

1 John 4:1-6

Overcoming Antichrists

As we begin our study of the fourth chapter of 1 John, it would be good to remind ourselves why John wrote his first letter. In chapter 1, John clearly states that he wrote this letter so that our joy may be full.¹ There is a joy that comes from God that makes our hearts glad despite the negative circumstances or the conditions of our world. In Psalm 4, David sang to God, "You have put gladness in my heart."² In Isaiah 61, it was prophesied of Christ that his ministry would give us "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning."³ In other words, through Jesus Christ, God can turn the dark night of the soul into a dawn of light and joy.

As Christians we are not delusional. We live in the real world where there are terrorist bombings and floods and accidents, but fullness of joy can be had in spite of it all. But our joy must be rooted in and flowing from our fellowship or partnership or companionship with God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. And there are three things that we must do to maintain this fellowship and joy. And the apostle John has mentioned these before.

1. If we desire to enjoy fellowship with God and Christ we must walk in the light of Scripture. In chapter 3 and verse 7 John wrote,

Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.

2. We must love one another. Therefore in verse 14 John said,

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren.

Now as we begin chapter 4, John again warns us and encourages us to remain faithful to the truth about the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.
(1 John 4:1)

¹ 1 John 1:4

² Psalm 4:7

³ Isaiah 61:3

The Word of God now turns from the importance of loving one another to the importance of knowing and believing the truth about Jesus Christ. Christianity puts great emphasis upon faith and believing. We are to believe in and trust the facts that God has revealed to us in the Bible. But we are also encouraged to be unbelievers; that is to be skeptical, to be discerning as to what we believe. In other words, you cannot believe what is true unless you reject what is wrong.

Therefore John says, “test the spirits.”⁴ Test what you hear about God and Jesus Christ from pastors and teachers and prophets, “because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” Just as a genuine Christian teacher is inspired and influenced by God’s holy Spirit, so false teachers and their doctrines are influenced by evil spirits. To put it simply—not everyone preaching love and Jesus is from God.

False teachers and prophets are the physical expression of demonic spirits. Jesus Christ warned us about this saying,

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.
(Matthew 7:15)

And the apostle Paul wrote that some people,

will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, ² speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron,
(1 Timothy 4:1, 2)

Counterfeits have to be very similar to the genuine article. Therefore false doctrines will sound reasonable and good and all about love, and after all, isn't love what it's all about? So John says to us: be sharp, be discriminating, and test the spirits, the preachers and their doctrines to see if they are of God. Now, how do we do this testing? The answer is simple we use the Word of God.

In Acts 17, the apostle Paul and his companions were going from town to town preaching about Jesus Christ. Paul would first visit the local synagogue and talk about Christ. And here is how the people of one synagogue discovered if Paul was telling the truth.

Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas

⁴ This is the figure of speech called “metonymy of the clause.” This is where a word is used for what it represents. Here “spirits” refers to teachers and their doctrines.

away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. ¹¹ These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily *to find out* whether these things were so.
(Acts 17:10, 11)

The teaching of the apostle Paul was tested by the people of Berea. They made sure that what Paul said about Jesus Christ, the Messiah, lined up with the Scriptures.⁵ We need to be wise and not swallow everything someone says about the things of God, just because of who they say they are. Our primary and sole authority on God and life and salvation must always be the written Word of God. Let's again read John.

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ² By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, ³ and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the *spirit* of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.
(1 John 4:1-3)

From the day that Satan lied in the Garden of Eden to our first parents, until the end of this age when the final antichrist will deceive the world, evil spirits have promoted false teachings to seduce people away from the simple truth of God's Word. And the false teachers in John's day lied about the person of Jesus Christ.

It is not enough for people to say they are teaching about Jesus Christ. This does not necessarily mean they are teaching the truth. We must understand what they mean by the name Jesus Christ. The false teachers, the antichrists in John's day did not completely deny the Lord Jesus Christ. A doctrine that denies the Lord Jesus Christ is pretty self-evident that it is not from God. The false teachers did not deny Christ; they misrepresented Christ. False teaching about Christ subtracts something from him or adds something to him that God does not say about Christ.

The apostle John wrote that any teaching that denies that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh; that he is not a true and full human being, is not of God. The

⁵ This would be the Old Testament Scriptures that prophesied about the Messiah.

absolutely clear teaching of the Bible is that Jesus Christ is a full and true human being.. Notice that John says that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, not just that Jesus came in the flesh or Christ came in the flesh. Jesus is a name. It is a personal name like Chuck or Isabella or John. Jesus is Greek. In Hebrew Jesus is Yahshuah from which we get the name Joshua. Christ is not a name. It is a title. It is Greek for the Hebrew word Messiah. Both Christ and Messiah mean the anointed one. In Acts 10:38 we are told "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power."

The false teachers of John's day asserted that Jesus was indeed a man. But they taught that the Christ was an eternal divine being from heaven who came upon Jesus at his baptism and left Jesus before he died on the cross. It was this devilish teaching that later morphed into the false teaching of the Trinity. What John's opponents denied was that Jesus, the man, was the Christ. But in reality Jesus, like Adam was to be, was and is the full human expression of the image of God.⁶ Let's read what God's Word says about Jesus Christ.

