

1 John 4:4-6 (NKJV)

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.

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.

If you could pick a 4 word sentence that you could have Christ appear and speak to you, what would it be?

I suspect that we could come up with a bunch of good ones. “Jon, I love you” would be a good one. We could come up with lots of things we would like Christ to say. But I’ll bet that all of them would consist of a message **telling us that we are right with God**. We would want to know that our relationship with Him is secure. Because, at the end of the day that is what matters most. Well here we have our brother John. He is trying to prepare these believers to deal with false messages. He is trying to teach them not to be gullible. But at the core, John wants these believers to have a **solid confidence** in their salvation. He does not want them afraid that somehow they might be wrong about how a person gets right with God. He does not want their assurance trifled with.

So in verse 4 John says these wonderful words. And the “you” here is plural. He is talking to this group of followers. And he tells them these words that are so precious, so encouraging, so meaningful.

You are of God, little children

Do you have confidence that he is saying that to you this morning? Does the shoe fit? Well, John has been telling us how we can **determine** if it fits. He has been telling us what these little children look like. They **obey God**, they **believe God’s Word** above anything else, and they **love like Christ loves**. John wants us to know that we can confidently read ourselves into this sentence.

You are of God, little children

Do you see how, if you believe this, down deep in your soul, this changes everything. It provides the fuel to **resist every false teaching** and every **temptation to gain the world**. We don’t need to **gain** an identity. We already **have one**. We don’t need to compromise to seek the **world’s** approval. We already have **God’s** approval. We don’t need to spend our lives making up for love that **was not** given to us. We are **deeply loved by God**. We don’t need to grab at the world’s stuff to make us feel **secure**. We are

eternally secure. Do you see what I mean? How can the world improve upon that which we **already have** if we will **only believe it.**

Do you ever have times when your thoughts rob you of any desire to live. Do you feel like, what is the point? Well here is part of the remedy to that string of thoughts. We are loved and accepted and chosen as adopted children into the family of God. Try pondering that truth deeply and see if that will not eventually lead you from the **despondency of life** into the **Joy** of the Lord.

A human's deepest and most driving needs are met in a secure relationship with Jesus Christ. The world loses its ways to **hook us** when we are assured of God's love for us. The world's advertising loses its strength. What it advertises begins to look more and more shallow and cheap, and even stupid, when compared to what we have in relationship with Christ.

John tells our body this morning, He tells every one of us who are a true believer-

You are of God, little children. Maybe this is "**note on refrigerator**" worthy this week. I cannot imagine a more deeply encouraging message than this. Now John applies this spiritual status in the context of fighting against the **world** and the **world's messages**, the **world's false good news.**

He says "**You have overcome them**".

Now, who is the **them**? Verse 5 tells us that the "**them**" are the false teachers. And how is it that we overcome them? We overcome them by not "hearing" them. We do not let their teaching **grip our hearts.**

Remember how Jesus would often say, **He who has ears, let him hear.** This is the kind of hearing John is speaking of. It is the hearing that goes to the heart. While our **ears** hear the false messages, we hear the words, they **don't take root** in our hearts. Our hearts **reject** the messages because we have evaluated the messages, comparing them with scripture. We have tested the spirits. We have evaluated the teachings. And we have pronounced them false.

In that way we overcome them.

This word for overcome is used often in scripture. It means to **carry off the victory, come off victorious.** If I understand it properly, this is not a aorist tense, once and done. The tense means, up to this point. You have overcome so far. So this is not referring to the victory we have in justification as much as the victory **enabled** by justification that we gain through **sanctification.** The overcoming comes as we apply that which Christ has done for us.

Now the word overcome pretty much means what our English word means. We have gained the victory over the false teachers by not succumbing to their

false teaching. But that was a process in the text, not just a state. It was accomplished by testing the spirits. There was work involved. There was thought involved. There was effort. This is much like **most things** needing done in our sanctification. **We** work and **God** works. In theological terms, **sanctification is synergistic**. There are **two** parties at work. **Justification**, the one time work of making us right with God that Christ did, is **Monergistic**. There is **one** party at work.

