



Overcoming the Spirit of the Antichrist

Bible verses: 1 John 4:1-6

Beloved, do not trust every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they belong to God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can know the Spirit of God: every spirit that acknowledges Jesus Christ come in the flesh belongs to God, and every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus does not belong to God. This is the spirit of the antichrist that, as you heard, is to come, but in fact is already in the world. You belong to God, children, and you have conquered them, for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They belong to the world; accordingly, their teaching belongs to the world, and the world listens to them. We belong to God, and anyone who knows God listens to us, while anyone who does not belong to God refuses to hear us. This is how we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of deceit.*

Ask everyone in the group to have their Bibles with them. Ask one person to read the passage out loud. Encourage them to have their pens and to underline things that strike them, especially later when you go through the key words and phrases. Also, encourage them to make notes.

After the reading of the passage is complete, explain the context.

Context

“The Community of the Beloved Disciple” had the Jews to reject them. They had the Romans to reject them. They moved to Greece and the pagans rejected them. They probably could have handled those three things, but things got so much more complicated when there were some from within their own community that began to break away.

The big question in the community was about Jesus Himself. We believe that Jesus was, at the same time, 100% human and 100% God. While this seems easy for us to say today, this question about Jesus being God and Jesus also being human was something that the Church had come to grips with for centuries. It is a radical statement to say that Jesus was both God and human.

Questions about who Jesus was and is were constantly met with resistance. This is why the faithful Jews of the day rejected the community. That’s why the pagans rejected the Community of the Beloved Disciple. That also seems to be the reason that there was division within the community. Some gave in to the external pressure and began to teach something different.

This is why John begins his letter by reminding them of what the community believed at the beginning. It is also why he addresses the community as “beloved.” The community has the following at the very heart of who they are:

- 1) A community that has had personal encounters with Jesus
- 2) A community that believes Jesus is the divine Son of God
- 3) A community that experiences love for one another
- 4) A community that has the Holy Spirit living in them and is guided by the Holy Spirit.

Holding on to this foundation, they can overcome every obstacle that stands in their way as individuals and as a group.

After explaining the context, ask someone to read the passage to the group again. When the reader has finished, go back through and highlight the key words and phrases found below.

Key Words and Phrases

- *Spirit*: Found in verses 1, 2, 3, and 6, the Greek word is “pneuma” (NEW-mah). It is also translated as “wind,” “breath” or “movement of air.”
- *Test*: Found in verse 1, the Greek root is “dokimohs” (doh-KEE-mohs). It means to “approve.”
- *Acknowledges*: Found in verse 2, the Greek word is “homologeı” (hoh-moh-LOA-jeje). Coming from two Greek words, “homou” meaning the “same” and “logo” meaning “word,” “homologeı” indicates a confession of faith.
- *Antichrist*: Found in verse 3, the Greek word is “antichristou” (ahn-tee-KREE-stoo). As the English indicates, it is one who is an opponent of Christ.
- *Conquered*: Found in verse 4, the Greek word is from the verb “nikan” (NEE-kahn). It means to defeat, overcome, or subdue through a fight or battle.

Now you may provide the following interpretation.

Interpretation

Christians are not materialists. The philosophy called “materialism” is not to be confused with consumerism. Materialism is the belief that only the physical world exists. Christians believe that there is a spiritual world as well and the spiritual realities have influence over the material world. This is what John is seeing. He sees that there is both a single spirit that is at work as the antichrist and many spirits at work that have some form of influence over the world in general and over each individual.

When we read “antichrist,” we often can read our own cultural narrative into that word. The spirit of the antichrist shouldn’t be seen as some character who will appear at the end of time to start the battle of Armageddon. However, the spirit of the antichrist is at work whenever the work of Jesus is diminished or trust in his power is lessened.

Remembering that “pneuma” means “breath,” “wind” or “air,” ideas get in the air and we can get swept away by the “wind” and it can cause us to doubt the person and the power of Jesus. These thoughts come from a spirit that is against Christ.

All of these different thoughts are to be discerned:

- I’m always going to sin in this way.
- I’m afraid that I’m never going to find something I’m interested in.
- Other people really don’t like hanging out with me.
- I really do just fine without praying.
- Other people need God, but I don’t.
- Things are just so awful in the world and they’ll never get better.

These are examples of thoughts, of spirits, that are against Christ, and all thoughts should be “tested” with the questions:

Do these affirm that I am a child of God?

Do they reveal the truth that I have the power of God within me?

Are these thoughts drawing me closer to my own church community?

If not, they are opposed to Christ and ultimately opposed to your well-being.

But the heart of the message in this section of the letter is in verse 4: “You belong to God, children, and you have conquered them, for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.”

The Community of the Beloved Disciple was built on two things. First, they were to have deep love for one another, the kind of love where they would “prostrate they souls” before each other. They were to know the love of God and to love each other with that same love. Second, by having the Holy Spirit live inside of them, they were to be guided by the Holy Spirit. Because they are children of God, the love of Christ was in them and the Holy Spirit was also in them. That is greater than anything else they may face.

The spirit of the antichrist is not something to be afraid of, but it is something to be on guard against. But the power is with the Christian, not the world.

Now you may lead a discussion using the following guide.

Application to Real Life

- How do you see the spirit that is against Christ at work in the world today? How do you think that the power of Christ is brought into question?
- What thoughts come across your mind that cause you to question the power of Christ in your own life?

- What needs to be in your life to remind you that the power of God that dwells in you is stronger than anything that is in the world?
- Who or what do you need to stop listening to in order to be free from the spirits that are against the power of Christ in your life?

Closing Prayer

Ask someone else to read the passage for a final time and then pray the following prayer.

God our Father, you have made us your children and your beloved. Help us to know which spirits, which movements in our hearts, lead us to living in the strength to conquer and which ones weaken us. Help us to love our Church more and help us feel the power that we have, a power living inside us that is great than any power living in the world. Amen.