religious fare.

That may be the extreme end of the spectrum.

But we have an adversary that is great.

Greater is he who is in you than he that is in the world.

What should we do in the face of opposition?

CONFESS JESUS CHRIST COME IN THE FLESH. Take hold of him by faith and the promise of scripture is that already we have overcome the world.

you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.' John 16:33.

These words were spoken a few hours before the cross. Jesus declares victory and then surrenders himself to die! How does that make sense? It makes sense because he is going to pay the penalty for sin with his own blood. He is going to secure peace with God on my behalf.

II. They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them.

Let's look for a moment at verses 5 and 6.

John tells us something that we already know. He tells us that the world recognizes its own and loves them.

The world loves its own messages. I read the news on the CBC and sometimes I read MacLean's magazine – both of these are considered to be sources of 'information' that are in tune with Canadians. But I find everything about them foreign. They boast of things I am ashamed of, they ridicule things that I believe are the most important in all the world. They seemingly declare to all who wish to listen that they have no need of God; that we are masters of our own lives.

The world loves that sort of message.

The world HATES the message of the gospel.

Why would they hate something that promises life?

The gospel, let me remind you, begins with bad news – it begins with the message that all of humanity stands condemned, that they are deficient.

The gospel begins by telling us what God requires:

- 1) You shall have no other God's before me.
- 2) You shall not make for yourself an idol.
- 3) You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain.
- 4) Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy.
- 5) Honour your Father and Mother.
- 6) You shall not murder.
- 7) You shall not commit adultery.
- 8) You shall not steal.
- 9) You shall not bear false witness.
- 10) You shall not covet.

It is when we know that we are deficient that we see the glory of the gospel that is in Jesus Christ. We look to one who offers to save us based on his righteousness and on his fulfillment of all that is necessary.

But try to tell that to the world – and at best they will turn a deaf ear to you – more often they will turn upon you with a vengeance.

Do you doubt it? He would be delighted for you to doubt it. He would love for you to attribute all the misery, sorrow, sickness and suffering in the world to natural causes that we can solve apart from the gospel and apart from Christ.

But he is there.

I. Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

Let's look at verse 4 together. John addresses his congregation tenderly with the words, 'Little children.' He then reminds them of reality.

ILLUSTRATION: I have to do this as a parent every once in a while with my own physical children. They come home crying because someone has called them a name, or because their value and worth has been crushed by some situation at school. When I argue my children's worth and value with them, I don't argue it on the basis of their ability or their achievements. I always tell my children that I love them, because they are mine – that God has given them to me and that that has value in and of itself.

So often we allow experience to overrule what we know to be true. Here John reminds us that we are from God.

He then tells us **THAT WE HAVE OVERCOME THEM.**

Look at that statement for a moment.

He doesn't promise that we **WILL** overcome them sometime in the future.

He states that we **HAVE** overcome them.

It is already done!

How have we overcome them? He tells us this as well – 'Greater is he who is in you than he that is in the world.'

It isn't based on my power, my ability, my fortitude, my determination – my victory has already been assured, because of the Spirit of Christ who is dwelling within me.

How does that work? It works, because the only final power that the devil holds over me is the power to see me condemned by God at the final judgment.

But I am no longer of the world – having laid my faith on Christ I have been transferred from the Kingdom of the World to the Kingdom of God. Jesus Christ himself is my surety, he is my righteousness.

Satan may make miserable for you now – but he has no power over you in the end.

Jesus once said to his disciples – **I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world**

In **Ephesians 2:2** the devil is called **...the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience-**

In **2 Corinthians 4:4** Satan is called 'the god of this world'.

In **John 12:31** Jesus refers to the devil as the ruler of this world.

Trace his history and you will see this is not enemy to be trifled with: His earliest history is shrouded in mystery. God chooses not to give us a detailed description of the devil's rebellion, but the evidence points us to war in the heavenlies, to the rebellion of Lucifer, the most powerful and beautiful of the angels. We read of rebellion against God, and an attempt to seize God's glory for himself (a tactic he continues to tempt humans to attempt). We read of Satan being cast out and sweeping down with him a third of the angels.

TRULY OUR ADVERSARY IS GREAT.

In Genesis 3 he comes clearly into view, intentionally leading astray Adam and Eve – HOW? By lies, half-truths and deceptions. Satan comes promising freedom and power and beauty, but leaves with Adam and Eve in captivity, under the curse and marred with sin.

TRULY OUR ADVERSARY IS GREAT.

This adversary has tremendous power in the world. We read the story of Job and we see that behind all of Job's misery sat

the devil. Consider what the devil had the power to do: He ruined Job's fortunes, murdered Job's children and inflicted Job with a wasting disease. He brings Job to the very edge of the chasm of despair. It goes on like this for days, weeks, months – could it even be years? Job wishes he had never been born, he cries out for God, he trembles and even rages.

TRULY OUR ADVERSARY IS VERY GREAT.

Zechariah tells us that Satan comes to accuse the High Priest of Israel and to demand that he be condemned. In Revelation 12:10 Satan is called the **accuser of our brothers** and the description is added that he accuses us day and night before God.

This is the same devil who comes to Jesus in the wilderness and tempts him at his weakest moments.

Jesus called him a liar and the father of lies.

Peter declares that he **prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he will devour.**

Paul tells us that he has **blinded the mind of the unbeliever to the glory of the gospel in Christ Jesus.**

And Jude declares that even the most powerful of God's angels would not dare to bring a rebuke against him without invoking the name of the Lord.

Dear friends, little children, our adversary is great!

Great and Greater

Subject: Spiritual Warfare

Theme: Understanding the Dynamics of Spiritual Warfare

Passage: I John 4:4-6

Intro: I have not had an especially triumphant week. It has, instead, been a week filled with frustration and difficulty, disappointment and uncertainty. More than once my wife has had to remind me of things that I have preached and that I believe about being anxious for nothing, and surrendering my worries and concerns to God in prayer.

Have you had that week before?

The people John is writing to are in that sort of a situation. They know the truth; but they don't necessarily feel the reality of it. They are looking around themselves and wondering how the good news of the gospel that they have placed their faith and hope upon harmonizes with the everyday experience of the church splitting and a group going out declaring that **they in fact are the true church.**

So John, a man of many years, an apostle of Christ offers these words to reassure them that their faith is genuine and also that these difficult situations shouldn't surprise them. After all, the spirit of antichrist is already in the world.

Now, we should be clear, that scripture speaks of 'The Antichrist' and the antichrists. There is a time prophesied in scripture when 'The Antichrist' will emerge and lead astray many; but in the mean-time, the very spirit that animates the final great adversary of God is animating lesser adversaries.

Let me review an earlier sermon for a moment to remind you that there are two aspects of the spirit of antichrist we should be aware of:

1) The first is rather clear, the antichrist will oppose Christ. He is, literally, against Christ.

2) The second, is clearly attested in scripture, and may come as a surprise, 'The Antichrist' (the final opponent) and those under the spirit of antichrist will often oppose Christ by setting themselves up as a rival to Christ. That is to say, the spirit of antichrist is not concerned that all people everywhere should stop believing in God – but rather, that they should stop believing in the true God, that they should reject the message of the gospel and that they should believe some lesser thing.

The implication of the passage before us is that we are in a spiritual battle with a great adversary. How great is the devil?

Let us consider the picture that emerges from scripture for a moment: