

1 John 4 – Part D

1 John 4:4-6, Part 1

1Jn 4:4 You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. ⁵ They are of the world. Therefore they speak *as* of the world, and the world hears them. ⁶ We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

It is always interesting to observe what men believe to be the source of their strength. For some, it may be their intellectual prowess, their financial success, their perceived leadership abilities, a certain skill set that they have, a certain position that they hold within a company, or their educational level and the number of degrees they have earned. It could be any number of things in which they find themselves trusting. Generally, what an individual considers to be their personal strength becomes a point of pride in their life, and very often a great stumbling block spiritually. Men have always trusted themselves and trusted their abilities and intelligence to provide for their personal guidance. It is a kind of devilish Achilles' heel that often defrauds men of God's truth and wisdom.

In the context of these three verses, John makes a very simple statement. He states that his readers "**are of God**" and that they "**have overcome**" the false prophets which have gone out into the world as well as the spirit of the Antichrist. However, it should be readily evident that the source of their victory is not in them, but in the person and work of the Holy Spirit within them. The word that John uses to reflect this truth is the word "**because**" in v4. John's statement to his readers is that the Holy Spirit that is in them is "**greater**" than and superior to the work of Satan and his false prophets that are "**in the world**". It is important when reading that last phrase in v4 to keep it and maintain it in its proper context. Every true believer knows with certainty that the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit is much greater than any devilish and demonic work that is present in the world, and this can easily be substantiated by many Scriptures in the New Testament. However, in the context of this passage, John is clearly speaking about the work of the Holy Spirit in helping the believer to discern the difference between one who truly speaks for God and those that John calls "**many false prophets**" in v1. If read properly, John is communicating that the work of Satan in the world is great, but John's assurance to his readers is that the work of the Holy Spirit is much greater, and therefore, they should have a great confidence and assurance regarding the work of the Holy Spirit in regards to providing them with discernment.

It should always be a concern to a committed believer when they see professing believers who are constantly being deceived by false teaching. If that is the case, then there is something that is strategically wrong and missing in their life. John assures his readers in v4 that they have "**overcome**" these false prophets and "**the spirit of the Antichrist**". The word "**overcome**" is the Greek word "*nikao*" and means to subdue, to conquer, to prevail, and to be victorious over something.¹ [John 16:33](#) says the following about Christ who has conquered the Satanic opposition that is inherent in a fallen and sinful world²,

Jn 16:33 These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

In [1 Corinthians 15:54–55,57](#), Paul speaks about overcoming death through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ.

1Co 15:54 **So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." ⁵⁵ "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?"**

The victory that is identified in this passage is not a victory that someone achieves. It is not a victory that is given to someone as a reward for their efforts. To the contrary it is a gift from God that is given to every believer. V57 says,

1Co 15:57 **But thanks *be* to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

The ability to be victorious is always and eternally found in the person of Jesus Christ. Because the believer is “**in Christ**”, it means that they have a standing that practically and eternally provides spiritual victory for their life. It has been guaranteed by God, and even though there may be conflicts, struggles, and battles along the way that a believer may lose, their ultimate victory is utterly secure through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ on their behalf. Every believer will often times be oppressed by various spiritual struggles that are very strong in their life. The enemy is a strong enemy, and he has many deceptive methods and tools which he uses to undermine the spiritual life of every believer. There will be trouble. At times believers will become anxious. As the end draws closer, there will be danger, persecution, and even martyrdom for many. Much of this is quite evident in the world already. The struggle is and always has been with the devil and his demonic forces which are at work in the world, but alongside that struggle is the great promise of God that the victory is God’s and it will prevail for the believer.³ [Romans 8:37](#) says the following and should be a great encouragement for every believer. This is Paul’s great doxology, and along with [Romans 11](#) is probably the greatest doxology in all of Scripture. It reads as follows,

