

## **Recognizing & Rejecting False Teachers**

### **1 John 2:18-27**

Contrary to the claims of our postmodern world that there is no such thing as absolute truth and that everyone makes up their own truth as they go along, the fact is, God has spoken and His Word is absolute truth. If we desire to enjoy fellowship with Him, we must build our relationship with Him based on His revealed truth and what the Holy Spirit teaches us through the Word of God.

Those who are in fellowship with God know, believe and abide in the truth of who Jesus is. They know, believe and abide in the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This being the case, they are able to detect a counterfeit, false teacher when they see one. Here we come to our fourth piece of evidence that, when present in our life, affirms that we are in fellowship with God. Those in fellowship with God are able to recognize and reject false teachers.

John's purpose for writing is to teach us how we might enjoy fellowship with God's people and with God Himself and that we might thereby experience complete joy.

John's message is that to enjoy fellowship with God, we need to be like Him. If we desire to be in fellowship with a holy God, we need to be holy. The last couple weeks, we have been looking at the evidence John presents in 1 John 2:3-27 that, when present in us, demonstrates we are enjoying fellowship with our holy God.

#### **Four evidences that we are in fellowship with God:**

##### **Evidence Exhibit #1-Obedience to God's commands in general (1 John 2:3-6)**

##### **Evidence Exhibit #2-Obedience to God's command to love one another (1 John 2:7-11)**

##### **Evidence Exhibit #3-Not loving the world (1 John 2:15-17)**

Last week, we considered how love for God and love for the world are mutually exclusive. If a person loves the world and the things in it such as desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the arrogance produced by material possessions, then the love of the Father is not in this person. One can't love the world and God at the same time. Those who love the world aren't in fellowship with Him. Therefore, not loving the world demonstrates that a person is in fellowship with God. As we considered last week, "Why would people who will abide forever want to cling to that which is passing away?" The world and all that is in it is passing away and not an appropriate object of our devotion and commitment as God's children.

#### **Evidence Exhibit #4- Recognizing and rejecting false teachers (1 John 2:18-27)**

Those in fellowship with God will detect false teachers and reject what they have to say. In the first message I preached on 1<sup>st</sup> John, we observed from 1 John 5:20 that God is the true God and to enjoy fellowship with a God who is truth, we must believe the truth revealed about Him through Jesus Christ. If a person is wrong about what he believes about Jesus, he will also be wrong in what he believes about God. A person can't believe a lie about Jesus and at the same time be in fellowship with God. Today, we will look at this point in more depth.

#### **We know that it is the last hour because of all of the antichrists who have come on the scene (2:18)**

“The” Antichrist’s coming is yet future. From passages like Daniel 9:26-27; Daniel 11:31-32; 2 Thessalonians 2; and Revelation 13, we learn about a specific individual and what this man will do to oppose and try to usurp Christ during the time of the Tribulation. While the time of “the” Antichrist’s coming is still uncertain and his doing the things prophesied about him hasn’t yet occurred, even now many individuals have come as his forerunners. These John also describes using the antichrist label. There were many antichrists present in John’s day and there are also many present in our own day who share many of the characteristics that will be evident in the Antichrist when he comes.

While there are several passages which talk about the one we know as “the” Antichrist, John is the only writer of Scripture to use the label “antichrist” to describe a person. John uses this term in four places in his epistles and in each place we are helped to know what an antichrist looks like so that we will know one when we see one. The Antichrist and the many antichrists we observe today have this in common—they distort the truth and are deceptive in their tactics, they deny Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God, and they work to both oppose and usurp Him. Following are the four places John uses the label “antichrist” when writing about them:

1 John 2:18- “Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour.”

1 John 2:22- “Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son.”

1 John 4:3- “...but 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.”

2 John 7- “Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.”

The presence of many antichrists demonstrates the character of the time we are living in—it is the last hour. What did John mean by the last hour? John actually refers to “a last hour.” The definite article does not appear in the Greek.

John is referring to the kind of time his readers were living in then and the kind of time we continue to live in today. Just as the appearance of “the” Antichrist will be a sign of the approaching end, even now, the presence of the many antichrists who have come as his forerunners marks the time in which we are living as a last hour kind of time.

Some have criticized John for talking about the last hour having been upon him and his readers since he wrote so many years ago. Sure, well over 1900 years have passed since 1 John was written, but remember that God is not bound by time—He is above and outside of it. God is not bound to man’s calendars or time frames. As Peter informs us, to God a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like a day. The only reason for the Lord’s perceived slowness in coming back is that He is patient, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to eternal life (2 Peter 3:8-9).

The fact that well over 1900 years have passed does not change the fact that John was living in a last hour kind of time marked by the presence of many adversaries of Christ—the same kind of time we are living in today. The only difference between John and his readers and us today is that “the” last hour is closer now than then. No matter when “the” last hour actually comes upon us, we need to live in constant readiness and in recognition of the fact that this is a last hour kind of time. We need to be warned and careful of the dangers of the many antichrists who have come in the last hour kind of time in which we are living to deceive people, to oppose Christ, and try to usurp Him.

