

Epistles of John Chapter 7 the Conflict

by A.B. Simpson

The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing and overcoming the various adversaries that oppose us, including the devil, false spirits, false prophets, the world, and sin, through the power of divine grace and the victory of Jesus Christ.

Topics: "Victory in Christ", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the duality of light and darkness in the Christian life, as depicted in the Epistles of John. He explains that while believers are empowered by God and have overcome evil, they must also recognize the reality of spiritual conflict against adversaries such as the devil, false spirits, false prophets, the world, and the power of sin. Simpson warns against the subtle influences of these foes, urging believers to remain vigilant and grounded in the truth of God's Word. He reassures that through Christ, believers can achieve victory over these adversaries, as the light of God dispels darkness.

Transcript

"You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world." (1 John 4: 4.)

The picture which John has given us of divine life and love, has been so full of brightness that we have scarcely seen the shadows. The testimony with which he began his letter, that "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all," has given the keynote to the whole epistle. Yet back of the light and the love, there ever follows the shadow of evil. The very brightness of the light makes the shadow deeper and darker; and our study of His blessed message would not be complete unless we looked for a time at the shadow side, and then at the light which illumines it, and is able to "turn the very shadow of death into the morning." Or, to change the figure, back of all the notes of victory which ring through this epistle, there is the noise of battle, and the form of the conflict and the foe. Just as surely as the apostle sees the vision of his Almighty and all-victorious Lord, does he also behold the dark form of the wicked one and the legions of his hostile forces and our spiritual foes.

Six different adversaries are set forth in the First Epistle of John.

I. THE DEVIL

The devil is himself described as "that wicked one." (1 John 5: 18, 19.) "He that is begotten of God keeps himself, and that wicked one touches him not. And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in wickedness." Certainly John had no skepticism about the existence and power of the devil, and no one who knows God will ever doubt the reality of Satan. It is the men who have never had their eyes open to behold the Father, who are still blind to the reality of the wicked one. The light reveals the shadow. Infernal wickedness always follows supernatural power and love. The period of Christ's earthly ministry was coincident with the outbreak of satanic evil, and the revelation of God in a human life always brings the experience of deep and fiery temptations. It is in the heavenly places that the spirits of wickedness fight their most desperate battles against the saints of God.

John's language here points out the devil in the most emphatic manner, as the very impersonation of all that is evil. "That wicked one" indicates a personality about whose identity there can be no mistake. There he stands, patent to all eyes, the embodiment of evil, the one who has no double, the prince of darkness, preeminence above all other things as the paragon of wickedness and the enemy of God and man. This world is still his throne, and the most helpless of his subjects and victims are those who least understand their master, and are so deceived that they even doubt his existence. He has blindfolded them with delusion, and bound them with the silken fetters of self-confidence and deceit, and as the Word of God describes it, they "are taken captive by him at his will."

II. FALSE SPIRITS

Satan has many emissaries and agents whom he sends forth to carry out his behests in the hearts and lives of men. Therefore, the apostle warns his readers (1 John 4: 1), "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." There are supernatural beings inhabiting the realms of evil, and permitted to have access to the hearts and minds of men. The origin of these beings, we do not know. A distinguished writer, who has become familiar with the subject of demonology by much contact with it, has suggested that they may be the spirits of a former human race before the fall of Adam. Of their existence there is no question. The hearts of men were filled with them in the days of Christ, and their casting out was one of His chief ministries.

There are two ways in which these evil spirits control men, directly and indirectly. Sometimes they take possession of men, dominate their will, driving them to insanity and self-destruction. This is actual demon possession in spite of the consent of the victim, and is one of the most distressing calamities that can come to a human soul. Then there is the indirect influence, which they seek to gain over the wills and hearts of men, deceiving, alluring, infatuating human hearts with their subtle wiles and leading them into sin. This form of spiritual influence is universal. It controls much of the literature of our age, much of the art and culture, nearly all of our popular amusements, and much of our philosophical teaching. These bright, seductive and intelligent beings paint the vision of error and the fascination of pleasure in such attractive colors, that multitudes of human souls are beguiled like the mother of our race, and are following the course of this world, "the prince of the powers of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience."

The most portentous form of spiritual peril is in connection with the system known as Spiritualism. There is no doubt of the reality of these manifestations of their power, but they are certainly evil and of the devil. Many are drawn lightly and thoughtlessly by idle curiosity into the mysteries of Spiritualism, only to find that their souls have been scorched by its fearful sorceries, and only by the narrowest escape have they ever got back from the very brink of the lake of fire. Do not play with it even in its most simple and

insinuating forms, as it comes to you, perhaps, as a parlor amusement in the form of table rapping, or through the ministrations of some clairvoyant medium, or in the more dangerous circle of the spiritual seance. It is sorcery. It is devil worship, and it is soul destroying. So also it comes in many forms of religious fanaticism through teachers, miracle workers, divine healers, so-called, and inward visions and revelations which are presented as the voice of God, and appeal to spiritual pride as a higher revelation, and an evidence of deeper light. The simple test of all these things is the Word of God, and the practical test of righteousness and holiness. Let us be prepared for false spirits and let us not fear to try them, for if God is giving us any message or revelation, He will always give us ample time to be quite sure that it is God.

