

Sunday, October 2, 2022

Warning

(Series: Life, Light and Love; a series on 1 John)
(Message Four)
(1 John 2:18-27)

Scripture:

¹⁸Dear 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. ¹⁹They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us. ²⁰But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. ²¹I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. ²²Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist—denying the Father and the Son. ²³No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also. ²⁴As for you, see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. ²⁵And this is what he promised us—eternal life. ²⁶I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. ²⁷As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him. (1 John 2:18-27)

Message:

Countries and companies come and go. Ever wonder why the Church is still around?

Church attendance is down significantly across the country following Covid. In fact, there isn't a single county in the United States where church attendance has increased in the last thirty years.

Friedrich Nietzsche once said, "Before the turn of the 20th century, the church will be wiped from the face of the earth." (It's still here!) Nietzsche wasn't saying it to be mean; he was just drawing a logical conclusion to the evidence he saw of an institution that appeared to be barely making it. (Ironically, the

place where Nietzsche made that prophecy is now the world headquarters of an International Bible Society.)

Over the last 2000 years, the church has had its ups and downs. Recent surveys indicate that only two out of three people who attended worship prior to Covid have returned to worshipping back in a church building.

John says there is a natural attrition that will always take place in the church - "*They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us.*" (2:19) John is saying the phenomenon we've been talking about (losing our first love, just going through the motions, becoming lukewarm, believing that knowing about God is sufficient, not being obedient, focusing on building sandcastles, etc.) impacts our walk with God, our commitment to the body of Christ, and our witness to the world.

John knows this is not because "believers" "*do not know the truth*" (2:17) but because they are not following (obeying) the truth and staying close to the Light. That is, they show by their living that "*they were never a part of us.*"

John is not teaching anything new here. John is simply reminding and warning believers (his Church) about the consequences of Truth they already know. In a healthy church, John says, it is by our love for one another that we remind each other, encourage each other, and make sure we stay together.

In this context, John wants to specifically warn us about the *antichrist*. (2:18) In the Greek, the word *antichrist* can mean two things: it can mean "*against* Christ" or it can mean, "*in the place of* Christ."

Initially that doesn't sound like a significant difference, but it really is. Those "*against*" Christ are *openly* and clearly *opposed* to him; they're easy to recognize. Those who seek to put themselves "*in the place*" of Christ are more *subtly* and therefore more dangerously *opposed*.

John is referring here to those *antichrists* which are a forerunner to The Antichrist who will precede the end of time (although John may not have made that distinction). Consider some of the **marks** or characteristics of the *antichrist* John notes for us.

- 1) They do not possess the **anointing** of the Holy Spirit (2:20)
- 2) They **deny** that **Jesus** is the Christ (2:22)
- 3) They come from within the **church** (not from the pagan world) (2:19)
- 4) They make their appearance at the last **hour** (2:18)
- 5) They do not behave **rightly** (2:19)
- 6) They offer **new** (and exciting) truth (2:22)

These marks of the antichrist undermine and attack believers and the Church. Those blatantly opposed to Christ and those who more subtly undermine the power that rightfully belongs to Christ both require a significant warning:

NOTE THE NECESSITY OF SUPERNATURAL ANOINTING (2:20, 27)

John writes, “But you have an anointing (i.e., **power) from the Holy One.” (2:20)**

True believers have been anointed by the Holy Spirit, so they have knowledge of their redemption, they have experienced fellowship with God, and they can spiritually discern truth from error.

In Reformed theology, we believe in the **priesthood** of all believers; that is, we believe each (every) member/believer has been given the Holy Spirit.

While Catholic theology places leadership exclusively into the hands of ordained clergy, the Reformed tradition places it in the office of believer (and elder). That means you don’t need a seminary education to hear God speak, to know his will and to follow his leading, or discern right from wrong, and truth from error.

In another book (John 10:1-4), John quotes Jesus: *“I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.”*

The people of God can sense the invasion of error, worldly elements, and lies because they have been anointed by the Spirit – if we listen to him, we can remain faithful. Those who have been anointed by the Spirit (all true believers) are called to stand for the Truth. As long as we **obey** His voice and walk in the Light, we’ll remain **faithful**.

NOTE THE NECESSITY OF A CHRISTOLOGICAL EXCLUSIVITY (2:22-23)

John is underscoring the central issue in all Christian heresy: They deny that Jesus is the Christ; that is, they deny the **presence of God in Jesus.**

The central issue of Christianity is the issue of Christology: *Who do you say **Jesus** is?* If one, in any way, denies Jesus is the Christ, God’s one and only eternal Son, they have a false understanding of who he is. If one denies Jesus’ deity, since the Father and Son are one, they now have a false understanding of God and deny the Father.