Ro 8:37 **Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.**

It is no wonder that in v4 that John uses the word “**world**” on three different occasions. The “**world**” with all of its ideas, religions, perspectives, and philosophies is adamantly opposed to God and to His truth. It is opposed to His righteousness and His holiness, and most of all it is opposed to His means of salvation through the person of Jesus Christ. The world finds Christ to be an insult to their wisdom and perceived intelligence, and in their utter depravity and ignorance they have become fools. They have come to a place described in [Romans 1](#) where they worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator. That great chapter says this about the world and how it views God. It says that they are “**without excuse**”, are not willing to glorify God, are futile in their thoughts, have a darkened heart, and have “**changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man**”. It says that they have “**exchanged the truth of God for the lie**”. It says that both men and women have exchanged the natural use of their bodies for that which is against nature. It says that they do not like to retain God in their knowledge and that they have a “**debased mind**”. [Romans 1:29-32](#) is staggering in its description of individuals without Christ and of people who are under the influence of the devil,

Ro 1:29 **being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, ³⁰ backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, ³¹ undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; ³² who, knowing**

the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

There may not be a more hopeless picture of sinful man provided in any other place in all of the Word of God, yet in [1 John 4:1-6](#) God has declared that believers will be victorious over all of these demonic attributes which are so prevalent in the world. John clearly recognizes that spiritual victory is the inherent promise to all believers in being able to overcome the sinful snare and teachings that are prevalent in the world and in the church. The Bible is clear that the devil who is called “**the ruler of this world**” has been utterly defeated and has had his power and authority restricted by the God of heaven who sovereignly rules over all things. The battle has already been fought and the victory for every believer has been fully secured for them. That victory over sin, over Satan, and over ourselves has its foundations laid in the victory that has been won by Jesus Christ when He gave his life on the cross and was resurrected from the dead by the Holy Spirit. That same Spirit and His victorious work is the inheritance of every believer.

It is quite interesting that the greatest use of the word “**overcome**” or “**overcomes**” is found in the book of Revelation and especially in [Revelation 2-3](#) where John is talking to the churches. In fact, John uses the word “**overcome**” or “**overcomes**” more than any other author in the New Testament. Of the 26 uses of the words, 20 of them are used by John, so it is a word that is unique to John’s letters. What we learn from Revelation is that the final conflict which occurs for seven years is an apocalyptic conflict that occurs between the God of heaven and the ruler of this world which is Satan. It includes angels of God and demonic beings, and even though at times it may appear that Satan is actually winning the conflict, that appearance of victory is only fleeting and temporary. In the end the Lord Jesus Christ will appear with the armies of heaven and will completely and utterly destroy every vestige of the demonic forces and Satan which have been cunningly deceiving the whole world. The Antichrist, the false prophet, and Satan will all be cast into the Lake of Fire where they will burn and suffer beyond description forever and forever and forever. So the victory that Christ has won and will win is utterly secure despite any confrontations that may happen with demonic forces. Why? It is because Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords.⁴

In [1 John 4:4-6](#), John says that his readers have tested the false teachers and have found their teaching to be severely lacking. He says that the believers have been able to repudiate the false teaching concerning the person of Jesus Christ and His incarnation. However, and this is what John is actually emphasizing to them, the source and the cause of their victory over these false teachers does not lie in themselves or in their abilities or in their personal intelligence. The success that they have experienced comes directly from the work of the Holy Spirit in providing discernment to them. In v2 He is called “**the Spirit of God**” and in v6 He is called the “**spirit of truth**”. In [1 John 3:24](#) John states that the Holy Spirit “**abides in**” every believer and that God has “**given**” the Holy Spirit to the believer. So, from the very beginning, John wants his readers to be crystal clear as to the source of their strength and understanding. He has already stated to them in [1 John 2: 26-27](#) the following,

1Jn 2:26 These things I have written to you concerning those who *try to* deceive you.²⁷ But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.

