

1 John 2:18-27 “Abiding in Him: The Truth and the Lie” February 13, 2011

Read 1 John 2

Over the next three weeks we will look at three aspects of “Abiding in Christ.”

Tonight we look at “the truth and the lie.”

Next week it will be “righteousness and sin.”

Then it will be “love and hate.”

We usually think in terms of the twin themes of “faith and practice.”

Our own Shorter Catechism states that the Scriptures principally teach

“what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.”

And certainly Paul’s epistles support this sort of twofold approach.

Paul regularly divides his epistles into two parts:

the indicative – what we are to believe;

and the imperative – what we are to do.

So I want to start by saying that a twofold way of putting it
has good warrant from scripture!

But that is not the *only* way of talking about the Christian life!

John provides us with a tripartite model:

what we are to believe (and know)

what we are to do (and practice)

and what we are to *love* (have communion with)

I want to start this evening where we left off last week,

as John pointed out that knowledge, practice, and communion
can be idolatrous.

That’s why John warns us in 2:16 not to love the world or the things in the world.

And he particularly warns us against three things:

the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes and the pride of life.

Introduction: The World Is Passing Away

¹⁷And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Notice how the desires (the lusts) of the world are contrasted with the will of God.

The world with its lusts are passing away –

just like the darkness is passing away in verse 8.

The word “desire” is used 38 times in the NT – 35 times it has a negative sense!

In our day the word “desire” has become far more positive.

We prefer a “world-affirming” view that says that our desires are good!

But John says that the world is passing away along with its desires.

The things your body hankers for are passing away.

What do you want?

Clothing? Sex? Food? Money? Beer?

These things are passing away.

And the things you want to see – the things you want to know –
they too are passing away.

These *things* are not what you were created for!

You were created for *God*.

Created *things* are not evil.

Remember, John does not condemn created things.

John condemns your desires.

If you can use created things without desiring them, then good!

That’s what they are for!

They are for your use – as you love God and desire *him*.

And that is why your pride in your stuff and status is equally vain.

Because stuff and status is also passing away.

You must abstain from these desires.

Abiding in Christ requires total abstinence from these desires.

Now, I want you to see the difference between John’s approach to sin
and what we’ve so often heard.

The saying when I was growing up was,

“I don’t drink, smoke, or chew,
or go with girls that do.”

In that paradigm it was the *things* that were evil.

And so therefore, the key to holiness was abstaining from “evil things.”

John says that the “things” that we need to abstain from are these lusts –
these disoriented loves that prefer the creature to the Creator.

And also pay attention to the contrast:

whoever *does the will of God* abides forever.

The will of God is contrasted with the lusts of the world.

If your life is oriented around the desires of the world,
then you will not seek to do the will of God!

But if you life is oriented around the will of God,
then you will not love the desires of the world!

There is a way in which the first section of John's epistle (1:1-2:6) focused on faith:
"what is true about God and Christ and therefore to be believed" (Yarbrough 139)

And then 2:7-17 focused on practice:

"what God in Christ commands and is therefore to be done" (Yarbrough 139).

Now John turns in 2:18-3:8 to the theme of communion –

as Yarbrough puts it, "God's presence in the heart and life of his people."

The key word in this section of John's epistle is the word "abide" or "remain."

The word is used 24 times in 1 John –
eight times in these 20 verses.

The word "abide" (meno) is rooted in John 15 –
where Jesus said "I am the vine; you are the branches."

I would suggest that the conjunction of agape (love)
and abiding (meno) is the way that John translates the concept of steadfast love –
the Hebrew word "*hesed*" which could be translated,
covenant loyalty, steadfast love, covenant faithfulness.

A person displays *hesed* when he remains true to his word.

A person displays *hesed* when he demonstrates his faithfulness in adversity.

A person displays *hesed* when he endures anything and everything
for the sake of one with whom he abides.

But John starts in verses 18-19 by talking about those who have lacked *hesed* –
those who have displayed a lack of love and steadfastness
because they do not abide in Him.

1. The Antichrists: False Teachers in the Last Hour (v18-19)

¹⁸Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. ¹⁹They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

The word "antichrist" has taken on a life of its own!

It is often said that the book of Revelation talks about the Antichrist,
and he is frequently matched with Paul's "Man of Lawlessness"
from Thessalonians.

In fact, the word 'antichrist' only occurs in 1 and 2 John.

This passage is the central passage for understanding "antichrist."

The other two references, in 1 John 4:3 and 2 John 7
build off of this one.

Of course, what makes it so easy to speculate
is that John says that "you have heard that antichrist is coming."

Therefore, it is clear that John's hearers already know something about antichrist.
But what *is* antichrist?

Here in 1 John 2 he says that the antichrist
is "he who denies the Father and the Son."

And he says that "antichrists" have gone out (and will go out)
from the church,
because it is the last hour.

