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A0443 -- October 24, 2004 – 1 John 4:4-6 – Antithesis of God and the World

Last week, we looked at 1 John 3:24-4:3. In 3:24 we discovered that we not only have confidence in prayer when we keep His commandments, but we also abide in Him and He in us. This means we are vitally in touch with God so that He is living through us (Gal. 2:20). He is our very life while we are abiding. It is under these conditions that the Father and the Son disclose themselves to us. This is the Doctrine of Self-Disclosure in which God reveals to the abiding Christian the framework of Scripture. A way of thinking about the universe as a reflection of the mind of God and therefore understanding that God's word applies to every area of life. Since God is the Creator then every aspect of creation, by definition, is revelatory of God. An application of this to unbelievers is that everywhere and always, unbelievers are being confronted by God. Because God is the Creator, He has necessarily spoken about every area of life and, therefore, men are responsible to learn to think about every area of life in terms of God's thinking. In short, we are to think God's thoughts after Him (Ps. 36:9). This begins with faith in Christ as the Son of God. Then we are to make Him Lord over every area of life. We are to ultimately to become Renaissance Christians. That is what can take place if we abide in Him and He in us. We also learned in v. 24 that we can know that He is abiding in us because He has given us the Holy Spirit. This is speaking of the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit which all who believe in Christ between Pentecost and the Rapture receive at the moment of belief. This ministry is permanent because Christ prayed that the Holy Spirit would come and dwell with us forever. We can quench and grieve the Holy Spirit, but we can never lose the Holy Spirit. We can only lose our effectiveness as believers when we do not rely on Him.

In 4:1-3, John excludes the naïve idea that the Holy Spirit is the only spirit in the world. This is why practicing divination, occultism, and demonism are outlawed in Scripture. These are never ways of accessing God, these are only ways of accessing demonic spirits that want to murder and destroy you mentally, spiritually, and physically. So, there are certainly other spirits in the world; they can reveal themselves through the human spirit of unbelievers and they can be accessed through occultism and divination or through those

who express a spirit of hatred or fear. But how can we detect malevolent human and demonic spirits in the world? John gives us a test to determine whether a spirit is true or false in vv. 2-3.

The test is whether the spirit **confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh**. If it makes this confession, it finds its source in the Spirit of God. If it refuses to, cannot, or simply does not make this confession, then it is not the Spirit of God. This is a malevolent spirit. Notice that the test does not have to do with one's works, but one's words. I showed you last week that when Jesus said, "you will know them by their fruits," He meant you will know them by their *words*, not their *works*. This was demonstrated by comparing Matt. 7:15-20 with Matt. 12:33-37. The test is what they are saying and teaching, not what they are doing (e.g., miracles or signs or any other empirical evidence). The test is what are they teaching. If they are not teaching sound doctrine in accordance with the rest of Scripture, then you are witnessing a malevolent spirit, what John calls the spirit of antichrist. Not the ultimate end-times person but the one who is teaching finds its source in the same spirit as the ultimate end-times person. And that ultimate source is Satan. John continues this line of thought in our section today 1 John 4:4-6.

The first observation I want to make about our text today is the first phrase of v. 4, 5, and 6. What do you notice? John mentions three distinct groups: (1) You, (2) They, and (3) We. In v. 4, John says "**You are from God**" which refers to John's readers; in v. 5 John says, "**they are from the world**" which refers to the Revisionists or antichrists that were a threat to John's readers; and in v. 6, John says, "**we are from God**" which refers to the apostles. Throughout this epistle John *often* uses these three distinct pronouns to refer to these three distinct groups.

Greek Text 4:4 *humeis ek tou theou este, teknia, kai nenikekate autous, hoti meizon estin o en humin he ho en to kosmo.*

Translation 4:4 **You are from God, little children, and you have overcome them, because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.**

John begins by addressing them as **little children**. This is the way John has been addressing them throughout the letter (cf. 1 Jn. 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21). Jesus was the first one to use this endearing address. He called His apostles **little children** in John 13:33. Now John is using it of his readers. Remember that John is the one apostle who speaks most like Jesus did. He was infatuated with Jesus and His expressions. In fact, he is the only New Testament author to ever use the phrase **little children** of his readers. It may signify that they were his spiritual children, that is, that John was instrumental in leading them to faith

in Jesus Christ as the Son of God; or more likely, that John disciplined them as Christ had disciplined His apostles. However, John designates them differently in 1 John 2:12-14. There he calls his readers **fathers** and **young men**. He called them **fathers** to emphasize their advanced knowledge of God and he called them **young men** to emphasize their vigor in defending the truth. But his general designation of his readers throughout the letter is **little children**.