And this work of sanctification is effective. It produces results. In fact in many places Overcomer and Believer can be used as synonyms. If a person is one, he is also the other.

Now, just so we don't think wrongly about this, just so we don't start slapping ourselves on the back over this and saying, aren't we just the greatest people, we are given more information.

Why do we overcome? What is the **driving force**? What is the **great enabler** of our victory? Was it superior effort or intellect or discipline? Nope.

1 John 4:4 (NKJV)

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 are **driven** to victory and **enabled** to have victory and **assured** we will have victory because **God's Spirit is stronger than the devil**. The forces **for us** are greater than the forces **against us**.

It is difficult right now to watch the news. I find it extremely difficult because it is so very hard to know what the truth is. And so many of the actions being portrayed right now are so mindless. They are fueled with soundbites and partial truths and slogans. But for the most part there are very few platforms for **reasoned debate** or the ability to **question the reasoning**. It looks more like passion in motion. What we are seeing is a manifestation of the world's system. And behind it all is the Father of lies. Our passage this morning gives us hope.

Yes, there is "one in the world". And yes, he has great influence in this world. And yes he can incite all kinds of things, from civil servants showing terrible cruelty, to mobs exploiting an evil action as license to loot and destroy and show **their own** cruelty. This shouldn't surprise us. We know who **this one is** who is in the world. We know his hatred of **God** and **anything** that has **God's fingerprints** on it. We know that his influence is great and he will use it for evil.

But he is **nothing** compared to **He who is inside** every believer. As we watch the news we must remember that God does not promise how things will work out in the short run. And He does not promise that it **can**, or **will be**, fixed in

its present form. But praise God He **does promise** that our hearts do not need to be casualties to this world's system. We can walk in this world and be immune to its temptations and its attacks. The devil's attacks may affect our **circumstances** which we **cannot control**, but they will not affect our **destination** nor can they **overpower our walks with Christ**. Nothing can ever separate us from the love of Christ. So we need to keep this proper perspective as we go about our days. The devil is strong. The Holy Spirit is immeasurably stronger. The devil spreads hate, among other things. The Holy Spirit spreads love.

There are also 2 other things to note here.

Notice how the Spirit is working in this particular instance. Maybe I focus on this type of this so much because growing up I saw some very wrong teachings about the Holy Spirit. Even here in our text, some would believe that we test the spirits by perceiving them to be false by the Holy Spirit. But that is not the direction we get from the text. We evaluate **the message** by comparing it to the **proper message**. We identify **bad doctrine** as bad doctrine because we compare it to **good doctrine**.

That is the kind of work the Holy Spirit most commonly does. He works in the believer's life helping him or her to **read** the truth and **understand** the truth and **apply** the truth and **remember** the truth. And like we said earlier, **we work** and the **Holy Spirit** works. The Holy Spirit was not given to us so that we could **do nothing** while the Holy Spirit **does everything** for us magically. This one that we have in us is **helping us overcome the evil one** is doing that by helping us **use the truth of God's word** in a way that accomplishes **God's will**. And this is a very real and present continual help. And while we are working, we must always remember that the Holy Spirit is the driving **"Because"** in verse 4. We work only because the Holy Spirit has called us to Christ. If it were not for that, and if His work in us would **stop**, our work in **sanctification** would stop as well.

This brings me to the second emphasis. Notice how our power to overcome is directly connected with **our identity**. We are **children of God**. That means that the Spirit of God is in us. We have an identity in the family of Christ with his spiritual genetics being a family trait. I don't mean that in the way the prosperity preachers proclaim it. But I mean it in the sense that there is no one who is in the **family of God** who does not have the **Spirit of God**. And so our ability and desire to overcome happens, not because of what we have **done**, but because of **who we are**.

Ok let's move on.

⁵ **They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them.**

Now this is talking about the false teachers. Keep in mind these are people who are committed to a doctrine which **they know to be counter to the doctrine** passed on by the apostles. These were not people making **minor errors** in their preaching of the Gospel. We may have many friends who we believe have very incorrect understandings of certain scriptures. And certainly **all of us** are wrong about many things. One day we will know the perfect interpretation of scripture. But then we probably won't need it like we need it now.

