

Reading: 1 John 5:13-21

Theme: Knowing We are Children of God.

For some people it is important as to who you support as a football team. Certainly, it is very important to know which side you're on if you are in a battle in a war. Many people support and vote for different political parties in an election. In some sporting events it turned out that players fixed the result - not so much for the opposition's sake, but for their own financial benefit as they are on their own side! Whose side are we on at the moment? At different times that question would mean were you a royalist or a parliamentarian; or of the house of York or Lancaster. This evening I'm not talking of any political, social or military sides, but a far more fundamental position - are we on God's side or the devil's side (*in v19 called "the world"*)?

John wrote in v16-19 of the 4th certainty that believers do not habitually practice sin. We saw last week in v18 the impossibility of a believer to be habitually residing in and habitually doing sin. We saw the security that believers also have - they have a sovereign protector, unseen yet for ever at hand and the evil one cannot touch, harm them. Having said that, John goes on in v19 to make a stark contrast between the world and those born of God. One commentator suggests v19 is the theme of the letter and John shows the characteristics of the one against the other throughout the letter. It sets before us 2 sides, 2 positions - there is no other side or position, for we are either on the world's side or God's. The question is "*Whose side we are on?*"

We can and are to know this - John gives the 2nd confident assertion Here "*we know and keep on continually knowing that...*" It is not up for discussion, but is something we are to be certain about. Robert Murray M'Cheyne said on this verse to his congregation "*Never rest until you can say this.*" In this message I have 2 aims - 1stly to cause any on the world's side, or not sure which side they are on, to see

your dangerous position and see the value and worth of going to and knowing you are on God's side; 2ndly to encourage those who are on God's side, to see with renewed freshness the wonder of what it means to be on God's side and to delight in such. I've 2 headings concerning these 2 positions regarding the world and the Christian:

1. The Position of the World.

I will be saying things from the Bible which may present a black picture about the world. I do not say them out of pride or arrogance, nor with the "*them and us*" mentality, but I will try and present what the Bible starkly says as to what the position of the world is and has been ever since Adam and Eve fell into sin and into the control of the devil. The NT uses the term "*the world*" on 3 different levels: **a. The created world around us** - every part of nature, including human beings on this terrestrial ball; **b. The whole of mankind** - all kinds and types and races of people throughout history; **c. To describe the world system** - organised and living without any reference or any relation to God and His ways. This is the way John uses it here.

John says here "*the whole world is under the control of the evil one*" (NIV); the RSV says "*in the power of the evil one*"; the ESV says "*lives in the power of the evil one*" and KJV says "*the whole world lieth in wickedness*". The translation "*the evil one*" is the better translation of the Greek, but the word control, power is literally "*lies*" and the ESV catches the sense of it "*lies in the power of...*" The world is like a sleeping baby - in the arms of the devil and this baby is content to have it so and is also blissfully unaware of it. Every attempt to get out is met by more reasons to slumber - needs met, no need to stir. The world lies in the control, the power of the evil one - the devil.

Society says the problems of mankind stems from a range of many things - we have not evolved enough in our behaviour to match of

physical evolution; others say it is economic ills, Third World debt, people lacking this or that which drives them to crime, antisocial behaviour; some have argued it is the political situation - change that and we will be better off. Others say we need more learning and education; others blame consumerism and greed - let us learn to be content and use earth's resources wisely and fairly, to share it equally and we will be harmonious and at peace. This is like trying to treat symptoms of a serious disease, but not the cause itself.

