

Reading: 1 John 4:1-6

Theme: Testing the Teachers' Lives.

John has written to encourage his 1st readers and in chapter 4 he addressed them with tender affection and warned them of false prophets. He showed the necessity not to believe every spirit - even those claiming to be of and speak for God, but they had to keep on testing them. John highlighted 2 areas to consider - firstly their teaching, especially concerning the Lord Jesus. Did it centre on Him as the One and only Saviour as the God man - God made manifest in the flesh? We considered this from v2-3 last week.

The 2nd area he touched on was the lives of those who teach God's word to see how they live, what they were motivated by (v4-6). As we look at these verses briefly and I want to do so using 3 headings - not complicated, difficult headings, but pick up the pattern from the original Greek and brought out by most English translations. Each verse begins with a different pronoun - *you, they, we* and then followed by "*are from*" (NIV) and then their origin is given - God or the world. Each heading is from within the start of the verse:

1. You Are from God. (v4)

John has written that belief and behaviour are always in harmony, in sync and he continues to develop that to show that false teaching leads to false living – it still does. John here in v4 & 6 draws attention to this through a contrast to the life motives of the false teachers in v5. John addresses these believers as dear or little children - again a term of affection to assure them of his love and having his confidence. He let them know he knew they were hurting as children and were

not functioning as mature ones for they were awed by the false teachers, they felt inadequate and helpless.

John encourages them that even though they were like little or dear children, nevertheless he emphasised that they were from (or of) God. They were to be encouraged for he saw there were evidences in their lives which proclaimed they were born of God, were God's children and had eternal life. John's aim was to encourage them to resist the impostors, the false teachers, these impressive orators who spoke great things and claimed great mystical experiences, so to encourage these believers John reminded them who they were.

Sadly, it is so easy for us to often forget who we are. We feel our smallness, or our weakness, see the apparent foolishness of preaching in a technological age (*or any age come to that*) and we see systems, ways to attract people used, even to claim great success of large numbers 'converted' and we can feel inadequate, useless both as a church and as an individual. We are to remember who we are as a Christian – a work of divine love, power, grace and mercy; we are sons and daughters of the living God forever; have God as our Father, the Lord Jesus as our Saviour and we have His care and keeping, we know His word of truth is true and reliable. We are not to be downtrodden, not to feel useless, for the One who is in us is greater than the one who is in the world. We are indwelt by God the Holy Spirit who brings to us all the resources and potential of God and therefore we are the "*overcomers*".

John wrote these words to his 1st readers who were hurting, struggling and questioning and says that they had overcome the world. Was he mad? Did he look on the bright side of life or was he hopefully deluded? Did he wear very rose-tinted glasses? Not at all! John was a biblical realist and so must we be!

We know false teachers and false prophets have gone into the world and arise so often in the churches. They have been about through the history of the Church and by reading Church history we will see the errors in one century reappear in a slightly newly packaged way in a later century. Even now old heresies and errors are repackaged as new ideas, discoveries or teachings - except now they're promoted to make lots of money and they can very quickly spread globally through all the modern means of communication.

Why then did John say to his 1st readers and also to us that we have overcome these false teachers and their spirits? As Christians we have the Holy Spirit and He is greater than any false spirit or teacher. At 1st glance this may seem contrary to common experience. The false prophets and teachers of John's day were increasing; the false teachers of our days seem so many, but John is right because true believers, ones who are born of God's Spirit have not been won over to their cause, the gospel message and biblical faith is still proclaimed. It is clear that we have not fallen under false spirits. We have overcome by God the Holy Spirit's help - not due to our niceness, or good minds, but because He who is in us is greater than the spirits of the false teachers.

False teaching and false teachers come in so many disguises, as wolves in sheep's clothing and may seek to disperse, snare, ravage and savage God's flock, but as sheep of Christ, we hear His voice and should not respond to the voice of a false shepherd or enemy. The Holy Spirit alerts us, makes us aware of the voice of our Beloved and the voice of error, we are to go back to His word to hear Him clearly speak and we listen in line with His clear voice.

By the enabling work of the Holy Spirit we can overcome those who would take us away from the truth and so we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. The Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth - the truth He has already made known in the word of God. We are not to minimise or underplay this ongoing work of the person of the Holy Spirit. We are to ask for Him to so work that we can glorify Christ more and more in our faithfulness.

2. They Are from the World. (v5)

The false teachers are from the world - they not only live it, but are dominated (*consciously or subconsciously*) by its aims, desires, hopes and fears. The world is their origin, natural sphere and audience. They play to the world, aiming to get a large following. We are not to confuse numbers with success or popularity with soundness; but the opposite is not necessarily true either.

