

Sermon 21, The Invincible Anointing, 1 John 2:26-28

Proposition: You have the Word and Spirit of truth who teach you to abide in Christ, and antichrists cannot overcome you.

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Introduction

Brothers and sisters, Reformed Christianity is known to outsiders as grim, inflexible, and unbending. While stuffed bears may have been called “Teddy” bears after President Theodore Roosevelt, no one would market a line of “Calvin” bears to be cute and cuddly. Yet to insiders like us, Reformed Christianity is known for its insistence on the perfect coherence of God’s word with God’s Spirit. Some branches of the church effectively privilege Spirit over word, and insist that whatever the Spirit is saying now through the living voice of prophets or church leaders is more important than whatever He said in the past through the written word. Other branches of the church effectively privilege God’s written word (and certainly this is a danger in our circles) to the point where the Spirit is essentially unnecessary because the Word is the be-all end-all of the Christian faith. But at its best (and yes, I know it’s not fair to compare Reformed Christianity at its best with other churches at their worst), the Reformed faith has always insisted that the Word and Spirit are equally ultimate and mutually reinforcing. As I hope to show you this morning, the “dynamic duo” of the Word and Spirit of God are omnipotent in the Christian life; if you have them at work within you, antichrists cannot overcome you.

I. The Threat to Abiding: False-Teaching Antichrists, v. 26

Though he started talking about antichrists ten verses ago, only now does John specifically state that he is speaking about what Peter calls “false teachers” and Paul calls “wolves.” These are people who claim to be proclaiming Christian truth but actually are proclaiming error and retailing falsehood. They are a threat to abiding in Christ.

How? By deceiving us. They tell us falsehoods; when we believe those falsehoods, then we stop abiding in Christ. We become victims of heresy, souls slain by lies.

II. The Anointing which Empowers Abiding, v. 27

So John is telling us the truth, for it is the only antidote to the lie. He is proclaiming the true word of God which alone can undeceive us. Yet again, he does so under the name “anointing.”

A. His Anointing Is His Word and Spirit, v. 27a with v. 24

What is this anointing? It is the thing that protects us from the false teachers and empowers us to abide in Christ. That's what it does. But what is it? We already said two weeks ago that it is the Holy Spirit; with Him poured upon us like anointing oil, we are protected and taught. But the Spirit is not the only facet of this anointing. The word is the other facet. How do we know that? Because of the parallel statements: the word we've heard abides in us (v. 24) and the anointing we've received abides in us (v. 27). Both of these things abide in us because they are two different facets of the same thing. In short, they are God's word and God's Spirit.

The word and Spirit protect us from false teachers. They deliver us from deception and thus empower us to abide in Christ.

B. His Word and Spirit Teach You About Everything, v. 27b

How do they deliver from deception? By teaching the truth. John makes a very puzzling statement here: He says that the anointing we've received from Jesus teaches us about all things, to the point where we have no need for anyone to teach us.

If you think of this anointing as being only the Holy Spirit, you get very confused at this point. How could John say they don't need a teacher when he is teaching them? He is teaching them that they don't need a teacher. That doesn't make any sense. But if we realize how he's teaching them, we see a way forward. He is teaching them with the word of God. By writing this letter, he is deploying God's word to come into their lives and teach them. They were being told lies by antichrists (that is, by false teachers). Does John simply say "Trust the Holy Spirit and you'll figure out the truth?" Some Christian sects and movements have said so. The Quakers, for instance, called on the "inner light" to reveal more truth than the external word. But John is not preaching mysticism; rather, he tells us that the anointing which is the Spirit (yes!) but also the word is what teaches us.

In other words, the reason you don't need anyone to teach you more about God is because you have a complete set of primary sources. Anything that anyone can possibly teach you about God is going to be something drawn from His word and Spirit. You have the sources, in other words.

