

## Sermon 36, Who Does That Sound Like?, 1 John 4:4-6

**Proposition:** You are of God and therefore listen to God's words

- I. Your Source: God
- II. Your Victory
  - A. You've overcome the spirits of antichrist
  - B. Christ is greater than they are
- III. Your Adversaries
  - A. They are utterly mundane
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- IV. Your Knowledge
  - A. You know your origin
  - B. You know your God
  - C. You know who to listen to
  - D. You know who won't listen to you
  - E. You know the true Spirit and the false spirits

### Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we continue looking this morning at John's admonition to test the spirits. As we saw last week, the test we are required to give is a true-false test. Is this spirit a true spirit (i.e., the Holy Spirit) or is it a false spirit, i.e., a demon? John provided for us a particular test: Does the spirit in question confess Jesus Christ come in the flesh? True spirits do, false ones don't — and failure to confess Christ as come in the flesh is a sure sign of being antichristian.

But John gives us a second test this morning. He comes from a slightly different angle this time, though. The test he gives revolves around speaking and listening. The true Spirit speaks in such a way that those who know God listen to Him; the false spirits speak in such a way that worldlings listen to them. In other words, the first test is "What is this spirit saying?" The second test is "Who does this spirit sound like?" What you need to know is that you are of God and therefore that you listen to God's words. You need to know that, and put it into practice.

#### I. Your Source: God

Brothers and sisters, as you prepare to test the spirits, there's something you need to know: You are from God. In fact, you are His children. You are His *little* children. John uses the diminutive here, emphasizing not just that you are a child but that you are not a very big child. In fact, you are a small child! Who are you to test spirits, greater in might and power than you will ever be? The answer is that you are God's child. The angels are not His children. They are huge and

powerful, yes — but they do not have the same status as you do. Just as the elephant driver rules the elephant, or the operator rules the dragline and the engineer rules the locomotive, so you are higher in status than the angels. Now, you're not higher in status than the Holy Spirit — but precisely because you are God's child, you recognize Him as the Spirit of your Father. You are from God. You have been born again through divine action. John just spent all of chapter 3 talking about that.

## **II. Your Victory**

But not only have you been born again; you have also won.

### **A. You've overcome the spirits of antichrist**

The world is full of spirits that don't confess Jesus as God's Anointed One come in the flesh. You have overcome them. John doesn't say that you will overcome the false spirits of antichrist; he says you have overcome them. This, I think, is him speaking as he does in the previous chapter. In eschatological terms, you have overcome the wicked one and the spirits of antichrist that tell lies about Jesus. That doesn't mean that apostasy is impossible and that you can never fall away now. But it does mean that if you are truly a child of God, you will not be conquered. Quite the contrary: You will win. How can John be so certain? Because you are of God! That is, you are born again and united to Christ by faith as God's child. Therefore, in His victory you will conquer. But He has already won. The Devil just doesn't acknowledge it yet. The Son of God came to destroy the works of the devil. His death prevailed; everything else is just mop-up operations. He will overcome. He has to!

### **B. Christ is greater than they are**

Why? Because He is greater than the spirit of antichrist! Make no mistake, these spirits are great. They are mighty and powerful. But Jesus is greater. This verse has been a major comfort to Christians over the centuries, and for good reason. It affirms in no uncertain terms that Christ is superior to Satan, and that Christ is inside you. The Devil is the spirit of the world; he is the god of this age, the spirit who is at work in the sons of disobedience. But Jesus created him, Jesus rules him, and Jesus has conquered him. One little word shall fell him! That word abides above all earthly powers.

When you look at the might of the fiscal state, the military-industrial complex, the world of academia, think tanks, the energy and technology sectors, and all the rest of what we call the world — the institutions generated by human desire that in turn generate human desire — does your heart quail? Do you feel that you can't fight city hall, that you have no chance against the massed forces of the world? Greater is He who is in you! The spirit that makes all of those things go, insofar as they are evil and opposed to you, doesn't stand a chance against the power of Jesus Christ. Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.

Jesus is greater in His origin. He is not a creature spoken into existence; His going forth is from of old, from the day of eternity.

He is greater in creativity. He is the word of the Father by whom the heavens were made. He is the one who invented flowers and the curve of a woman's breast.

He is greater in longevity; the world will perish, but He will remain.

He is greater in humility. Satan will not be content until everything is swallowed up in his insatiable maw. He cannot bear to look weak and stupid and miserable, even though he is all of those things, far more than he would have been had he remained in God's throne room to serve the Almighty.

Christ is greater in glory, greater in love, greater in forgiveness, greater even in death than the one who is in this world. Can you love Him? Can you trust Him? Can you listen to His voice and worship Him — even when that requires you to lay down your wallet, when it requires you to give up your favorite sin, when it means that you can't do what you feel like doing and instead need to do what He requires of you?

Brothers and sisters, see this great Savior, and worship Him. And then take a good hard look at the alternative.

### **III. Your Adversaries**

You see, you bear the DNA and name of Christ. You are a Christian. That means that the spirit of antichrist is opposed to you just as it is to Him. Antichrist very much takes this personally. As Bunyan so perceptively narrated, "Then Apollyon broke out into a grievous rage, saying, I am an enemy to this Prince; I hate his person, his laws, and people; I am come out on purpose to withstand thee."