False teachers often compromise the truth and make many things palatable to those around them. It may be an easy religion - you can live as you like if you do and say this or that, for you will be okay. It may be in offering a reward for

living a right, good, kind and religious life and they say that you will be ok because of... It may be offering real benefits in the here and now - so health, wealth, prosperity, long life and then heaven sounds good - but realise heaven will be a long time off because of your health, wealth and prosperity! These ones may play the world's audience, give them what they want - the freedom, a new world order or a new lifestyle. Sadly, many in Third World countries are taken in by prosperity teaching which then leaves them poorer, cynical of the true gospel, none the wiser and lost.

The false prophets and teachers will always get a hearing and following as they say that mankind is basically alright and just needs a little bit of improvement here or there and that this can be achieved by... well basically what these ones have to peddle and to offer! This false teaching can occur subtly also. The gospel message to repent and believe becomes a love ethic; Jesus Christ is not presented as the Lord and Saviour to be submitted to and be given lifelong obedience to, but merely as an example or a teacher to be followed when convenient or Jesus is someone we can ask to add a coat of paint to our tarnished life.

False teachers offer so much, even accompanied by phenomena and accounts of great experiences, but they are like the devil in the garden of Eden - offering so much and yet not being able to deliver as they do not deal with the problem of sin or our accountability to God. We are to ask people as to what they want from and for their lives. It may be ease, wealth, prosperity or a long life, then we are to show them they are misguided, even deluded as they can have all this,

may even gain the whole world, but if they lose their eternal soul they are an eternal loser. We are to urge people not to settle for a sham, a substitute and not to let false spirits deprive them of the best that God truly will give them. We are to urge them not to settle for an imitation of true life, when God offers, in and through the gospel, the real, true and priceless life in all its fullness. We are to urge people not to let the false teachers who push a false message fool them. If we are a believer we are to be on our guard and not be taken in and side-tracked by what false teachers peddle in our days.

3. We Are from God. (v6)

John made this huge claim on behalf of himself and the apostles (*also true teachers?*) This statement seems the height of arrogance! It certainly would be if it was uttered by an individual Christian, for an individual believer cannot say in effect “*If you are of God you will agree with me, but if you disagree with me you cannot be of God!*” Here John is writing as a chosen apostle, one of Christ’s especially chosen, called and equipped ones. He was one of those given unique authority and calling to be part of the foundation to the Church as said last time - apostles and OT prophets [Ephesians 2:20].

John here carries forward his reasoning from the 1st 3 verses - the doctrine had to be tested. Now he says “*See if they agree with such in their lives as well as their teaching*”. They had to conform their lives to Scripture, to the revealed truth and not either ignore it or add things to it.

The people, the children of God, the flock of God will hear God’s word taught and say “*Yes, that is right*” and try to live

it out; those not of God will hear it, may or may not agree with it, but they will not live it out. There is a recognition of the voice of God by God's children. Jesus said that His sheep hear His voice and follow Him (John 10 - especially v27). John says that those of God will listen to the apostolic teaching and respond aright. Those who are not of God will not bother to listen. Regrettably we find this even in churches, where people claim to follow Jesus, but will not hear the Bible's teaching on all sorts of issues - the way of salvation, the person and work of Christ, the existence of hell, the practice of God's plan for the lives of men and women they say "*Ah, but... God has moved on. We are to realise that is outmoded... We have come to see and understand...*"

We are to test them according to what the word of God says and if they deny that, if they are not listening to the apostolic teaching of NT or the prophetic teaching of OT then we are to recognise the spirit of error and falsehood.

The Holy Spirit who is in God's children causes them to recognise, discern God's voice speaking through a true messenger. It is not in isolation, or by feelings, but is measured against Scripture, the Canon of Scripture - the measure, the rule of Scripture. By it we are enabled to recognise the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error - sometimes even alarm bells seem to sound in our minds and hearts that what is taught does not sound or feel right.

Often, we may have to go back to fundamentals to question if this is adding or taking away from Scripture. If it does, then we are to be careful and on our guard. Does it say we need

something more than trusting in the full person and work of the Lord Jesus? If so, be careful and on your guard. Does it make out we need this or that for a better Christian life because it adds to Christ's work? If so be careful and on guard.

Our age is one where tolerances is pushed as virtue and intolerance is considered the sin of the age. Isn't it strange that those who are so keen on tolerance are often the most intolerant towards those who disagree with them! As believers in a multicultural, multi-faith and relativistic age, we need to be constantly reminded that somethings are always and exclusively true and that being so then makes other things false! We are not to be arrogant, or bombastic, but be alert and ready to stand up winsomely, wisely, but firmly for the truth. As we stand up for the truth, we stand upon the truth of the Bible, the Saviour and the salvation it proclaims. Martin Luther taking on, what seemed to be the whole world, declared that "*Here I stand, I can do no other.*" He took his stand on God's word, its truth and reliability. We to are to stand on what God's word says and do so in a right, loving way that honours the God who has done so much for us.