Of these **little children**, he says **you are from God**. This means they are products of God's workmanship; products of God's grace. Believers are God's work of art (Eph. 2:10 New Jerusalem Bible). Not only are they recipients of God's grace in salvation, but John says here that his readers **have overcome them**. **Them** refers to the Revisionist teachers. The verb, **have overcome** is the perfect tense of *nikao* from which we get the word "nike". What this means is that John's readers have already gone to battle with some of the Revisionist teachers and were victorious. The perfect tense also indicates that the victory is having present effects in the ministry. To have victory over false teachers is always a positive step in strengthening believers by building their confidence in their leaders (elders) and in God's word. Now they will be more apt to follow God's commandments which will give them confidence in prayer and the joy of abiding fellowship. But John's readers would be naïve to think that the threat of these false spirits is over. The threat no doubt continued then as well as today.

Why did the readers **overcome** the false teachers? John says **because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world**. The one who is in them is the Holy Spirit (3:24). Therefore, it is **because** the Holy Spirit is **greater than** Satan **who is in the world** that they have this victory. Since the world is under the sway of the evil one (5:19), to have victory over the world's deceptions is to have victory over Satan himself. John knows that every victory that the truth has over evil is a direct product of the Holy Spirit. In and of ourselves we are not immune to false spirits or doctrine. Therefore, we must rely on the Holy Spirit who is in us to give us victory and keep us cleaving to the truth of God's word.

Satan is extremely powerful but he is still a creature. The Spirit of God is the Creator (Gen. 1:2). And no creature is ever greater than its Creator. In fact, no creature is even a challenge to its Creator. The most powerful creature is Satan and yet all the power he has was created by God and was graciously given to him by God. He therefore is no match for God at all. Therefore, we must rely on the Creator God Himself if we are to have victory over false spirits that have gone out into the world. Next John turns to the Revisionists/antichrists.

Greek Text 4:5 *autoi ek tou kosmou eisin, dia touto ek tou kosmou lalousin kai ho kosmos auton akouei.*

Translation 4:5 **They are from the world, for this reason they speak from the world and the world hears them.**

They are from the world. They stand in sharp contrast to you in the prior verse. They are not from God but from the world. These are the Revisionists/antichrists. They are products of the world system which is anti-God. We often think that they are neutral but they are actually very anti-God. They may be sincere individuals, but they are sincerely anti-God. We have already been taught a lot about the world earlier in this epistle. Let's review what we already know of the world. In 1 John 2:15-17 John tells us, "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Essentially John is saying that no one can serve two masters. Either you love the world or you love the Father. John does not believe in being neutral. Agnostics try to take a neutral position, but there is no neutral position. One of the leading atheists in the world, Dr. Gordon Stein, makes this cogent observation about agnostics, "An atheist is someone who does not believe in a god. A theist is someone who does believe in god. There is no middle ground. You either do or you don't."¹ So, there you have it from one of the world's leading atheists. There is no middle ground. Either you believe in God or you do not. To say you do not know or you are not sure if there is a god is identical to saying that there is no god. John agrees with Dr. Stein. You either love the world or you love God. But you cannot love God and the world at the same time because they are polar opposites. John also taught us the reason why we cannot love the world and God at the same time in 1 John 2:16, "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world." According to John, there are three subcomponents of the world system. None of these sub-components have their source or dynamic in God. Instead, they have their source or dynamic in the world. In other words, once again, you cannot be neutral on anything. This will be my constant challenge to you. To make Jesus Christ Lord over every area of life. No area of your thinking should be left untouched by the revelation of God. And nothing can truly be known apart from Christ. Paul said it this way in 1 Cor. 2:2, "For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." This does not mean that Paul was not interested in botany, boxing, or literature. What it means is that Paul made a conscious decision (he determined this) not to study any area of life without reference to Christ. In other words, Paul made a determined effort to make Jesus Christ Lord over every area of life. Finally, John's motivation for why we should not follow the world system is given in v. 17, "The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever." The world and all its sub-components are passing away. This world is going to be completely

and literally burned up (2 Peter 3:12) and God is going to create a New Heaven and New Earth where those whose will is conformed to the will of God will live forever (2 Peter 3:13). So, these false teachers are from the world and because they are from the world, they speak from the world and the world hears them.