That's how the spirit of antichrist operates! It hates not just His person, but also His laws and people. You are hated by the world. And what else can we say about those persons and institutions that are motivated by the spirit of antichrist?

#### **A. They are utterly mundane**

The first thing the verse emphasizes is just how worldly they are! The word "world" appears half a dozen times in this passage. Yes, the word "spirit" appears seven times, and we know that the Holy Spirit in His perfection is greater than anything the world can throw at us. But our adversaries are worldly in origin, worldly in speech, and worldly in their listening. They are utterly mundane, utterly secular, utterly focused on this world to the total exclusion of the next. Sound familiar? Secularism as an ideology is a devil's project. It is something that the devil generates and approves of. He wants people to think only of this world and ignore the next! Have you ever asked a worldly person "Where will you be in 100 years?" All you can get out of them is "I'll be dead." They don't seem to have any sense that they will in fact be in another world at that point. They are so mundane, so secular, so worldly, that they cannot thrust their mind into even the idea of Heaven or Hell. That is the reality of those who are driven by and speak from the spirit of antichrist.

#### **B. They are desire-based (lust of the flesh, etc.)**

Though John does not say it here, he alludes very clearly to his point in ch. 2. There he said that the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life are not of the Father but are of the world. Here he tells us that those driven by the spirit of antichrist are of the world. Thus, we need to apply what we know about the world from ch. 2 to the worldly people described here. What we

determined was that the two lusts and the pride of life are the desires that generate the ungodly world system that in turn generates them. The world is that system generated by and generative of human desire. Insofar as it projects itself as ultimate, as total, it leaves no room for God and thus is radically opposed to Him.

Knowing this, then, how should we respond to the reality that many deceivers have gone out into the world? Their worldliness is a reminder to us to not be worldly! We don't live based on desire. We don't regard the world as ultimate and look to it to satisfy every one of our desires. Instead, we remember our origin from the Father. We don't have to live for the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life!

### **C. They have an audience**

The final descriptor of these folks, these false prophets who speak from the spirit of antichrist, is that they have an audience. The world listens to them! Worldly people are eager to hear worldly stuff. The spirit in the world is a very powerful one. He is able to sway the minds of men and nations. And of course, we already know that human culture is very powerful even apart from demonic influence. We are cultural beings and we will be acculturated whether we like it or not. I laughed at all the articles talking about how people are already developing new routines and habits to deal with the post-coronavirus "new normal." Of course they are! That's part of what it means to be human. We aren't going to keep planning our days around getting to the office at 8 when we don't need to go to the office anymore.

Anyway, think of worldly pundits who have an audience in the world. Obviously not every human being listens to them. But we can safely say that the "spirit of the age" is powerfully influential on the minds of most people. Those who are able to catch on and say what the world wants to hear get an audience — generally a large audience.

You and I are live in this desire-generated world. We too have something in us that wants to listen to what the world is listening to. But John insists that we have something better than that. We don't have to listen to those who speak from the spirit of the antichrist. Indeed, we must remember that those who say what the world wants to hear are no friend to grace. Oh, their discourse is polished. It's compelling. It has great production values. It's slick. It is distinctly moral and oftentimes religious. But it is antichristian in its origin. If the world is listening to a particular pundit, that is a pretty solid sign that the pundit is not speaking the truth — or at least, not the whole truth.

## **IV. Your Knowledge**

Meanwhile, Christian, as you endeavor to test the spirits, you need to remember what you know. As the giver of the test, you need to know what you're looking for. Yes, it's a true-false test, but many factors go into the final score of "true" or "false" for any given spirit. In order to evaluate rightly, you need all of the things John reminds us of in this passage.

### **A. You know your origin**

The first of these is your origin. You are from the Father, not from the world. You are not beholden to the world, driven by the world, or required to make the world happy. You're from

God. He gave birth to you, begot you, through His word and Spirit. So since you know your origin, you are well-placed to test the spirits.

**B. You know your God**

Second, you know God. John mentions those who know God, and this is obviously the same group as those who are from God. What does it mean to know God? It is a personal relationship, as in the statement “Yes, I know James Tillotson.” That is, I’ve met him and talked to him and I maintain an ongoing relationship with him. You know God!

**C. You know who to listen to**

And therefore you know who to listen to. You don’t have to seek the spirit of antichrist that says whatever the world wants to hear at that particular moment. You listen to true teachers — to the apostles and the prophets. The one who is born again listens to John and his fellow apostles. Now, this statement sounds rather prideful. But it is the bare truth. Those who have been born again love the Scriptures and delight in listening to what John has to say. Can you go a long time without reading the Bible? Then you aren’t from God. But if you really need your Bible, you know that you are from its author. And by the same token, as long as you’re listening to the prophets and apostles you know you’re not listening to the spirit of antichrist.

**D. You know who won’t listen to you**

You also know who won’t listen to you. You expect the world to find your message rather incongruous and ill-fitting. The world listens to the spirit of antichrist — not to the Spirit of Christ!

**E. You know the true Spirit and the false spirits**

So you know the Holy Spirit, as you know real money. And by the same token, the better you know the real, the better equipped you are to recognize the fake.

Who does that spirit sound like? What kind of audience would this discourse gather? If you can answer those questions, you can test the spirits. You can do this, because you are from God, His Son is in you, and He is greater. Amen.