

forgiven. He makes people believe that they've lost their chance at God's love. That's the devil's greatest lie. When you sin, when you feel like there's no where you can turn, when you feel ashamed of what you've done, don't turn away. Come and hear about Jesus again. There is no shame greater than God's love. There is no sin greater than God's forgiveness. The one in you is even greater than your sin. Follow him!

I heard a pastor recently describe what shepherds were like in Jesus' day. Shepherds would take their sheep out to graze during the day. They were free to roam wherever the shepherd led them. At night, the sheep were herded into big corrals together with the sheep from other flocks. All the sheep spent the night mixed together. In the morning, the shepherds had to separate out their own sheep again. That sounds hard! It wasn't. Do you know what they would do? They would just call. The sheep knew their shepherd's voice. They heard his call and followed him. When other shepherds called, they paid no attention. No matter who else was calling, they knew their shepherd's voice.

"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish" (John 10:27-28). You know Jesus' voice! My prayer for every person here is that no matter what other voices you hear, you follow Jesus' voice. When classmates laugh or friends leave, the one who is in you is greater. When teachers challenge or opportunities are lost because of Jesus, the one who is in you is greater. *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"* (Romans 10:31). In the midst of all the voices, never forget that "the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world!"

1 John 4:1-6
Pastor Nathan Nass

Confirmation Sunday
May 7, 2017

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ²This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. ⁴You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. ⁵They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

The One Who Is in You Is Greater!

I can remember my own Confirmation day. There were 30 of us confirmed together. It was great, because with so many kids I only had to answer one question for the whole examination! But here's what wasn't so great: That Sunday was the last time I ever saw some of my confirmation classmates. I bet 10 of those 30 I never saw again. By the end of high school, if 5 of us were in church on a weekend, it was a good Sunday. Parents and grandparents: Was it any different for you? Why do you think that is? I don't think people try to reject God. But over time many people stop caring about God. They start listening to other voices instead of to Jesus and his Word.

Jesus our Good Shepherd makes us a beautiful promise: *"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish"* (John 10:27-28). That's great! The problem is that Jesus' voice isn't the only voice we hear. You are beginning to hear lots of other voices—from friends, from teachers, from movies. They challenge Jesus and his Word. As you get older, there are only going to be more voices. The more people you meet. The more experiences you have. Lots of voices! Studies show that just one out of every three young people stays in the Christian church. There's three of you. Do that math. On average, just one of you will still be here in few years. We all pray that's not the case! But there're so many voices!

God knows that. So this is what he had his disciple John tell us: *"Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."* God knows. He knows about all the sinful ideas and false beliefs—the false prophets—that fill our world. So God tells Christians to test every idea and belief that's presented to you. Don't believe everything you hear! The stakes are high. Going to heaven or hell depends on faith—or lack of faith. What you believe really matters. You've got to test everything you hear: "Is this from God or from the world?"

Remember the confirmation class when we compared the world's wisdom with God's wisdom? That was an important class for me, because you and your classmates shared the voices you've been hearing. Remember what we listed? "Evolution is true and creation is foolish." "All gods are the same." "Sex is great at any age, at any time, and with anyone as long as you use protection." "The Bible is so old it can't be true." "It doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you believe something." You've heard these voices, haven't you? You can't believe everything you hear. You've got to test every voice.

God tells us how: "*This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God.*" Do you see how it works? It's simple. Ask, "Does this idea bring me closer to Jesus or push me away from him." You've got to test everything! Try it. "My friends tell me it's fun to get drunk." Is that voice pulling me closer to Jesus or pushing me away? "I could spend every weekend playing sports." Is that voice pulling me closer to Jesus or pushing me away? "My professor says the Bible's old and I can believe whatever I want to believe." Is that voice pulling me closer to Jesus or pushing me away? Do you see how it works?

There's a special term that John uses for people or ideas which pull us away from Jesus: "Antichrist." Antichrist means, "instead of Christ." At our house, we have a beautiful basket of fruit: Pears, grapes, peaches, apples. They look so good. It's just that they are plastic! They look good on the outside, but they have nothing to offer on the inside. We could call them "antifruit." In life there are all sorts of people and ideas which try to take over your heart *instead of* Jesus. Maybe it's a boyfriend or girlfriend who pressures you. At that moment, that person is an antichrist! Maybe it's a group of friends who tempt you. Antichrist! Test everything. Watch out for anything that wants to take the place of Jesus in your heart. In the end, it's just plastic.

Do you know whose voice you need to test more than anyone else's? Your own! You are the worst false prophet in your life. You have a sinful nature inside you, so you need to take your own thoughts and your attitudes and test them with God's thoughts and God's attitudes. Just because you think it doesn't mean it's true. Just because you feel it doesn't mean it's right. In fact, chances are the thoughts and feelings you have by nature are the opposite of what God wants you to have! There are so many voices that lead us away from Jesus. They succeed far too often. The road that leads to hell is wide, and too many confirmation graduates are on it!

Have I scared you yet? I want you to know what you're up against. The danger is real. The devil is powerful. But now I want you to hear God's promise to you: "*You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.*" I love that phrase! "*The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.*" On our own, we don't have the strength to be faithful to Jesus until death. None of us do. But you're not on your own. No way! "*The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.*" Who is that? It's God! He's in you!

This makes me think of one of my favorites stories in the Bible. The king of Aram wanted to capture God's prophet Elisha. So he sent an entire army of soldiers and chariots to arrest him. When Elisha's servant saw them, he said, "*What shall we do?*" It was just this one servant and the one prophet against an entire army. They had no chance! Do you know what Elisha said? "*Don't be afraid, those who are with us are more than those who are with them.*" And Elisha prayed, "*O LORD, open his eyes so he may see.*" Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" (2 Kings 6:16-17). Wow! They weren't alone. The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world!

I once heard that put in a simple way: "God and you make a majority." It doesn't matter who is against you. You and God—really just God, right?—are stronger than anything in the world! I know there's a lot of voices, a lot of temptations, a lot of people who are against what you believe about Jesus. But "*you, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.*" God's approval is greater than the approval of your friends. God is greater than whatever short-term pleasure you might get from sin. You fill in the blank. God is greater! When you are on God's side, you have overcome!

In ancient times, they had an interesting way to decide a war. Instead of having two huge armies fight each other with terrible casualties on both sides, sometimes each army would pick one man, and the two of them would fight to the death, and the one who won would win for his entire side. The winner was called a Champion. That's what God did. God chose one man—Jesus—to come and fight the battle for you. To defeat Satan for you. To die and rise for you. To win forgiveness for you. Jesus is your Champion, and because of him, you have already won! God's forgiveness? Yours! Eternal life in heaven? Yours! You have won! You're on Jesus' side, and he won for you.

So look at your life, compare what the devil and what Jesus offer you, and ask yourself, "Who offers me more?" The devil pretends to offer you a lot. But the devil is a liar. Sin pretends to be great, but it's just like that plastic fruit. God is greater! When that classmate questions God's Word, remember, "*I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes*" (Romans 1:16). When a friend pressures you to do what you know is wrong, "*be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go*" (Joshua 1:9). When you doubt whether it's really all worth it, remember Jesus' promise, "*Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life*" (Revelation 2:10).

But what if you're not faithful? What if you sin? What if you fall away? Then remember this: The biggest way that Jesus is greater than anything in the world is this: Jesus forgives you. No matter who you are, there is going to come a moment in your life when you are ashamed because you have sinned. The devil is going to try to take advantage of that moment to push you away from God. He makes people feel like they could never be