If you want to know if the person who knocks on your door handing out pamphlets is a Christian, ask them what they think about Jesus Christ. If they say he was a great teacher, a wonderful prophet, or a god (small “g”); or even a son of God, you’re looking at a genuine fake. If they say he is God incarnate in the flesh, fully human and fully divine, then you’re looking at a brother or sister in Christ.

All Christian **heresy** finds its root in **Christology**. John understood. John addresses the heresy of Docetic Gnosticism which claimed that God couldn’t unite with flesh or suffer and die on a cross; they said God entered Jesus at his baptism but left before his crucifixion. John says, *“That’s a lie. Don’t believe it! God emptied himself into human form in Jesus Christ.”* Jesus Christ is fully human and fully God.

Malcolm Mudridge, in “Jesus Rediscovered” writes: *“Beneath the church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, a silver star marks the alleged precise spot where Christ was born. A stone slab is supposed to mark the exact site of the manger wherein he lay. The Holy Land is littered with such shrines divided up...between the Greeks, Armenians, and Coptics—often causing rancor among them. Most of the shrines are doubtless fraudulent; some in dubious taste, and none to my liking, yet, one may note as the visitors come and go—ranging from the devout to the innately curious, that almost every face somehow lights up a little bit.”*

That’s because people innately know it is about Jesus. It will always be about Jesus; the Father himself has said so! He is the only one who offers hope.

The source of Truth about Jesus is found in what Jesus and the Bible teach. John says, “Accept, trust and be content with what has already been revealed and taught.”

Paul writes, *“Continue in what you have learned and become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.” (1 Timothy 3:15)* God says what has already been revealed is sufficient for our life and our salvation.

At the same time, people are often attracted to promises of “new” and “deeper” truth. It is part of our nature. People like to be “in on the secret,” and “to know what is really going on.” We like to be privy to “special information” and have the “inside scoop” not available to the general public. We like the thought that we are following “advanced” teaching. People can be incredibly gullible.

John urges believers to “remain in what you have heard from the beginning, and which they know in their heart of hearts to be true. He cautions them to be especially careful about embracing “new” truth. John reminds us it is about remaining **faithful** to Jesus – God in the flesh.

NOTE THE NECESSITY OF DOCTRINAL INTEGRITY (2:24)

In 1 John 2:24-29, John stresses the **probity** (correctness, integrity, etc.) of doctrine and remaining true to the Gospel.

Note the emphasis on “**remaining**” – a reference to uninterrupted fellowship.

--“*Remain in the Gospel*” (24) – as you have heard it from the beginning.

--“*Remain in the Father and Son*” (24) – i.e., stay focused on the Father and Son.

-- “*Remain in the Spirit*” (27) and you’ll have a life teacher and unerring Guide.

This *remaining* is not a **passive** activity; it requires strenuous effort, due diligence, **discipline**, and staying close to the Father and Son.

You’ve heard people say, “*Doctrine isn’t important. It only divides. What’s important is love—not doctrine!*” That may sound good, but it is not true.

Sadly, many (most?) people find talking about doctrine is about as exciting as discussing the merits of blue socks over black socks. They associate doctrine with dullness and find it dry and boring. They believe doctrine just courts controversy and generates more heat than light. But *doctrine* is just another word for *Truth*. Truth should never be considered dull or dry.

You’ve heard people say, “Christians are too narrow-minded. They are too intolerant. They are too opinionated.” And they are right! The Truth is always narrow-minded; Truth is always **intolerant**. Truth is always **nonnegotiable**. Truth is never flexible. Two plus two isn’t four today and five tomorrow (in spite of inflation ☺).

God has given us the “Truth.” He doesn’t want us to be creative with it; he wants us to be faithful and obedient to it. It doesn’t change.

John says real Christians **remain** in the Truth of God as revealed in Jesus Christ and the **Scripture** and taught by the apostles and those who are true Christians abide in the Truth. This Truth, John reminds us, is the Truth they were taught from the beginning by the apostles; the Truth which has been confirmed in them through the inward working of the Holy Spirit; the Truth which does not change. The source of Truth is found in Jesus and what he and the Bible teach.

Periodically, we say the **Apostles Creed. It is a summary of the Truth of the Christian faith that we have been taught and believe.**

Let us profess the Apostle’s Creed together:

I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth...

*And in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered
under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he
descended into hell;
on the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from there
he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting. Amen."*

While some people say it without ever thinking about the words, it testifies to the verities of the Christian faith. Some people don't even know what they say they believe.

We have leaders who have been called out by their church for misrepresenting their own faith commitments, people who call themselves Christians but can't name the four Gospels, and people who claim to follow Jesus but live just like the world lives. Many who call themselves Christians have sold out to the world. They have discovered it is far easier to go along than to live counter-culturally.