So these people are not just making a **mistake**. There are lots of people who get swept into false doctrine because they are ignorant of good doctrine. So they may spend time in that state, maybe even teaching it. But as they become more aware of how scripture counters what it is they believe, they change, they submit.

We often find, though, that the leaders who are teaching false doctrines are **very aware** of what scripture really says, but they simply **cannot gain the advantage** they seek by submitting to it. So they **change it**. There are many instances of so called faith healers who **knowingly** manipulate the crowds so that they can pull off their shenanigans and deceive their audiences. Their duplicity betrays their guilt.

This is the kind of teachers the gnostic teachers were. They were selling a bill of goods that profited them. Maybe money, maybe power, maybe status, it is hard to tell what the appeal is. But they were in it for **self**.

When a person is preaching for the motives of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or the pride of life, you can know one thing. They are **of the world**. Even if they are teaching the truth, but doing it for those motives, Jesus called them **hirelings**. He condemned what they did.

So these false teachers were of the world. They were doing what they were doing because it offered a worldly payoff of some sort.

Now, if you are preaching a message for a worldly payoff, you can be pretty confident that truth is not the highest priority. The **payoff** will tend to **shape the message**. For instance, if the motive is **money**, and if a first teaching message in a fund raising letter raises \$1000 and the second one, where the substance of the message is tweaked raises \$10,000, the message will change to match where the money is. That is the nature of worldly motivations.

Now these false teachers will become specialists, not in what the Bible says. That is not their motivation. They will become specialists in **their audience**. They will know how to pull their strings and press their buttons. Their craft

becomes manipulation. And they will speak the world's message because they understand it so thoroughly. They are doing their so called ministry for its fleshly appeal so they will know how to appeal to the flesh of their followers. And those who are following them are acting just like the teachers. Now Jesus had some sympathy for those who were misled by bad authorities. But he showed **no** sympathy for false teachers. But we do know that if the followers hear the real truth but gravitate back to the false teaching, it is because of who they **really are. they speak as of the world, and the world hears them.**

The Holy Spirit will drive a believer to seek the truth because they love the truth. This is a process, not an event. And it might take years for it to kick in. But it will kick in. A believer will love truth. And the compulsion to know it will drive a person from the false and into the true. So a believer will have a **limited shelf life** under a system of **false teaching**. We cannot know the timing. But we can know that when there is opportunity to know the truth, a believer will be drawn to it. **False teaching** appeals to worldly impulses, worldly payoff, a person's love for self. **True teaching** appeals to a believer's love for God that comes in response to God's love for us.

Let's move on to verse 6.

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.

Now, who is the **WE** here? Based on the context I believe John is talking about himself and his apostle friends and those in group who are teaching what Christ said.

While it is true that all believers are of God, as we saw in verse 4, John is speaking of where true teaching is originating in this verse. He is saying that it comes from us. Now we have to keep in mind that we started 1 John with exactly this same kind of reasoning. John was saying that this was **not** some **cleverly thought up scheme**. John was a first hand witness of what he was proclaiming. He **heard it** and **saw it** and **felt it**. There is no mystic mumbo jumbo here. He was **there**. And he was willing to die for what he believed, which no one will do if they think it is a lie.

So John is saying- we are of God. We are carrying the true Jesus Gospel. We have the truth. And that is what we are preaching.

Now when the truth goes out, one of two things happen. A person is stricken to the heart by the truth of the message. Or a person finds it uninteresting, unappealing, unchallenging. Ho Hum. It is irrelevant.

Scripture says this about hearing.

Romans 10:17 (NKJV)

17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

There truly is a **supernatural process** that accompanies the hearing and reading of God's word. And it involves far more than the **ears hearing it** or the **mind grasping** what the words mean.

Carla allowed herself to be hypnotized when she was in a class in college. While hypnotized, she was given a post hypnotic suggestion that she would find the word "blank " very funny. Sure enough, a while later in class, the professor said the word "blank" and Carla laughed hysterically. And that wasn't something she chose to do when she heard the word. It struck her as just being very very funny.