Now, the world is a highly organized system that is headed by Satan himself. Originally the created order was under the dominion of man (Gen. 1:26-28). But at the Fall of man in Gen. 3:7 that dominion was forfeited to Satan. Now he's the "ruler of the world." When Satan tempted our Lord, do you remember what the third temptation was? Turn to Matthew 4:8-10. Notice what Jesus did not say. Jesus did not say, "You can't make that offer." That is because Satan very well could make that offer. He is the owner of all the kingdoms of the world. Additionally, Satan is given the following titles throughout the New Testament. (1) "ruler of the world" (John 12:32; 14:30; 16:11), (2) "god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4), (3) men are under the "dominion of Satan" (Acts 26:18), and (4) the "whole world lies in the Evil One" (1 John 5:19). So, it is quite clear that the Revisionists and all men born into this world system are not, I repeat, not exercising their free will and doing actions that find their ultimate source in themselves. Ultimately, behind their will is Satan who has access to the inner spirit of the unbeliever to work his will and plan through the unbelieving world (Eph. 2:1-3). Unbelievers are not standing in a neutral place with respect to God and Satan. They are fully on Satan's side and at total enmity against God. They are willingly serving the "god of this world." This is ultimately the reason why there are only two worldviews. There is not a myriad of positions. You are either from God or from the world. But there are no other alternatives. Every religious system, every philosophy of life falls into one of two categories; godly or worldly. And when I say godly, I am referring to the God of Christian theism, not some abstract concept of god. Lots of people believe in God. I read recently that 86% of Americans claim to believe in God. They may believe in some concept of God, but the issue is whether they believe in the God of Christianity. We're not interested in gods that are wholly at odds with the Christian God. And I would join the atheist in arguing against concepts of god that are not the God of Christianity. So, unbelievers speak from the world and the world is ruled by Satan. This is why we have to know Bible doctrine thoroughly. Because if we do not, we will get deceived by false spirits (1 John 4:1-3).

Next, John says that the world hears them. The world speaks one thing and it hears one thing. The world system has at base a single message. There may be some differences in the details of things (there is an answer for that from the Christian Bible), but in practice the world system speaks one message and hears one message. It cannot hear, it refuses to hear what God has said. It knows God very well through creation and conscience, but it suppresses what it knows of God and believes the lie of the world (Rom. 1:18-25). This is

because people are born into the world with a sin nature and Satan works on the sin nature and blinds them from the gospel (Eph. 2:1-3; 2 Cor. 4:4). So, unbelievers think they have free will, but in actuality, their will is enslaved to their nature, which is sinful. So, if you mean by free will, freedom to follow one's nature, then I am all for free will. For in saying so we are only asserting that the unbeliever is free to sin but not free from sin; free to follow his nature but not free from his nature. And therefore, he is only free to sin and never free to righteousness. And this goes on and on until God does something about it (Eph. 2:4; John 6:37; 44). And so, until God does something about it, the world refuses to hear God and listens only to the world system. The world system refers to worldly content and a worldly perspective where man is at the center. To express his rebellion man exalts himself as the final reference point. He says I do not need God; I am sufficient. I have the standards within myself to determine right and wrong, to legislate morality, etc. He uses logic legislatively to dictate what is and is not, what is right and what is wrong, etc. In essence, he re-plays the Adam and Eve story over and over and over in his experience. He constantly defies God's interpretation of the universe and chooses to set himself up over God and become the great experimenter so that he can decide whether God exists, what is morally right or wrong, etc. He can hear and accept the authority of the expert: the doctor, the lawyer, the accountant, the scientist, etc. ,for the authority of the expert is from the world; but he cannot hear or accept the authority of God. He refuses to hear that kind of authority because he is sinful at heart. He will bow to no other authority than an authority that is on par with the world.