A true follower of Jesus believes and accepts the teachings of Scripture. If we start wavering, if we let the light grow dim, our love will dim as well. Love tells the Truth. If the Church starts to get fuzzy on doctrine, the Church will be in real trouble.

After speaking at Harvard, Billy Graham was accused of trying to take the church back to the 18th century. Graham: *"No, I'm trying to take it back to the first century."*

A friend was speaking about doing evangelism. A woman asked, *"Are you saying you're right and they're wrong?"* He said, "Yes, ma'am, I am." She uttered an expletive and walked out. That may happen.

David Clark and Norman Giesler, in *Apologetics in the New Age: A Christian Critique of Pantheism* (Baker) talk about the cartoon "Shoe." Skylar, one of the main characters, is taking a philosophy exam. There is one question on the exam: *"What is the meaning of Life?"* Skylar is scratching his head and saying, *"I sure hope it's multiple choice!"*

Truth is not multiple **choice**. The Truth doesn't **change**. We must be faithful to the unchanging **Truth** of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. **As long as we follow "the Way, the Truth and the Life," we will remain faithful.**

NOTE THE NECESSITY OF ESCHATOLOGICAL EXPECTANCY (2:25)

In laymen's terms, this is the "**Power of Hope.**"

One of the most devastating things a person can do to a hospital patient is tell them they are going to die: "*You have a week to live.*" They'll die in a week. But if you say, "We can fight this. The doctors, nurses and family will work with you, and we can lick this." It can happen!

The difference is the power of hope. With it, people persevere. Without they give up! It is a tragedy (it should be a crime) to rob people of the power of hope.

On his 75th birthday, Winston Churchill was having his picture taken. The photographer said, "Mr. Churchill, it was such a privilege to photograph you on your 75th birthday; I hope I'm around to photograph you on your 100th birthday." Churchill looked at him, took the cigar out of his mouth: "Well, son, you look pretty healthy, I don't see any reason why you wouldn't be."

Hope allows things to still go on in the midst of heartache and adversity.

People have been shocked and outraged by recent political decisions, by what is being taught in some schools and universities, by books in the libraries, by song lyrics, by some of the things passing for "art."

Some have suggested it reflects the sinful nature of our culture. Perhaps, but even more significantly, it reflects the hopeless nature of our society and world. If you knew you were going to die and had no hope of a future, how would you sing? How would you celebrate? How would you paint? How would you live?

In addition to our faith, in addition to our love, the one thing the Scripture says we can offer one other and the world is "hope." ("*And now these three remain, faith, hope and love...*" **1 Corinthians 13:13**). In addition to our faith and love, we ought to be reclaiming hope. Only followers of Jesus have hope and can offer it to others.

Jesus is coming back. We have the "hope" (guarantee) of eternal life. When we stop talking about Christ's return, when we no longer speak of resurrections, when we forget about forgiveness and new beginnings and fresh starts, we are in deep trouble. As long as we **hope** in Jesus, we can remain **faithful**.

SUMMARY

John has been telling us about what it means to be a true follower of Jesus; what it means to walk in the Light, to walk in love.

First, John said, Christians must know and obey God's **commands**. This first test is moral in nature. That is, being a Christian must impact our lifestyle (that is, how we **live**).

Second, John said, true Christians love **God** and **others**. This second test is communal in nature. That is, being a Christian must impact our **relationships**.

Third, in our text this morning, John says, Christians must remain in God's **Truth**. This final test is doctrinal in nature. That is, this third test has to **doing** with what we believe.

These tests John gives us are still useful for us today to distinguish between those who are truly following Jesus and those who are not. We can hold ourselves up to these marks.

If someone says, "The Church is old fashioned. Its Truth is antiquated. It went out with my grandfather's Oldsmobile; it's going to die," you can smile and tell them they're nuts. You can share these reasons we've talked about, you can tell them your pastor said so, and/or you can live your life as a testament to the Truth (or all three).

When followers of Jesus and His church remain close to Jesus, his world will be **transformed**, and we can **rejoice** in our eternal life.

Prayer:

Father, we long to live in the Light as you are in the light. We long to walk in love as you are love. We long to know and live out the Truth as you are the Truth.

Father, we thank you for anointing us by your Spirit. We thank you that Jesus Christ is not only Your Son but is our Savior from sin. We thank you for your promise that if we remain in you, we remain in the Truth and we have eternal life. Thank you that Jesus is the hope of the world.

Father, give us the strength to acknowledge Jesus in all we do. May we be known for living in Truth and offering Hope to this world.

In Jesus' name – our life, light, and love – we pray. Amen.