The Bible here in this verse and elsewhere is quite blunt - the world lies in the power, control of the evil one. The Bible teaches of good and evil, well actually of God and the devil. It speaks of sin and righteousness. The devil is not some dark force, but a real being and he is powerful, far too powerful for any world ruler, any man or woman to understand, for he is wise, cunning, deceptive, cruel, ruthless and full of hatred for God, His works and ways. In the Bible the devil is termed "*a strong man armed*" (Luke 11:21), or "*the prince of this world*" (John 12:31); "*the prince of the power of the air*" (Ephesians 2:2); "*the god of this world*" (2 Corinthians 4:4). The devil was God's most glorious created being in the spiritual world and realm, was the greatest angel, but he rebelled against God and attacked God's very Being and power, along with other rebellious angels. They were all banished from Heaven. When God created man and woman, the devil came and tempted Adam and Eve, they listen to him and fell. In doing so, they gave over, yielded their control and dominion of the world over to the devil himself. He controls, has power over the world, its outlook, its motivations and desires.

This affects all areas of life for everybody - private or public, inside or outside the family, nationally and internationally. The devil has a stranglehold upon the whole world's outlook, mentality and organisation of life in this world. By nature, the world would, because of its sweet contented bias to sin would have it to be so.

Unseen and unknown, the world is governed by this invisible spiritual superpower which manipulates mankind just exactly as it wants.

There are unseen spiritual dark powers. I'm not saying that everything has a demon in it, or is evil, but there are these real spiritual forces of evil and against God c.f. Ephesians 6:12. The devil was even so bold as to offer the Son of God, when He was here on earth in a human body, all the kingdoms of the world if He would bow down and worship him (Matthew 4:8-9). This evil one governs and rules all this world is and he affects its attitude towards God and His people. This evil one causes people to have a resistance of some kind against God. Such a one will fail to worship and reverence God. The devil will powerfully aim to keep people away from this great and glorious God, the totally free gift of eternal life He gives to bless them and us with.

We are to realise the devil is powerful, but not all powerful; he knows much, but he does not know all things. Only God is almighty and all-knowing. We can learn from v18 that the devil can't harm, grasp, get hold of believers, the ones born of God for they are God's - because no one can pluck them from the hands of the Lord Jesus and are eternally secure. Moving on we see:

2. The Position of the Christian.

John highlights that this is something that we as believers are to know and keep on knowing. In stark contrast to the position of the world in the control of the evil one, believers are to know they, rather, we are the children of God (NIV). Literally it says "we are of/from God". The force of the little word here (*εκ* - *which is a preposition*) is "out of" or "out from". To help us grasp it the NIV adds "*we are children of God*" and so shows our origin and what we have become, yet it limits our thinking. I will stick with the translation *out of* or *out from*.

John uses the word “we” to include himself even though he was an apostle. What he wrote, we can say of ourselves if we are a Christian - we are of God. He doesn't say that we Christians are nice people, or religious, or moral, or attend church, or who made a decision in a religious meeting. **A Christian is someone who is of God.** This little phrase has much in it and I want to try and quickly work through some of the things it includes - at some we will pause longer to look at them, but all will be quickly touched on. I hope we can note them, think on them and thank God for them.

To be of God means **we are taken out of the devil's power and control.** We were of the world, under the devil's power and we could do nothing to free ourselves. For us to be of God means **He has done a work of grace and mercy** in us and we have been delivered from this present evil world (Galatians 1:4); rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into the kingdom of the Son He loves (Colossians 1:13). Because of this sin is not to have dominion over us, for we are not under law, but under grace (Romans 6:14). We have been brought out, rescued, redeemed from the control of the evil one by God in His grace and power. Peter summarised the great changes in our standing and position in 1 Peter 2:9-10 *“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.”* We are FREE - set free by the Son of God, no longer under the devil's control, rule, domination and power. We are no longer what we were, where we were or who we were - but we are new creations in Christ.

But the phrase “of God” also means **we belong to Him, to His realm and His kingdom** – for that to have happened will mean that we are at peace with God, reconciled to Him, no longer His enemy but have,

by His grace, come into an entirely new and radical relationship with Him. This means He has done something in us who were dead in trespasses and sins - **He has given us life**, we are born of God, we are now partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). All these marvellous, miraculous things originate, flow, come from, are of God. It is **He that keeps us and sustains us** and everything we are, do and have comes from Him in our spiritual and physical life and blessings.