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth,
a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders,
and signs which God did through Him in your midst,
as you yourselves also know
(Acts 2:22)

On the Day of Pentecost Peter preached and declared that Jesus is a man attested or approved by God. God's stamp of authenticity was upon Jesus through the miracles God did through him. Continuing, Peter declared,

Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly
that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified,
both Lord and Christ.
(Acts 2:36)

God has made the man Jesus, who was born of Mary, ministered in Israel, was crucified and who was raised up from the dead both Lord and Christ. There is no separate divine being who is the Christ. Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. In Romans 5 the apostle Paul makes a comparison between the sin of the first man, Adam and the righteousness of the man, Jesus Christ.

Therefore, as through one man's offense *judgment*
came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so
through one Man's righteous act *the free gift came*
to all men, resulting in justification of life. ¹⁹ For as by

⁶ Genesis 1:26; Hebrews 1:3

one man's disobedience many were made sinners,
so also by one Man's obedience many will be made
righteous.
(Romans 5:18, 19)

The book of Hebrews emphasizes over and over again that Jesus Christ is truly and fully a human being.

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,¹⁵ and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

¹⁶For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. ¹⁷Therefore, in all things He had to be made like *His* brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things *pertaining* to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.
(Hebrews 2:14-18)

The apostles and the earliest followers of Jesus Christ make a special point to emphasize his full humanity. It is fair to ask: How could Jesus Christ be tempted as we are, share in flesh and blood, be made like us in every way, unless Jesus Christ is completely a human being just as we are? A being who is a God-Man is not a human being. In fact, one Roman Catholic scholar writes honestly on this subject.

[t]he decision declaring Jesus both God and man makes genuine humanity impossible...Jesus is tempted but cannot sin because he is God...what kind of temptation is this? It has little in common with the kinds of struggles we are familiar with.⁷

The Bible states clearly that since Jesus is the Christ, because he was tempted in every way we are, we can come boldly to the throne of grace to find the help we need.⁸

⁷ Thomas Hart, To Know and Follow Jesus, (Paulist Press, 1984), p.46

⁸ Hebrews 4:14-16

I ask you to bear with me on this topic for just a little longer. If you deny the reality that Jesus Christ is a true human being, it leads to three terrible consequences.

1. It is to deny that Jesus Christ can ever be our example. The apostle Peter wrote that Jesus Christ left us "an example, that you should follow him."⁹ If Jesus Christ was not in any real sense a man, living under the same conditions as we do, then he cannot show us how to live life.
2. It is to deny that Jesus Christ can be our High Priest. The true High Priest had to be made like us so "that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people."¹⁰
3. By far the most terrible consequence: if the Christ was a divine being and Jesus is not the Christ, if as the false teachers said that spirit is good, but that all material things, like our bodies are bad, then God can never resurrect us from the dead. He can never fill us with His everlasting life and glory. We must either live on after death as a disembodied spirit, which is what the false teachers asserted, but the Bible does not. Or at death we truly perish and will never live again.

Let's continue with John.

and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the *spirit* of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.
(1 John 4:3)

Those teachers who misrepresent Christ are to be identified with the spirit of antichrist. This is a stunning statement! Now, this does not mean that your average Christian who is taught the Trinity is evil. What it does mean is that they have been deceived. But the apostle John also wants us to know that people who are truly born of God will understand the truth when they are taught the truth.

You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the

⁹ 1 Peter 2:21

¹⁰ Hebrews 2:17

world.
(1 John 4:4)

The meaning of this tremendous verse in its context is this: we need to be aware of and alert to false teachers, but we do not need to fear them. The very life of God in Christ in us, through the gift of the holy Spirit, enables us to overcome false doctrine. And no power can ever rob us of everlasting life, because we are born of God; we are His children forever.¹¹

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.
(1 John 4:5, 6)

Verse 5 may suggest that the false teachers, the antichrists, were drawing a large audience. When you tell the world what it wants to hear, you will always gather a large crowd. The message of the world always makes much of man's wisdom. It makes man the center. It concerns itself with your needs, your goals, your dreams; you always being blessed and prosperous with no trials and no troubles.

But the message from God always honors God and the Lord Jesus Christ. You can be forgiven not because your sins are small, but because God and Christ are greater. Your faith is powerful, not because of the quality of your believing, but because of the quality of the object of your faith—the Almighty and His Son Jesus Christ.

The new covenant message of God is rooted in the words of the apostles. The apostles were entrusted with the special authority to establish Christian doctrine. And we have the true apostolic teaching preserved for us in the New Testament.

The great need of our day and time is for men and women who are valiant for the truth. We need men and women whose hearts are filled with the love of God and whose backbones are filled with a righteous boldness to proclaim and defend the truth. We are called to serve the one true God. May we be about our Father's business, that our joy may be full.

¹¹ John 10:27-30. Jesus Christ and God are one in the sense that they are united in keeping us saved and secure for everlasting life.