What else has John taught us about the **world** in this epistle? Turn to 1 John 3:1. He says here that *the world* cannot recognize the regenerate nature of the child of God. The reason is *because* the world *did not know Him*. This the same argument John makes in his gospel 15:18ff. The *world* can no more recognize the manifestation of divine life than it recognized that divine life itself in Jesus Christ, God incarnate. We often think that if Jesus were here today on earth it would make a big difference in people's recognition of God; that more people would believe in Jesus Christ. You may have heard the saying, "Seeing is believing." Well, we already had a test case 2,000 years ago and people stared "eternal life" in the face and did not recognize Him as God incarnate. The Bible never says that "seeing is believing". Instead, it demonstrates that "seeing is not believing." An application of this is that I can honestly tell you, looking back, that if I were an unbeliever living in the time of Christ and I had to choose between losing my eyesight or my hearing, I would choose to lose my eyesight. Why? Because faith does not come by seeing but by hearing the word of God. And hardly anyone got to read the manuscripts because they were so rare. They were, therefore, read to people.

Now, jump down to 3:13. We should not be surprised if the world hates us. If a Christian can murder another Christian because of spiritual envy (case of Cain and Abel), then we should not be surprised at all if the world hates us because of spiritual envy; because they know we are approved by God and they are not. This is what has and is happening in America. America used to have a lot of Christians or Christians who at least knew the Bible. We did not hate the non-Christians when we were the majority. But now the majority has shifted. Now the majority of Americans are not Christian and they do hate us. We should not be surprised about all the lawsuits against Christian principles and therefore against Christians themselves and therefore ultimately against Christ Himself. The ACLU is against Christianity. And the basic reason for this is they have a serious case of spiritual envy. They know they are not approved by God and they know that we are approved by God and so they hate us. Finally, John mentions the **world** in 4:1, 3. There are false spirits that have gone out into the **world** and even the spirit of the antichrist is already present in the **world**.

So, you can see now why John is so concerned with the Revisionists. They are **from the world** and the world is run by Satan. Therefore, what these false teachers **speak is from Satan and the world** eats it up. They love it. It feeds their fleshly idolatry.

Now, the question here remains, “Well, if we (Christians) are from God, then why is John warning us against false teachers? If we have the Holy Spirit in us who is infinitely more powerful than Satan and his world system, then why do we have to worry about the false teachers from the world system?” The answer is quite simple. Remember what John taught in 1 John 3:9 about the Christian. The Christian has a new regenerate nature but he also has the old man, the flesh. When the Christian is abiding, the new regenerate nature is activated. And because the new regenerate nature is Christ living in him, then sin never finds its source in the regenerate nature. But we still have the flesh; and all sin that the Christian commits finds its source in our flesh; and our redemption is not complete until the flesh is removed. And so, Christians can buy into the world system.

Another question that I often hear and which John touches on here is this: “Why are there so many different doctrinal views in Christendom?” “If we all have the same Bible, then why can’t we all agree?” “Why does false theology spread in the professing Christian church?” Well, the first side of this answer is that Christendom is composed of genuine Christians and mere professing Christians. This means some of them are not genuine Christians. So, we are obviously going to have radical differences of opinion on doctrinal issues because non-Christians cannot receive the things of God, for they are foolishness to him (1 Cor. 2:14). The second side of this answer has to do with the fact that all genuine