### **Three characteristics of “antichrists” which help us to know one when we see one:**

#### **1. Those who oppose Christ abandon the fellowship of believers, demonstrating they never belonged in the first place (2:19)**

It is the tactic of false teachers to try to blend in and look like they belong to the body of Christ. Their desire is to lead others down the path of rejection and denial of Christ. Though the antichrists in John’s day had at one time or another associated with the fellowship of believers and appeared to be a part of it, they voluntarily withdrew themselves. They turned their backs on God’s people and left. John writes that their departure shows that they never actually belonged to the Christian community. They were never genuine Christians to begin with. They are unbelievers. If they really belonged to the fellowship of believers, they would have stayed, but the fact they departed proves they never really belonged. As Bruce writes, “Continuance is the test of reality.”

Not all who claim to be a part of us or look like us really are a part of us as the fellowship of believers. People who look like they are a part of us, but are not, will demonstrate their “true colors” when they one day defect. This is not talking about a person leaving a local church to attend another one.

This is talking about leaving the fellowship of believers altogether to join the opposition. Again, such a departure indicates a person never really belonged in the first place.

The departure of the antichrists could be compared to Judas' departure from the true disciples. His departure from the group to join the opposition and betray Christ reflects he never really belonged to the group, that he never believed in Jesus.

## **2. Those who oppose Jesus deny that He is Messiah (2:20-25)**

### **In contrast to the opposition, believers have the Holy Spirit and know the truth (20-21)**

The way John begins verse 20, "but you" demonstrates he believes his readers are different—that they really belong to the fellowship of believers. Addressing his readers directly, he gives them assuring words. John writes about them that they have the anointing from the Holy One. The anointing refers to the Holy Spirit who was given to believers at their regeneration.

The Holy Spirit indwells believers. He works to establish us in our faith and help us know and understand God's truth as it is presented to us in His Word; thus guarding us from lies and enabling us to persevere in the truth. Because of the Holy Spirit's ongoing ministry within us, we are well equipped. We know the truth about who Jesus is. By the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we know the absolute reality and 100% reliability of the truths God's Word communicates about our Lord. Through the Spirit's ministry, we don't confuse a lie with the truth—we are able to perceive the difference between God's truth and what false teachers try to tell us is true about Jesus when it isn't.

John isn't writing his readers because they don't have the truth, but to confirm the truth they already know about Jesus and their faith in Him and to support them in their adherence to it. John writes to affirm his readers' understanding of the character of truth—"no lie comes from truth." The two cannot coexist. With the assurance that they know the truth, John's readers can be certain that there is no falsehood intermingled in what they have heard from the beginning and believed about Jesus as no lie is of the truth.

### **Those of the opposition deny the Son and thereby deny the Father as well (2:22-23)**

In verse 22, John poses the question, "Who is the liar?" and then proceeds to give the identifying mark of the antichrist. Here is John's guide for detecting false teachers. The liar is the person who is characterized by his denial of the fact that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God. A person characterized by this denial is "the" Antichrist—that is he is identified with this individual because what he does in opposing Christ foreshadows what "the" Antichrist will do.

The person who denies Jesus is the Christ not only denies the Son, but the Father as well. A person cannot be committed to the Father and deny His Son. To have fellowship with one, you have to have fellowship with both as the two go together.

Those who are the children of God and who are living in fellowship with Him will agree with the Father about the Son- that He is Messiah, the Son of God. As John makes clear in verse 23, “whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.” When someone acknowledges or confesses the Son (he or she is in agreement with the presentation of Scripture and the testimony of the Father as to the true nature of Christ), that person has the Father also.

John’s point here that those who have fellowship with the Father will agree with Him about His Son and that those who reject the Son also reject the Father is consistent with what he writes in the gospel of John.

John 6:45- “It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from Him comes to me.”

John 8:13-19- “The Pharisees challenged him, ‘Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid.’ Jesus answered, ‘Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. But if I do judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid. I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me.’ Then they asked him, ‘Where is your father?’ ‘You do not know me or my Father,’ Jesus replied. ‘If you knew me, you would know my Father also.’”

**Application for today:** One of the most important and fundamental ways to detect a false teacher is to put him under the doctrinal test concerning his view of the Person of Christ. Every false teacher errs when it comes to his conclusions about who Christ is. They all deny Christ in one way or another. Those who claim to worship the one true God, but deny Jesus Christ as the Divine Son, do not in fact worship the true God.