III. FALSE PROPHETS AND ANTICHRIST

Besides the spirits of evil that come unseen, there are human spirits and prophets, who are also the emissaries and agents of the wicked one. The apostle speaks of many antichrists, and particularly of some of whom he gives us the touchstone by which they may be tested. "As you have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists." (1 John 2: 18.) "Many false prophets are gone out into the world . . . every spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof you have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world." (1 John 1: 3.) The description here given fits so exactly the latest form of false religion, that one is almost forced to apply it. The very corner stone of Christian Science, so-called, is the point raised by John in this passage; namely, has Jesus Christ come in the flesh? Was the incarnation real? Did Christ have an actual human body? Is there such a thing as matter and a material body at all? All this Christian Science denies, and, of course, denies that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, thus constituting itself, by its own direct testimony, to be at least one of the antichrists of the last times. Indeed, it is a wonder how the intelligent American mind can be deceived by teachings so absurd, and so contradictory even to common sense, to say nothing of Scripture. And, indeed, it is not new. It is but a rehash of the old Sabbellian heresy of apostolic times, and the idealism taught in England in the seventeenth century by David Hume and Bishop Berkely. At the time of Hume's death, his foolish philosophy was labeled by the inscription on his tombstone:

Within this circular idea,

Vulgarly called a tomb,

Impressions and ideas rest

Which constituted Hume.

Berkely had a still more serious setting down by a plain woman in his congregation, who one day found him lying in a ditch and begging to be helped out. Looking down upon her pastor with a smile of mischievous triumph, she cried, "So, Doctor, you've got into a real ditch at last." "Oh, no, Madam," said the doctor, as he tried to spit out the mud and keep himself afloat, still manfully sticking up for his principles, "I-I-I've got a painful idea that I've fallen into a ditch." This, alas, is but one of the fanaticisms abroad today, seeking to counterfeit the truth and mislead the simple. May the Holy Ghost give us that blessing so finely described in Philippians 1: 9, 10, "That your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That you may approve things that are excellent; that you may be sincere and without offence until the day of Christ."

IV. FALSE BRETHREN

Not only are we opposed by false teachers, but by unworthy fellow workers and brethren, who often prove untrue. "They went out from us, but they were not of us: for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." (1 John 2: 19.) It would be harsh and serious for us to say that all who turned aside from the fellowship of the truth and the cause for which we are standing are false to God, and yet it is one of the trials of Christian work, that we often have to bear the painful severance of the bonds of fellow service that have held us in fellowship with former workers, and we have often to see the most sacred interests betrayed by those that should have been most true. This should not distress us, but rather make us glad and thankful that we learned before it was too late that they were not of us. Better they should withdraw if they were not true, than to continue in a false position and do more harm from within than they can do without. No work can be injured from the outside if it is right and true within the heart, and in all the constituent elements that form its inmost center.

V. THE WORLD

"This present evil world" is the next great adversary. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust thereof: but he that does the will of God abides forever." (1 John 2: 15-17.) Here the apostle presents the world as a great trinity, or rather, anti-trinity of evil as the counterfeit and rival of God. The three persons in this trinity are the lust of the flesh, representing the grosser forms of worldliness and animal indulgence; the lust of the eyes, representing the more refined and aesthetic tastes which find their gratification in earthly things; and the pride of life, expressing the loftier ambitions of the human mind for preeminence and power in the world of fashion, of commercial competition, of political prominence, of intellectual greatness, or even of ecclesiastical honor and influence. For every one of these varied forms of human desire the devil has a proffered prize.

But it is not the world that hurts us, but the love of the world, or rather, the lust of the world. It is the thing in us that wants the world that does all the harm. It is the spark within the soul which kindles the conflagration. An angel might pass through all the beauty, brilliancy, and wealth of our world, and not feel one heart throb of attraction, because he had just left the dazzling glories of heaven, and was immediately to return. It is the earth hunger within us that makes us want the earth, and if this in any measure possesses us, it excludes the love of the Father and makes the smallest earthly thing an idol and a curse. The humble housewife setting her heart upon the paltry savings of a few hundred dollars, and miserly farmer, laying up in a long life of saving his paltry treasure of a few thousands, yes, the very minister of the Gospel building up a church for his own ambition, very much as the merchant is building up a business -- these men may be just as worldly as the millionaire pursuing his larger prize, or the social queen seeking the worship of her more brilliant court of splendid admirers. It is very solemn that the last message of John, in this epistle is this: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." The idol is anything in our heart or life which takes the place of God. And this is just what the world does in the heart where it becomes the ruling motive, and thus the mammon of unrighteousness. Well may we heed the warning, and ask the Father's love to counteract the danger, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world."

VI. THE POWER OF SIN

The last and most terrible of all our foes is that subtle power which Satan injects into the soul, and which perverts every good and holy thing from a divine to a selfish and a wrong direction. It is sin. And so we read, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." "If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." (1 John 1: 8, 10.)

The reality and malignity of sin are only fully appreciated by the soul that has learned the secret of deliverance from sin. It is only holiness that can rightly measure sin, and it is only the heart that has learned to know God, that fully knows the exceeding evil and bitterness of sin. Some forms of modern philosophy and religious teaching lightly ignore it, as they do a personal God; but it is only the deeper evidence of the power of sin in binding the minds of them that believe not. It is those who are dead that know not even that they are dead. It is the poison of sin in the human soul that gives the world its power to allure, and the devil his vantage ground to assail. Passing through an infected land with disease lurking in the air, if there be a scratch upon the skin, the poison is apt to be absorbed and the blood infected. But if the skin is whole the traveler passes unscathed. Sin has left its deep wound in the human soul, and everything becomes defiled by its subtle and malignant power. It is the worst of all our foes, but thank God it is the one evil with which divine grace and power have grappled first, and grappled victoriously. For the victory which this blessed epistle reveals, is the victory over sin as well as Satan, and the world, and we go into the battle from the very beginning with the blessed assurance, "The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son cleanses us from all sin."

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