

1 John 5:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.

Analysis

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John contrasts believers with the world. "And we know that we are of God" (kai oīdamen hoti ek tou theou esmen)—certain knowledge expressed with oīda. "We are of God" means belonging to God, born of Him, sharing His family. This isn't arrogant presumption but humble assurance based on the evidences John has provided throughout the epistle: faith in Christ, righteous living, love for believers, Spirit's witness. Christians can and should know with certainty their relationship to God.

"And the whole world lieth in wickedness" (kai ho kosmos holos en tō ponērō keitai). Kosmos is the world system opposed to God. "Lieth in" (keitai) suggests resting in or lying in, indicating settled position, not temporary state. Ponēros can mean wickedness (abstract) or the wicked one (personal—Satan). Both senses apply: the world lies in wickedness and lies in the wicked one's power. The present tense indicates ongoing condition—until Christ returns, the world remains under Satan's temporary dominion (2 Corinthians 4:4, Ephesians 2:2) and characterized by wickedness.

This stark contrast—believers are of God; the world lies in wickedness—explains the conflict between Christians and culture. We shouldn't expect worldly approval or assume cultural Christianity represents genuine faith. The world's values, priorities, and thinking oppose God. Believers must resist worldly conformity (Romans 12:2) while engaging the world evangelistically. This also provides

perspective on persecution—those lying in wickedness naturally oppose those who are of God.

Historical Context

Jewish apocalyptic literature divided humanity between children of light and children of darkness (Dead Sea Scrolls). Jesus taught about two kingdoms—His and Satan's (Matthew 12:25-26). Paul described Satan as this world's god (2 Corinthians 4:4). Early Christians understood they were aliens and pilgrims in a world opposed to God (1 Peter 2:11), expecting persecution from the world while shining as lights in darkness (Philippians 2:15).

Christendom's later development (when Christianity became culturally dominant in Europe) sometimes obscured this distinction, assuming Western culture equaled Christian civilization. However, biblical Christianity maintains clear distinction between church and world, believers and unbelievers, those of God and those lying in wickedness. Cultural Christianity without regeneration is false Christianity. The distinction remains binary—people are either of God or lying in wickedness, with no middle category.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. What evidence gives you certain knowledge that you 'are of God' rather than lying in wickedness with the world?
2. How should understanding that the whole world lies in wickedness affect your expectations regarding cultural acceptance of Christian values?
3. In what ways are you tempted to compromise with the world's wickedness, and how does this verse call you to distinctive Christian living?

Interlinear Text

οἴδαμεν	ὅτι	ἐκ	τοῦ	Θεοῦ	ἐσμεν,	καὶ	ὁ	κόσμος
And we know	that	of	G3588	God	we are	and	G3588	world
G1492	G3754	G1537		G2316	G2070	G2532		G2889
ὅλος	ἐν	τῷ	πονηρῷ	κεῖται				
the whole	in	G3588	wickedness	lieth				
G3650	G1722		G4190	G2749				

Additional Cross-References

2 Corinthians 4:4 (References God): In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

Ephesians 2:2 (Parallel theme): Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:

Galatians 1:4 (Evil): Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father:

John 12:31 (Parallel theme): Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out.

Revelation 12:9 (Evil): And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

John 16:11 (Parallel theme): Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.

1 John 5:20 (References God): And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

1 John 5:13 (References God): These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

John 14:30 (Parallel theme): Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.

James 4:4 (References God): Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

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