**In contrast to the opposition, when we abide in the truth we have heard from the beginning about Christ, we affirm our fellowship with God and that we are recipients of the promise of eternal life (24-25)**

John again shifts from the false teachers back to his readers. He appeals to them to let the message they have heard from the beginning, the message of Christ, abide in them. When what we have heard concerning Christ from the beginning abides in us as believers, we allow it to soak in, to be at home within us, to have free course in our lives, to operate within and control us. John is essentially appealing for believers to continue believing and abiding in the gospel truth that already abides in them and has since the day they trusted in Christ.

As the Word of God abides in us in this way, it serves to affirm that we are also abiding in the Father and the Son. When the gospel of Christ abides in us, it serves to demonstrate that we are in fellowship with God and that we are recipients of the promise of eternal life.

We need to be clear here. We don't abide so we can receive eternal life—that's works salvation and that is not what John is teaching here. We abide in the message we have heard from the beginning because we have eternal life and it is our abiding that provides assurance that we are the recipients this promise made to those who trust in Jesus as Savior.

We often think of our trusting in Christ as an event that occurred on a certain date. While there was a definite point in time when we crossed over from death to life, from darkness to light, from being enemies of God to being His children the moment we trusted Christ, our faith is not a onetime event, but an abiding faith. We entered into a relationship with God the moment we trusted Christ and we continue to trust Him and abide in the gospel truth we heard from the beginning. We will never depart from it, but will continue to abide in it. Again, this abiding is the demonstration of our fellowship with God and the fact that we are recipients of the promise of eternal life.

### **3. Those of the opposition try to deceive the faithful (2:26)**

The antichrists were unrelentingly trying to undermine the readers' conviction that Jesus is the Christ and that eternal life is found in Him. False teachers will do all they can to lead us astray as it relates to our understanding of who Christ is.

#### **Believers don't need someone to come along and tell us the truth about who Jesus is as the Holy Spirit faithfully teaches us this truth (2:27)**

While the antichrists are trying to lead John's readers astray, they aren't having the success they would like because of the anointing the church has received, that is the Holy Spirit. John's readers don't need human teachers to tell them or help them detect the truth about who Christ is, that He is the Messiah and Son of God, because they already have been taught this truth by the Holy Spirit who continues to guide them and help them discern what is true.

Some misunderstand John to teach here that human teachers are not needed at all. They think that believers no longer need teachers to instruct and guide them in gaining a deeper understanding of the Christian faith and life. John is not denying the importance of gifted teachers for the church. John is not contradicting what Paul said (See Ephesians 4:11-12). In fact, John, in this very letter, is taking on the role of teacher. What John is saying is that his readers don't need human teachers to tell them what the truth concerning Jesus is. They aren't dependent on human wisdom or professors of theology for learning the truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. They have received the anointing, that is the Holy Spirit, and He faithfully teaches John's readers the truth about Jesus.

The Holy Spirit is real, He is true (1 John 5:6; John 15:26; 16:17). He is not counterfeit like the false teachers/antichrists. Therefore, we can trust that the teaching He imparts to us is also true, dependable, and conforming to the truth of God's Word. We can confidently remain in the truth received by the anointing of the Spirit. John's readers don't need someone to give them the truth about Christ; they instead need to remain in the truth taught them by the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

John Stott has well said in summary of this section- "The only safeguard against lies is to have abiding within us both the Word that we heard from the beginning and the anointing that we received from Him. It is by these old possessions, not by new teachings or teachers, that we shall abide in the truth."

Years ago Dr. H.A. Ironside related that one day while on the streets of Los Angeles he came across a street preacher vigorously preaching to a considerable audience around him. As he listened he soon recognized that the speaker was expounding the heretical views of a well-known cult. As he surveyed the audience he noticed a man on the other side of the crowd attentively following the preaching. Occasionally the trace of a smile appeared on his face. Dr. Ironside felt sorry for the man being misled by the cult-preacher. When the preacher was finished Dr. Ironside made his way to the man he had watched and struck up a conversation with him. He asked, "And what did you think of what the preacher said?" The man's reply was, "Well, he sure did tell us, didn't he?" "Yes, he surely did," Dr. Ironside agreed, "but what did you think of what he preached?" With a smile, the man replied, "I sure couldn't answer him, but all the while he was preaching there was something inside me saying, 'It's a lie, it's a lie, it's a lie.'" The Holy Spirit, in this Christian brother, taught him so that he was able to detect a lie. This man didn't need someone to teach him how to detect what is true as the Holy Spirit was already doing that in him (See D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistles of John*, pgs. 122-123).

### **Application for today:**

**God has given us every resource we need in His Word and in the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit to face the danger of false teachers, we only need to abide in these**

Abide in the Word. Read it. Memorize it. Study it. Meditate on it. Absorb it into the fabric of your life. Trust the Spirit of God, the Source of truth, to guide you in the understanding of God's Word, in the understanding of who Jesus is, in understanding what is needed to be in fellowship with God.