Christians have some degree of worldliness. Christians, because they still have the flesh, can be and are often worldly (1 Cor. 3:1-3). The **world** is subtle, deceptive, and appealing. We would be naïve to think that we can't be deceived by it while we are still in the flesh. Christians often think the grass is greener on the other side. For example, many within Christianity take on a worldly perspective with reference to the gospel. The Bible teaches that the sole condition of salvation is "belief" (1 John 5:1) but the worldly perspective is that this is too easy (easy believism) and therefore cannot possibly be true. This is why so many people are attracted to the major world religions like Islam and Judaism, because they are works-oriented and sinful human nature is works-oriented. It fits their fallen nature and so they are lured into it. "Works-oriented churches thus have great attracting power for many who are outside of Christ, not to mention Christians who may also fall into this trap (**Gal. 5:4**)."ⁱⁱ Those who hold to Lordship Salvation would constitute works-oriented churches. When Christians front-load the gospel with works (e.g., you have got to stop smoking, drinking, dancing, chewing or going with the girls that do) or backload the gospel with works (e.g., a genuine believer will inevitably not commit certain sins or habitually sin or will inevitably persevere in good works), they are essentially making works a necessity of saving faith. In doing so they destroy grace (Rom. 4:1-16; **11:6**). Many Christians have destroyed grace by front-loading the gospel or back-loading the gospel and this indicates that they have bought into the worldly perspective that simply believing that Jesus is the Christ is far too easy and therefore cannot be true. But believing is not easy at all because we are asking someone to place their confidence in a Person whom they have never seen, who lived 2,000 years ago, who was Perfect and can take away sin and make you acceptable before a holy God. How is that easy? Believing is not easy at all.ⁱⁱⁱ The fact is, these other groups are adding works to belief. We might charge them with teaching an 'impossible believism.' So, Lordship Salvation and Perseverance of the Saints folks are **worldly** at this point because they attach works to saving faith either before or after salvation. John warns us not to be deceived by these false spirits of the world. Avoiding deception requires a lot of doctrinal training and a keen ear for discerning truth from error. The more doctrine you know, the easier it is to detect false doctrine. When I was applying to be your pastor-teacher, I tried to be extremely careful in answering their doctrinal questions because I know the nuances of doctrinal formulations. And I wanted to be straightforward and precise, and not speak in generalizations. And so, every word I choose to use in front of you is carefully measured.

Now that we have looked at John's readers and the Revisionists/Antichrists, let's turn to verse 6 where we have John and the apostles mentioned.

Greek Text 4:6 *hemeis ek tou theou esmen, ho ginokon ton theon akouei hemon, hos ouk estin ek tou theou ouk akouei hemon. ek toutou ginokomen to pneuma tes aletheias kai to pneuma tes planes.*

Translation 4:6 **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.**

He tips us off that he is talking about himself and the other apostles by the words, **we are from God**. This means that they themselves, as well as their oral and written teaching, are the product of God. Only an apostle of God could correctly make the authoritative declarations made here. Their doctrine came directly from God. This, of course, is directly related to some very important doctrines regarding the Scripture itself which we will look at next week.

What does John mean by **he who knows God listens to us**? If you have been following John's use of the word **know**, then you recall that he does not mean "knowing God in the sense of having a relationship with God." Instead, John means knowing God intimately (1 John 2:3-6). The Christian who has come to know God intimately has the discernment that enables him to **listen to** the apostles teaching. This infers that immature Christians, ones who have not come to know God intimately, do not listen much too apostolic teaching even though they are believers. This is confirmed by the fact that when John looks at the other side of the coin, he says **he who is not from God does not listen to us**. Notice John did not say **he who does not know God does not listen to us**, but simply **he who is not from God**. In other words, he is not saying believers listen to their teaching and unbelievers do not listen to their teaching. Instead, he is saying that believers who have come to know God intimately **listen to** their teaching and those who are out of touch with God, believers or unbelievers, do **not listen to** their teaching.

By this refers to what has just been written. John and the apostles were writing Scripture in the first century. Many people claimed to have a word from God and tried to claim apostolic authority. John and the apostles had to discern whether these claims were true or not. They had to determine whether God had spoken those words or not. They had the apostolic ability to discern this and here John gives an authoritative pronouncement of judgment on the teaching of the Revisionists. **By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error**. The ones who listened to their apostolic messages and confessed Jesus Christ come in the flesh were spirits of truth, but those who did not listen to their messages and did not confess Jesus Christ come in the flesh were spirits of error. John is pronouncing judgment on the Revisionists. Their teaching is not from God. They are false deceivers that have gone out into the world and they should be avoided. We should do the same. If we

want to know whether a spirit is of the truth or of error today, we compare their teaching, what they say, with the canon of Scripture.

So, there are four fundamental and absolutely essential doctrines all related to Scripture alluded to in this verse; (1) the Doctrine of Revelation, (2) the Doctrine of Inspiration of Scripture, (3) the Authority of Scripture, and (4) the Canon of Scripture. Since we do not have time to look at these doctrines today, we will devote next week to a study of the Bible itself.

ⁱ Bahnsen-Stein Debate “Does God Exist”

ⁱⁱ Hodges, Zane, *The Epistles of John* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 180.

ⁱⁱⁱ See Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation!* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989), pp. 115-123)

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