That is a bit like how scripture describes a **believer's response** to the word of God. It is not so much that they **choose** to be affected by it. It just happens to them. They may be able to resist it the message, but they cannot help being affected by it. Maybe one day they were going happily along with their lives and the word of God held **no interest** or effect. And then the next day, bang, they could not escape the power of the words from the Bible.

That does not **just happen**. That does not happen because we got **smarter** or **more attentive**. It happened because God did a miracle in our hearts and He softened our hearts to His word.

You could take that same message to hundreds of thousands of people with no effect whatsoever. But for some reason it becomes unavoidable to some. The same message.

We may look back on periods of our lives where scripture really had no sway in our lives. We didn't care if we heard it or if we didn't. But then one day we find we cannot get enough. We have questions that we need answers to. It becomes the most interesting thing in life.

The Bible truly is a supernatural book. It cannot be explained like all other books.

This is what Isaiah said about it.

Isaiah 55:11 (NKJV)

11 So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper *in the thing* for which I sent it.

God accomplishes the changes that He wants in His people by using His word, and it is often by using **His word** through **His people**.

There is something in this truth that is amazingly **freeing** for us.

When I prepare to speak, I seek to make what I am saying very clear. I seek to make it something that we can easily apply. I try to speak energetically to

convey the importance I think it holds in our lives. So in short, I try to do my job of conveying the truth as good as I can.

But at the end of the day I know this. My skill as a speaker will never accomplish **God's work** in a person's heart. The best Biblical teacher in the world, without the Holy Spirit's work in a person's heart, will **never, not one time, not ever**, accomplish a single change for eternity in a person's heart. We might have a human capacity to **make people feel better**. We might have a human capacity to **get them to change some things in their lives**.

Motivational speakers do that all day long. But only the Holy Spirit can empower the word to accomplish the necessary **spiritual** changes in a person's life.

Do you see what that does? It takes the pressure off of us. As long as we know God's word, understand it in context, and speak it to the need, we do not need to worry. All the pressure is on the Holy Spirit at that point.

So we can do a horrible job at communicating that we think was **more confusing than anything else**, but if the word of God is presented and the Spirit of God is working, it will do miraculous things. And we can be the best orator ever born and declaring the Word of God verbatim, but if the Holy Spirit is not working, we will not bear any fruit.

That is why we should study and prepare like it all depends on us and pray like it all depends on God.

Then John continues in the last verse.

By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

John is essentially telling us this truth.

We know what spirit is in a person by **how they respond** to the accurately presented Word of God.

This is a truth that is very helpful in removing the mysteries of our lives. It will help us dramatically in understanding **where a person stands**. It will help us discern **who is true to Christ** and who is **not**. And it is as simple as it can be.

How does this person respond to Biblical truth that is clearly and accurately portrayed to them?

Now this isn't just what we **say** the Bible says. It has to be what the **Bible truly says**. But if we can show that the Bible says it, what is the person's response to it?

We might think that is too simple. But it is not. We know that a person has the **Spirit of truth** if they respond to what scripture says by submitting to it and believing it and obeying it. We know the person has the **spirit of error** if, when presented with God's word, they will not submit to it, will not obey it

and will not believe it. We may not know this on a single instance. But we will see it as a trend in a person's life. And it tells the truth.

We might think that this is all based on a human's ability to reason. But it is easy to see there are **supernatural forces** at work here. There are spirits. And the spirit drives the results. There are pro Christ forces and anti-Christ forces. And they ultimately determine the outcome. In a child of Christ, the **Word of God** will have sway. In the anti-Christ force **it will not**. It is really that simple.

And why is all this true? Why does the Word of God have sway over a believer. It is because of the miracle that God has done in a believer's life. He has made us children of God. Greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world. Christ in us is the hope of glory.

If we meet the tests of true believers that John is giving us, we can imagine this and know that it is based on truth.

We can imagine Christ saying this to our face today.

You are of God little children.

You are of God little children.