

SURE OF THE TRUTH

Leader pages on pp. 110-113

THE POINT:
TRUTH IS FOUND IN
JESUS ALONE.

1 JOHN 2:18-29

¹⁸ Children, it is the last hour. And as you have heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. By this we know that it is the last hour. ¹⁹ They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. However, they went out so that it might be made clear that none of them belongs to us. ²⁰ But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. ²¹ I have not written to you because you don't know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie comes from the truth.

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MEMORY VERSE

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²² Who is the liar, if not the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This one is the antichrist: the one who denies the Father and the Son. **No one who denies the Son has the Father; he who confesses the Son has the Father as well.** ²⁴ What you have heard from the beginning is to remain in you. If what you have heard from the beginning remains in you, then you will remain in the Son and in the Father. ²⁵ And this is the promise that he himself made to us: eternal life. ²⁶ I have written these things to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.

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²⁷ As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you don't need anyone to teach you. Instead, his anointing teaches you about all things and is true and is not a lie; just as it has taught you, remain in him. ²⁸ So now, little children, remain in him so that when he appears we may have confidence and not be ashamed before him at his coming. ²⁹ If you know that he is righteous, you know this as well: Everyone who does what is right has been born of him.

KEYWORDS

The last hour (2:18)—Between Jesus' first and second comings, often considered a time of conflict between God and Satan.

Antichrist (2:18)—A title used in only four verses in the Bible (1 John 2:18,22; 4:3; 2 John 7) meaning persons who oppose Christ.

Anointing (2:20)—An action, process, or state of being of having the Holy Spirit live in a person and impacting his or her life.

Holy One (2:20)—A title referring to God as separate, distinct; this applies to all three Persons of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Spirit).



WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF TRUTH IN OUR LIVES?

It seems our culture has become increasingly less adept at determining what is true and what is not. In a culture of 24-hour news feed and online opinions masquerading as fact, it should be no surprise that many Americans believe ideas that are nothing more than conspiracy theories. In fact, half of Americans believe at least one conspiracy theory. For example:

- 40 percent believe the FDA is withholding natural cures for cancer.
- 27 percent believe America is hiding aliens in Area 51.
- 23 percent believe 9/11 was an inside job.
- 19 percent believe the government is using chemicals to control the population.⁵

Typically, conspiracy theories start with some fringe group and then are picked up by some credible source. It's hard to know what to believe. The struggle for truth is real. However, there is good news! Absolute truth does exist, and it is found in Jesus Christ.

The Anchor that Keeps Us

// 1 John 2:18-21

Since the coming of Jesus, believers have known they were living in the “last days.” The expression “last hour” (v.18) is only found here in the New Testament and is synonymous with the idea of the last days. The phrase points to the imminent return of Christ and the final judgment. For believers, this is a day of joyful expectation (2 Pet. 3:12-13). However, for the unbeliever, this will be a day of judgment and punishment (Rom. 2:5).

John highlighted the reality of the last hour. He said, the “antichrist is coming” (v. 18). In the future, this man will set himself up to oppose God. In the meantime, “many antichrists have come” (v. 18). While the last days will involve someone who will oppose Christ, multiple antichrists also exist, who even now are working in opposition to the kingdom of God.

False teaching is prevalent in our contemporary culture. For example, one highly popular pop

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artist is quoted as saying, “What I’ve discovered is that in art, as in music, there’s a lot of truth—and then there’s a lie. The artist is essentially creating his work to make this lie a truth, but he slides it in amongst all the others. The tiny little lie is the moment I live for, my moment.”⁶ Here’s a hugely popular singer whose goal is to convince her listeners to accept a lie! In the same manner, this is the moment all false teachers live for: a deception that mixes a lie with the truth.

HOW DOES KNOWING THE TRUTH CHANGE OUR PERSPECTIVE ABOUT LIFE?

How are we to identify these false teachers? We know them by their unwavering commitment to falsehood and their departure from the church. In John’s day, these peddlers of deception gave evidence of their real character by leaving the church. “They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us” (v. 19). These false teachers were nothing more than wolves in sheep’s clothing.

Thankfully, true believers “have an anointing from the Holy One, and ... know the truth” (v. 20). This anointing is the Holy Spirit’s presence and indwelling, which all believers receive at the moment of their conversion. “You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him” (Rom. 8:9). The Holy Spirit is the ultimate Teacher, guiding us into all the truth (John 16:13); therefore, He teaches and leads us as we study the Bible. As we rely on the Spirit of God, we are protected against error.

The Antidote to Anti-Christ

// 1 John 2:22-26

John also declared that every antichrist is a “liar.” The fact that they are anti—opposed to Christ—means they deny the reality of who Jesus is. The antichrist lies because he denies that Jesus is the Christ. And whoever denies the divinity of Jesus—that He is the Christ, the anointed One from God—ultimately denies the Father as well. A person cannot believe whatever he or she wants about God’s Son and have a relationship with the Father.