What John clearly wants his readers to understand is that their protection from false teaching and their victory over its deception are directly related to the indwelling Holy Spirit which illumines their mind and gives them the grace to apply within their life what He has taught them. Every successful Christian life is completely dependent and always reliant upon the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in their life. He is the Spirit that has been given to them by Jesus Christ and His work in their life is utterly crucial to their success as a believer. [1 Corinthians 2:12-14](#) says the following,

1Co 2:12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. ¹³ These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. ¹⁴ But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.

The Holy Spirit is the member of the Trinity that illumines the believer's mind to the truths of Scripture. Please appreciate that the world does not listen to the things of God and has no interest in the truth. The lost do not have the Holy Spirit in their life and therefore they do not have the spiritual capacity to accept and to receive the truth that is from the Spirit of God. In fact, Paul declares that the truth and “**the things of the Spirit of God**” are actually “**foolishness**” to the unbeliever and that he cannot understand God's truth on his own. The word for “**foolishness**” is the Greek word “*moria*” from where the English word “*moron*” is derived. The unbeliever believes that the word of God is both absurd and silly. It has no substance to them and therefore they reject it as being foolish.

What John is doing in this passage is emphasizing to his readers that they are the actual victors over false teaching, but he wants them to understand that the source of their victory is not in them. It is not because of their intelligence or because they may have greater skills of discernment than the unbeliever. The reason that they are victorious in Christ is because they are possessed and indwelt by the Holy Spirit and He is the One who helps them to be discerning. The Holy Spirit is greater and superior to any work of Satan. There is no work in which the enemy can prevail over the Holy Spirit's work in the believer's life. Please appreciate that the world in which the believer lives is the devil's world. It is his domain and the sphere and realm of his influence and power. It is the place where he promotes his demonic philosophies, his deceptive values, and his personal agenda for defeating Christ. However, for the believer, that work of Satan has been rendered powerless by the Holy Spirit who lives within the believer. There is no greater power at work in the world than the work of the Holy Spirit. He is fully and completely carrying out and orchestrating the will of God and the will of Jesus Christ throughout the universe, and there is no power that can thwart or stop His work. As a believer yields their mind and heart to this glorious work of the Holy Spirit within them, they have the privilege of being able to experience the Holy Spirit's victory over the world, over sin, and over the devil's work in their life.⁵

For the believer, this passage should provide a great affirmation of their God given right to knowing the truth and being able to discern error when the word of God is not properly taught. Even if a believer succumbs in some way to a false teaching, that false teaching does not have the power to remove the believer from God's kingdom. Certainly it has the power to remove them at times from God's blessing on their life. God does not bless error, and He does not bless the application of false teaching in a believer's life. Believers possessing the indwelling gift of the Holy Spirit not only have a supernatural

insight into the truth, but they also have a great love for the Word of God.⁶ Often times it is a lack of insight into and a lack of love for the Word of God that reveals the true identity as to whether someone is or is not a true believer. Many people have been deceived into thinking that just because they are a member of a church or have been baptized or give benevolently to the church that they are saved. Each of those are very good and very responsible attributes within a believer's life, but none of them are guarantees of salvation. Certainly they may be the evidences of salvation in a genuine believer's life, but they are not a guarantee. Probably the most revealing evidence of genuine salvation is a person's love for the Word of God and their willingness to apply the truth from God's Word into their life.

So here is the encouragement for the believer. John says that **“you are of God”** (v4) and the evidence of that is that you have **“overcome”** the false prophets. The reason, however, is not found in us personally, but it is rooted in the work of the Holy Spirit who is greater than the devil who is in the world. If as a believer you know that your life is undergirded and strengthened daily by the truth, then that awareness should provide a source of great encouragement and assurance to your life that you are truly one of God's children. It is just another way of God confirming within your heart that you are truly saved and that you are guaranteed a home with Christ in heaven. No wonder John encourages us to **“test the spirits”** to see whether they are of God.

ENDNOTES

¹ Strong, 1252.

² Renn, 705.

³ Verbrugge, 387.

⁴ Verbrugge, 387.

⁵ Akin, 173-174.

⁶ MacArthur, 158.

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