So the first thing we need to see is that the antichrist
is intimately associated with the last hour.
And the reason why John knows that the last hour has come
is because antichrists have come.
Even in the first century, antichrists were already present.

He explains later in 1 John 4:3 that "every spirit that does not confess Jesus
is not from God.
This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming
and now is in the world already."

So the *spirit* of the antichrist is already in the world.
But John goes a step further:

In 2 John 7 he warns against
"those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh.
Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist."

Please note "Such a one is *the* antichrist."

The historian Eusebius relates a story about John that may or may not be true –
but it illustrates what John is talking about.

The apostle was going into the public bath at Ephesus when he saw Cerinthus,
one of the early Gnostics who denied that Jesus Christ came in the flesh:
Immediately he fled from the bath, saying,
'Let's get out of here lest the place fall in:
Cerinthus, the enemy of truth is inside!'

Certainly the teaching that John describes here as constituting "the antichrist"
matches exactly with what we know of Cerinthus's teaching,
since Cerinthus taught that "Christ" came upon Jesus at his baptism at the Jordan.

And so John would say that all the notorious heretics were "antichrists":
whether ancient heretics, like Gnostics, Arians, or Manicheans,
the medieval versions, Muslims, Cathars, or Albigensians,

or their modern counterparts, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and Moonies.

It's noteworthy that some medieval Catholics
argued that the Pope had become the antichrist
because the corruption of the medieval papacy
functionally denied that Jesus was the Christ.

But you can see from John's description,
that the antichrist is fundamentally a false religious teacher.

Attempts to identify the antichrist as a political ruler
certainly cannot be based on *John's* description of the antichrist –
and of course, no one else besides John *talks* about the antichrist!

John is concerned about false teachers who are in the church,
but who then go out of the church.

If these religious teachers gain political power,
then obviously there will be a political dimension to them:
think of Brigham Young (Mormons), Sun Myung Moon (Unificationists),
and of course, Muhammad (Islam).

And it would not at all be a stretch to see a number of modern "secularists"
in the same light:
think of Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud,
all of whom denied that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh.

Or as John puts it in verse 22,
"Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?
This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son."

So, yes, the antichrist is certainly connected with the last hour –
and the way that you know that the last hour has come
(indeed, that it began in the days of the apostles!)
is because ever since the days of the apostles
there have been false teachers who have denied that Jesus is the Christ.

It appears that John expects that there will be an antichrist at the end of history,
but his primary focus is warning against the ones in his day.

The second point that we need to see in verses 18-19
is that these false teachers went out from us "but they were not of us."

John is concerned to show the difference between "us" and "them."
And so while one central difference is their *false doctrine* –
another difference is their *failure to abide*.

After all, “if they had been of us, they would have continued with us” (v19).

This is the word “meno” – to abide.

Those who depart from the church –

and particularly those who depart in the context of false doctrine –

denying that Jesus is the Christ –

they go out, “that it might become plain that they all are not of us.”

John is not making a blanket statement that

“everyone who leaves this church is going to hell.”

Rather, he is making the more limited – but nonetheless powerful – statement,

that those who do not abide with us –

“with us” in the broader sense of Christian orthodoxy –

go out because they were not “of us” in the first place.

So when you hear about someone converting from Christianity to Islam,

or when you hear about someone converting from Christianity to agnosticism,

John is saying, “if had been of us, they would have continued with us.”

Note that John does not make any comment about “them” beyond that.

He does not address the question of whether they can be “reconverted.”

Obviously, if they repent of their unbelief, then they can be restored “to us.”

But that is not his concern here.

His concern here is to say, first, they left because they weren’t really “of us.”

And second, he is concerned to reassure his hearers –

because their confidence, their assurance, has wavered.

“But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.”

God’s purpose in their apostasy was to demonstrate the difference

between the apostate and the elect.

The apostate apostatize – they depart.

The elect remain – they abide.

But while John is beginning his section on the abiding/remaining in Christ,

in these verses he emphasizes the knowing/believing aspect of that abiding.

And you see that in verses 20-21

2. The Anointing: You Know the Truth (v20-21)

²⁰*But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. ²¹I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth.*

The implication here is clear:

if they had been anointed by the Holy One, then they also would have knowledge.
They have believed the lie, because they are not of the truth!

I write to you because you *know* the truth.

Do you see the importance of truth?

The false teachers were claiming all sorts of “inspiration”
but John says that there is no “secret” inspiration.
“You all have knowledge.”

Don’t think that there is some “secret knowledge” that you are missing!
If you have been anointed by the Holy One, then you have knowledge.
You know the truth!

Sure, there are always difficult, challenging questions that puzzle us.
But 90% of Christian teaching is unanimously agreed upon by *all* Christians!