To be of God also means **we are part of His family and will have the family likeness**. As such we are to love our brothers and sisters. Because of all the great things He has done for us all there should be a growing delight in God and rejoicing in who He is to us, all He has done, is doing and will do for us. This is something strange and foreign to those who have no relationship with God, even if they are religious. Those who believe in the Lord Jesus as their Saviour will delight in God and can find themselves doing so even in the darkest of times which they will not necessarily understand, where they may even question why, groan and hurt, but in their innermost being they have a trust and confidence in their God and Saviour and do take delight in delighting in Him.

We who are of God **are to be controlled by His Spirit** - do as He would do, say, think and react. The world is controlled by the evil one, but as believers we are to evidence we are controlled by the Holy Spirit and so the peace of God is able to rule our hearts, to control our thoughts, desires, tongues, attitudes and actions and He does so in accordance with the revealed will and word of God - the Bible. This is to be worked out and shown in our lives - our aims, desires, motives and actions are be controlled and brought subject to what pleases Him and certainly not shaped by our feelings, by society or by the company we are in. A number of times John wrote of believers walking in the light, obeying God's commands, loving the brothers and sisters, believing the truth of the Lord Jesus. As

such, the fruit of the Spirit is to appear in our lives (Galatians 5:22-23). This is not to be forced fruit, not imitation fruit, not to be put on to impress, but to arise naturally as we become spiritual in the natural things and natural in the spiritual things. It will also include humility, for we cannot truly see what we were, where we were going and see God's astonishing grace to us and then be proud and arrogant. We realise we are what we are by and through the grace of God alone. To be proud and arrogant is to be like the world and so to have a worldly spirit.

To be of God means we are **to go on for Him and our chief end is to glorify God, enjoy Him in our life here on earth and then forever in heaven.** It is to be no chore or bore to spend time with Him in His word, in prayer, and to meet with Him with His people as often as we can in the church meetings.

To be of God means **we are going to God** - we are destined for heaven and glory. That is His aim and purpose, that is our goal and destiny. The Lord Jesus prayed all His people would be with Him and that they would see His glory (John 17:24). We as believers are destined to be there, to enjoy and glorify God forever. This is in stark contrast to the destiny of the world - to be thrown with the devil into hell and to suffer eternal judgement.

To be of God involve these wonders - I haven't touched on **regeneration, justification, sanctification, adoption, preservation or translation to glory.** We have only scratched the surface! We can say "*we are of God*", but are not do so with pride or arrogance, but with a sense of awe and wonder, a sense of amazement that this can be true of us. Then we are to adore and praise the God of grace who has brought this about for ones such as us who deserved only hell. There should be within us a sense of being lost in wonder, love and praise for what He has done, is doing and will most gloriously do.

Coupled with that we should find a compassion, a desire, and concern as we see the world around us - loved ones even, and we recognise, realise they, with all their gifts, abilities and niceness, are under the control of the evil one and are hell bound. Because of this we will have compassion on them, we will desire and be concerned that they be delivered and it means we will pray for them, tell them as we have opportunity of the Saviour that we have and what the gospel offers them freely if they receive His amazing grace.

Incredibly the world will resent such ones with such a wonderful message and it will evidence who they are controlled by. We are still to keep on praying, to proclaim by life and word the great gospel of our God. We are to keep ourselves uncontaminated from the world and its influences, for we are not to let it squeeze us into its mould. We should ask for discernment in every area of our lives, especially in our thinking - for we are to see past the delusive ways and propaganda of the world.

I come back to the question – “*Whose side we are on?*” The amazing great truth is that we can go from the world’s side and position, to Christ’s side and Christ’s position. This is a radical work which only God can do, but **He is able do it and we can be of God.** Those of us who have changed our position, state and destination have so much to praise our great God and Saviour for.