

Lesson 19: “God Versus the World”

1 John 4:4-6

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1 John 4:4-6 *You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.*

John is again making stark contrasts of “black and white” with no gray between. Notice, “You are from God and have overcome *them*.” The “you” are the born-again followers of Christ. The “*them*” are the non-followers of Christ. Here is John’s stark contrast dividing people into two camps.

Then notice, “Greater is *He who is in you* than *he who is in the world*.” The “*He in you*” is the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity of God. The “*he who is in the world*” is Satan, the created devil who is the spirit of antichrist in the world. Here is John’s stark contrast between the author of “good” and the author of evil.

But note carefully that these are not equal competing forces. We are not talking about the “good side” of the force versus the “dark side” of the force, as in the popular Star Wars saga. God and Satan are hardly equal in any way. And Jesus and Satan are not created, competing brothers, as the Mormons believe. Jesus is the eternal Son of God, second person of the Trinity God-head, and Satan is a created angel who rebelled and was cast out of heaven.

In our passage, John speaks of “God Versus the World” and that is the title of my message today. It is not God versus the world of people He created, nor God versus the beautiful planet He created. Rather it is God versus the forces of wickedness that pervade our world through the evil influence of Satan and his fellow-rebellious demons. These demons are also created angels who followed Lucifer/Satan in his heavenly rebellion and were likewise cast out of heaven by God, before the creation of mankind.

Our earthy struggles appear to our natural senses to be simply a matter of differing opinions, different life styles, different backgrounds, differing political persuasions, different takes on priorities and above all personal struggles with our own will in trying to discern right from wrong. And yet God, in the Bible, tells us of an invisible spiritual dimension in which the true struggles of life are taking place, which affect the struggles that we see.

Ephesians 6:12 *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.*

This revelation is staggering in its implications. Behind all the struggles of life we see with our eyes, is an ongoing spiritual battle between the godly angels of God and the wicked demons over our very lives, and the decisions we make for good or for evil. Yes, there are angels all around, and demons too. That is why Paul goes on in his letter to the Ephesians to urge Christians to prepare for this battle with correct spiritual “armor.”

THE 6-FOLD ARMOR OF GOD (Ephesians 6:13-17)

1. TRUTH (belt) - always tell the truth and seek to find and expose the truth
2. RIGHTEOUSNESS (breastplate/bullet-proof vest) - ever strive to do what is right in God’s eyes
3. GOSPEL (boots) - share the good news of salvation through Jesus
4. FAITH (shield) - hang on tightly to your faith in Christ – it is the victory that overcomes (1 John 5:4)
5. SALVATION (helmet) - know with confidence who you are in Christ – redeemed and transformed
6. WORD of GOD (sword) - know and use your primary offensive weapon - the Holy Scriptures

Take important note that our overcoming of the forces of evil in the world is in the present-perfect tense: “(you) *have overcome them*.” This implies a past, present and future victory.

1. The past victory over evil was won at the cross of Calvary and the empty tomb of the resurrection.
2. The future victory over evil will be finally won at the end of the age when all death itself is defeated and Satan and his demons are thrown into the lake of fire
3. But the emphasis in the present-perfect tense is in the now, the present. We are here told that we are able to overcome evil and the evil one *now*.

And that present overcoming is by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit of God in each believer. As we personally trust in Jesus in our lives and specifically trust Him to take us through every trial with thanksgiving and confidence, we overcome the temptations and spiritual darts of the enemy who would bring us down in discouragement and despair, and emerge victorious, stronger than ever in our faith.

Limerick (unknown)

Our race had a hopeful beginning
But man spoiled his chances by sinning
We hope that the story will end in God's glory
But at present the other side's winning

It certainly may seem like the evil side is winning when we look at the news. But despite all appearance, God assures us that He has won, is winning and will win completely in the end. Remember John's hopeful comment in 2:8, *"the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining?"* When we get discouraged and feel the world is "going to hell in a hand basket" we should read the words of Isaiah the prophet. He lived in another time, but a time like ours when hope seemed lost and the world of evil was winning.

Isaiah 40:21-26, 28-29

Do you not know? Have you not heard?
Has it not been declared to you from the beginning?
Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?
It is He who sits above the circle of the earth,
And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers.
He stretches out the heavens like a curtain
And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in.
He it is who reduces rulers to nothing, who makes the judges of the earth meaningless.
Scarcely have they been planted, scarcely have they been sown,
Scarcely has their stock taken root in the earth, but He merely blows on them, and they wither.
And the storm carries them away like stubble.
"To whom then will you liken Me, that I would be his equal?" says the Holy One.
Lift up your eyes on high and see Who has created these stars [= angels],
The One who leads forth their host by number; He calls them all by name.
Because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power, not one of them is missing.
Do you not know? Have you not heard?
The Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth
Does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable.
He gives strength to the weary, and to him who lacks might He increases power.