DIGGING DEEPER COUNTERFEIT CHRISTIANITY

Most Christian colleges offer classes that equip believers in knowing what they believe and why they believe. They teach Christians in the truths of Scripture by equipping them with thoughtful and practical responses for whenever the core issues of their faith and life are challenged. The name of this study is Apologetics. Apologetics comes from the Greek word *apologia* from 1 Peter 3:15, which states we should always be prepared to give a reason for our belief. Christian apologetics, therefore, involves making a case (or defense) for the truth of the Christian faith. This isn’t just the job of philosophers, pastors, and speakers though. As Christians, we are all called to defend our faith. We need to be so familiar with the Bible that we can spot false doctrine and teachers.

How are you equipping yourself to define the gospel?

WHAT ARE SOME TRUTHS ABOUT JESUS THAT ARE DIFFICULT FOR MANY NON-CHRISTIANS TO BELIEVE?

The false teachers of John's day blatantly denied the truth of who Christ is. The particular falsehood that was being taught was called Gnosticism. Gnosticism had two primary doctrinal errors.

- **Docetism.** Docetic is from the Greek word *dokeo*, which means “seems” or “appears.” The Gnostics believed the body is evil. Therefore, God, who is Spirit, could not take on flesh. Thus, according to them, Jesus did not come in the flesh, it only appeared that He did. This is a blatant denial of the incarnation.
- **Cerinthianism.** Cerinthus was a contemporary of John. He taught that Jesus had a real human body, but that He was not the Christ until the Spirit came upon Him at His baptism. However, the Spirit left Jesus before the crucifixion, since the Spirit could not be associated with suffering.

About twenty years after John wrote this epistle, Polycarp (a disciple of John) sent a letter to the Christians in Philippi. He wrote:

“For everyone who does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is an ‘anti-Christ’; and whosoever does not confess the testimony of the Cross is of the devil: and whosoever perverts the oracles of the Lord for his own lusts, and says that there is neither resurrection, nor judgment—this man is the first-born of Satan.”⁷

For believers, though, John offered encouragement. “What you have heard from the beginning is to remain in you. If what you have heard from the beginning remains in you then you will remain in the Son and in the Father” (v. 24).

What they had heard from the beginning was the preaching of the gospel.

The heart of the gospel message is that all who know the Father through the saving work of Christ His Son have the promise of eternal life. Eternal life is a gift from God to every person who believes and trusts in Christ.

The Anointing in Us // 1 John 2:27-29

The proof of true salvation is not just believing the right thing. Conforming to the doctrine is not enough. Our belief should translate into right living. We are to pursue righteousness in light of the return of Christ. John mentioned the return of Christ to motivate his readers to righteous living. Our attitude toward Christ's second coming says a lot about our spiritual state.

HOW DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT HELP US DISCERN TRUTH?

John urged his readers to “remain in Him” (v. 27). We are to hold to the Christ of Scripture, while living for the glory of God “so that when Jesus appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before him at his coming” (v. 28). John mentioned two of the benefits of remaining in Christ:



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- **Confident.** This could also be translated boldness. God desires that all will be prepared to meet Him and will have solid confidence in His return.
- **Unashamed.** Sadly, many people do not have confidence; instead they carry the weight of guilt and shame. However, God desires that His people would remain in Him and thus have no reason to be ashamed when Jesus returns.

Because many people—including Christians—don't see the return of Christ on the horizon, they may not see a need to change their routines or live with His return in mind. For the Christian, however, the right belief—including the belief that Christ is returning—must be consistently supported by the right ethic.

We look to Christ—the Righteous One—and in response to the new birth He offers, we seek to live right in His power. “If you know that he is righteous, you know this as well: Everyone who does what is right has been born of him” (v. 29). That practical righteousness is proof of genuine salvation. We can be sure of our salvation, and we can be sure of the truth—the truth that

is found through a personal relationship with Jesus. A personal relationship with Christ ensures a life of joy, hope, and purpose beyond anything a mere religion can bring.

DID YOU KNOW?

“The Great Debaters” was a movie based on Wiley College’s Debate Team. Wiley was a small liberal arts college in Marshall, Texas. Melvin B. Tolson started this team. Henrietta Bell Wells was the only woman on the team. She was a freshman at the time. Wiley began debating and defeating other black colleges, sometimes three times its size. In 1930 the team broke new ground and debated with an all-white school, the University of Michigan Law School. Wiley won. In 1935, Wiley became the national champion when they won against the University of Southern California. Debater James Farmer Jr. went on to found the Congress of Racial Equality and become a leader in the Civil Rights Movement.⁸

Which is the most difficult to debate, the truth or a lie? Explain your answer.

LIVE IT

How can we live according to God’s unchanging truths?

It goes without saying that the struggle for truth is real. The news is flooded with conspiracy theories; some of these theories have cost lives. Remember the January 6 capitol riots which were born out of various beliefs about the November 2020 election. Many people didn't know what the truth was then and still don't know now. However, there is good news! Absolute truth does exist, and it's found in Jesus Christ.