That’s why I could go to an interdenominational assembly like XIF
and preach forthrightly from the book of Acts,
and the whole congregation – Baptist, Lutheran, Pentecostal, etc.,
could affirm probably everything that I said!

And on the points that *John* is talking about,
that Jesus is the Christ – that he has come in the flesh –
and the basic Trinitarian relationship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit –
the whole Christian church is utterly unanimous!

We all have knowledge?
And why do we agree on this?
Because we all have been anointed by the Holy One!

And the anointing of the Holy One has a profound cognitive effect.
Indeed, the one who has this anointing will *know* and *understand*
the basic facts and doctrines of the Christian faith.

The Holy Spirit opens the eyes of all believers to see that Jesus is the Christ –
and opens our lips to confess the Son – and thus the Father as well!

3. The Antichrist: He Who Denies the Father and the Son (v22-23)

²²*Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.* ²³*No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.*

In verses 22-23, John turns back to the antichrist.

We’ve already looked at this at some length,
so I’ll just point out here that “No one who denies the Son has the Father.”

John warns against counterfeit versions of the Christian message.

John emphatically rejects the idea that these false teachers
can have some “other way” to the Father except through Jesus.

John recorded Jesus’ saying in his gospel,
“I am the way, the truth, and the life,
no one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)

You cannot have the Father without the Son.

Why?

Because God is one!

Thus, “Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.”

The one who denies the Son denies the Father.

Jesus is the *only* mediator between God and man –
because he *alone* is true God and true man.

But before we move on,

I want you to think about this interesting way of saying it:
“whoever confesses the Son *has* the Father also.”

What does it mean to “have” the Father (and the Son)?

We might expect “knows” the Father,
or “sees” the Father,
but “has” the Father?

We come back to our theme of “Abiding.”

If you confess the Son,
if you walk in the light,
if you abide in Him,
then you *have* the Father.

Jesus said, “If anyone loves me,
he will keep my word, and my Father will love him,
and we will come to him and make our home with him.” (John 14:23)

This is stunning!

If you love Jesus, you will keep his word,
and the Father will love you,
and the Father and the Son will come to you
and make their home with you.

This is eternal life – to have the living God abiding with you!

4. The Abiding Truth: What You Heard from the Beginning (v24-25)

²⁴*Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father.* ²⁵*And this is the promise that he made to us – eternal life.*

Well, if John was concerned in verse 20 to emphasize the anointing of the Holy One, then he is concerned in verse 24 to emphasize the *word* – and particularly the word *preached*.

“Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you.”

This is the second imperative in John’s epistle:

Let it abide

Let what abide?

The Word.

Of course, when John talks about the word preached,

he is not referring merely to sound waves that buzzed in your ear!

Certainly John *is* referring to the message!

But the message is

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard,
which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon
and have touched with our hands,
concerning the word of life – the life was made manifest,
and we have seen it, and testify to it,
and proclaim to you the eternal life,
which was with the Father” (1 John 1:1-2)

The message that you heard is nothing less than Jesus himself –
not just information “about” him –
but the incarnate Son of God – the Word made flesh!

The reference to “eternal life” in 1:2
now comes back in 2:25.

The promise that he made to us – “eternal life” –
is the same “eternal life” which was with the Father
and was made manifest to us.

There is no eternal life apart from Jesus.

The Son has life in himself (John 5) – and he may give life to whom he will.

But the life that gives us is not some extraneous “substance”

[Here is eternal life, and I will give it to you!]

that life that he gives us *is his own life!*

As Jesus put it in John 17:2,

“You have given the Son authority over all flesh,
to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.

And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God,
and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

Do you see how important knowledge is to John?
Eternal life is to know God and Jesus.
Not just ‘know about’ them –
but to *know* you, the only true God,
and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

I’m learning a lot about R. J. Breckinridge.
I know so much about him that I almost feel like I know him!

But I don’t.

If all you know is historical information about Jesus,
then you don’t *know* Jesus.

John summarizes this whole section in verses 26-27:

5. The Abiding Anointing That Teaches You (v26-27)

²⁶*I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you.* ²⁷*But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him.*

Again – you *know* the truth.

You have received the anointing from Jesus – his promised Holy Spirit –
and therefore you don’t need anyone to teach you.

One of the central teachings of Cerinthus, Valentinus, and the other Gnostics
was that there was a special “knowledge” or “gnosis”
that was only available to the few –
those who had been specially illumined.

John says that this is bunk.

He’s not saying that everyone will have an equal *amount* of knowledge –
but that there is no “special” anointing, no secret knowledge,
that comes only to the “special” Christian.

I may know more about the scriptures than *most* of you –
but I do not claim that there is anything special about my knowledge.
I cannot teach you anything beyond that which is the common possession
of all believers – the anointing that you have from him!

What is trustworthy is not *me* – but the anointing that you have received.
And that anointing has taught you to abide in him.

Therefore,
Abide in him.