The battle of God the Almighty versus the world controlled by the evil devil-angel is hardly a fair fight. God is the ever-present, Almighty One from eternity past. The devil is a created being – powerful and smart, yes, but no match for his creator. It would be like you in a fight with some small robot you created. Not only are you many times bigger and stronger, you know how the robot acts because you made it. King David, in writing what we know as the second Psalm, said this about God versus the world:

Psalm 2:1-6

Why are the nations in an uproar and the peoples devising a vain thing?
The kings of the earth take their stand
And the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying,
"Let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us!"
He who sits in the heavens laughs. The Lord scoffs at them.
Then He will speak to them in His anger and terrify them in His fury, saying,
"But as for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain."

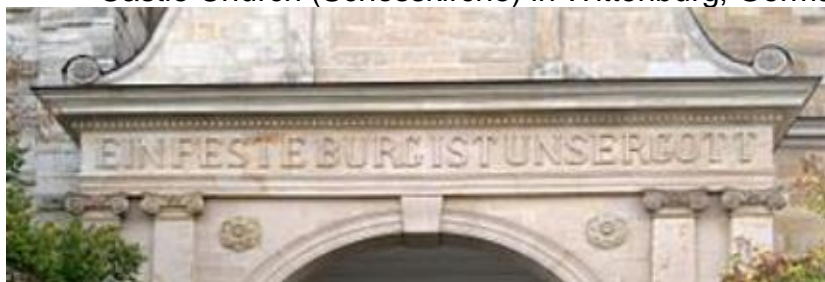
Look at 4:5-6 and see one more test of knowing the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. It is the test of whether another listens to God's point of view as you relay it to them. Their listening is not a test of their salvation, but of whether the spirit of truth has influence in them at that point. If they don't or won't listen, you can be sure the spirit of error has control of their life right then, and further sharing of God's truth is

futile. But we are always looking for open ears to hear and hearts to consider. That is where the spirit of truth has created fertile spiritual soil and where we have opportunity to bring God's influence. It was 490 years ago (1529) that Martin Luther, the founder of the Protestant Reformation, wrote what has become his most famous hymn, with both lyrics and melody, his. Though written in his native language of German, it was beautifully translated into English in 1853 by Frederick H. Hedge. The lyric powerfully speaks of "God Against the World" of Satan's evil and our victory over that evil when we trust in the power of Jesus's Spirit within us.

The title in German is "Ein Feste Burg Ist Unser Gott." It is inscribed in stone in two prominent locations. It is on the tower of Castle Church (Schlosskirche) in Wittenburg, Germany where Luther nailed his 95 theses, sparking the Protestant Reformation. And it is also inscribed on the front of the Georgenkirche in Eisenach, Germany where Johann Sebastian Bach was baptized and Martin Luther sang as a boy soprano and later preached his reforming doctrines while under papal ban.



Castle Church (Schlosskirche) in Wittenburg, Germany



Georgenkirche in Eisenach, Germany

A MIGHTY FORTRESS IS OUR GOD (Ein Feste Burg Ist Unser Gott)

Words and Lyrics by Martin Luther, c. 1529 (490 years ago)

Text translated from German to English by Frederick H. Hedge, 1853

A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing
Our helper He, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing
For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe
His craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate
On earth is not his equal

Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing
Were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God's own choosing
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He
Lord Sabaoth, His Name, from age to age the same
And He must win the battle

And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us
The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him
His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure
One little word shall fell him

That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth
The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him Who with us sideth
Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also
The body they may kill; God's truth abideth still
His kingdom is forever

Or maybe as we look at the image on the front of our bulletin today, with the earth held in the hand of the Almighty God, we might think of a more recent song, written by native American Obie Philpot and recorded by countless musical artists.

HE'S GOT THE WHOLE WORLD IN HIS HANDS

He's got the whole world in His hands, He's got the whole world in His hands
He's got the whole world in His hands, He's got the whole world in His hands

May today's Scripture by John and these great songs give us encouragement in the wake of the evil assaults upon us. May we rise with confidence to not only know that God is on our side, and decidedly we on His, but that we have overcome the forces of wickedness through the Holy Spirit within us.

From top to bottom – may we wear the helmet of salvation, the breastplate of righteousness, the belt of truth and the boots of the gospel, protected by the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Remember always: GREATER IS HE WHO IS IN YOU THAN HE WHO IS IN THE WORLD!