Part of peer-reviewing an essay is to methodically look up every reference and see if the source cited says what the author claims it says. For some of these academic writings with fifteen or twenty citations per page, that can get difficult. But there is simply no substitute for it as you seek to determine whether the author is honest and telling the truth. Of course, the greatest difficulty in looking up all the citations comes from amassing all those sources. If you're really going to check an article thoroughly, of course, you would need to check not only the article's sources but also the sources used by those sources, and so on until you have resolved everything back into primary sources. It's an overwhelming task, which is why none of us ever bother to look up the vast majority of references we spot in our daily reading. If we read that Aristotle or Marx said such and such, we just believe it and move on.

But brothers and sisters, when John calls the word and Spirit the anointing that teaches us everything, what is he saying? He is saying nothing less than that you have the complete set of resources needed to fact-check every claim anyone could ever make about God. False teachers are going to come and they are going to try to deceive you. They are going to try to make you think something that's not true. But what do you have to stand against them with? You have an anointing. This anointing is the Holy Spirit in your heart and the word of God in your hand. With the combined forces of these two things, you are never at a loss, no matter how sophisticated the forces arrayed against you.

Just as Ken Ham encourages you to challenge the claims of evolutionists with the question "Were you there?", so John is encouraging Christians to challenge the claims of false teachers with "Where does it say that?" Show me in the word! And brothers and sisters, your anointing empowers you to say "I don't care who said it or what his theological pedigree was. I don't care where he went to school, where he pastored, or how expensively credentialed he was. All I care about is where he got his statements about Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior. Are they in the book or not? Does the Spirit help me understand the book to say what that teacher claims, or does He tell me no?"

That doesn't mean that, say, what I'm doing right now is worthless. Yes, I'm teaching you. But I'm only helping you understand the content you already have in the anointing. If I or anyone else starts teaching things that aren't in that anointing, then leave. If I teach you content that's not found in the word and Spirit, I'm leading you astray. But so long as what I'm saying comes from the anointing, is found in the word and confirmed by the Spirit, taught by the Spirit and confirmed by the word, then you are on safe ground.

This, then, is what it means to say that the anointing teaches you about all things. You can't learn without the Spirit. The Spirit illuminates your mind, bends your will, changes your heart so that you can understand what's written in the word. A prayerless reading of Scripture is a worthless reading of Scripture. But a non-reading Christian, someone who never bothers to look something up in the book, cannot claim to have the Spirit, for the simple reason that the Spirit tells us to abide in Christ and to abide in the word we heard from the beginning.

C. His Word and Spirit Command You to Abide, v. 27c

That's right: If you boil down the teaching of the word and the Spirit to one thing, it's this: Be tenacious. Hang on to Jesus Christ. Cling to Him by faith. Believe Him no matter what. Word and Spirit alike join and point to Jesus and say "That's the one you should trust. Believe in Him, and He will give you eternal life."

The anointing is true, unlike the false teachers. It is a combination of a written text and an internal Spirit. Together, the team of Word and Spirit is invincible, unstoppable, and unbeatable. With them in you, you can and must abide in Christ. Don't walk away from the faith. Don't forget what you've heard. Don't fail to love one another. Rather, abide.

III. The Outcome of Abiding: Confidence at His Coming, v. 28

And if you do, what will happen? You will have confidence at His coming. You won't be like Adam and Eve, hiding yourself from Yahweh God among the trees of the garden. If your life has been shaped by the anointing of God's word and God's Spirit, then you will look like Jesus Christ! You will have no need to hide from Him in shame; rather, you will know that you are accepted and forgiven in Him. His Spirit will have already told you that you are His child and that you have nothing to fear and nothing of which to be ashamed, for your shame has been removed in Christ.

So little children, stay in the word. Stay in the Spirit. And when Jesus returns, it will be the best thing that's ever happened to you. If you've gone with the false teachers and their false lies, then you will be mortified to stand in the presence of the Christ about whom you were so wrong. But if you stick to what the word says, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, you will not be ashamed. Word and Spirit: by these things Jesus has anointed us, with them He teaches us, and He will bring us, formed by them, safely to His presence unashamed. Amen.