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- **Seek the truth.** Is there an area of your life where you tend to bend the truth a bit or allow the world to inform you? Ask God to search your heart and show you these areas.
- **Dive deeper into truth.** If there's a specific biblical truth causing you confusion in your walk with the Lord, spend time researching that specific topic. Also, ask the Lord to reveal His truth to you.
- **Speak the truth.** It's likely you'll enter into a conversation, even with believers, where biblical truths are challenged by the world's standards. Ask God to help you speak firmly, yet gently, in truth.

DAILY READINGS

1. YES PEOPLE // MATTHEW 24:24

Some people find it easy and very comfortable to be around those who will not tell the truth. We call them “yes people.” They easily accept and spread “urban legends” themselves, which is simply information that is not true. Instead of telling the truth, these people give us words we want to hear. This can be very dangerous. The power of these deceptions is real and can cause us to stumble. Therefore, we must refuse to listen and not have ears itching to hear falsehoods. Today’s verse states there will arise false teachers, and they will tell us what we want to hear. Let this one important thing be your guide: what they have to say will not be based on Scripture. **We must be very discerning and make sure what is said is based on words from the Bible.**

2. REAL OR FAKE? // ACTS 20:28-30

Students have a popular saying today. They use the word “fake” for anyone pretending to be someone they are not. They believe some people present themselves in a false light, just like the people in these verses. Paul warned the leaders of the church about false people who worshiped within their midst but had bad intentions. These people will distort the truth and attempt to draw believers away from it. Paul admonished believers to stand on the Word. **This is true for us today. We must be people of the Book who know it, and who live and stand by it.**

3. THE COUNTERFEIT // I KINGS 18:21

To work in the Treasury Department of the United States workers must undergo much training. One of their many functions is to protect the integrity of the financial system in our country. Investigating counterfeit money is one of those duties. They are trained to know all of the intricate details about all monies. They become so familiar with the real thing that it’s easy for them to spot a fake. This is a good

description for the insight of the prophet Elijah as he dealt with false prophets on Mt. Carmel. He exposed them as worshipers of Baal.

In the same way, we must know the Word, so we can identify false doctrine instantly.

4. NOT MY WILL, YOUR WILL // I JOHN 5:14

It was so rewarding when my siblings and I were teenagers. We were able to freely ask our parents for certain things, and we knew we would receive what we asked for. We had confidence in their answer because what we asked for was based on our parents’ values and their expectations. When kids are doing their chores, maintaining good grades, and being respectful, they are living out their parents’ values. We were those kind of kids, so our parents wanted to reward us. How great to know that our heavenly Father is the same. When we’re in the will of God, our wants are His wants. That makes it easy to ask when we are praying according to the will and the Word of God.

Our Father wants to reward us when we are obedient to His Word.

5. MORE THAN CONQUERORS // ROMANS 8:37

Confidence makes us feel great. There’s nothing like being filled with assurance. For example, when we were students, nothing compared to the way we felt when we diligently studied. Then with confidence, we passed our exams. But the opposite also rang true. If we were not studious, more than likely we did not do well on the exam. We felt dread rather than confidence. As Christians, the Bible gives us the assurance that we are “more than conquerors.” And just like a student who diligently studies, we exude confidence knowing we are not only conquerors through Christ, but we are “more” than conquerors. That means no matter what we go through, we will be victorious. With this assurance, we should have a great feeling of confidence.

No matter what, we win with Christ.



Introducing First John

BY C. MACK ROARK

Among the last of the letters of the New Testament, 1 John was written by apostle John probably while he was in Ephesus in his old age. Strong tradition has it that after Jesus' crucifixion, John stayed in Jerusalem until Mary the mother of Jesus died,¹ then went to Ephesus where he ministered until he was banished to Patmos. At Ephesus, sometime between 80 and 100,² he wrote his gospel, the last of the four to be written. A decade or more later he wrote the letter we call 1 John. That the letter follows the gospel, and not the other way around, is obvious to most scholars.³ Apparently enough time had passed since the writing of the gospel for it to be circulated, studied, interpreted- and misinterpreted and on the basis of that misinterpretation, for a schism to have occurred

in the churches reading that gospel. John wrote his epistle to address this schism. (Especially 2:19,21,24,26, and 5:13).

Thus we should call 1 John a pastoral letter, written to a circuit of house churches in and around Ephesus,⁴ to counter this split. John had no intention of getting the two groups back together. Rather, he wanted to expose the error and make clear that those who had separated really did not belong (2:19); and even more, he wanted to strengthen the faithful in the face of these who were perverting the truth (2:26).

Who were these false teachers, and how were they perverting John's gospel? From John's characterization of them we can know that they

were in error both doctrinally and ethically. Examining these two errors will give a window into the life situation of the churches as well as into the basic teachings of the letter.

In terms of doctrine, the background for 1 John is high Christology of the fourth gospel. The letter obviously presupposes the gospel,⁵ which makes clear that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah sent from God. Indeed the whole purpose of his gospel was to bring people to faith in Jesus as Messiah (John 20:30-31, NIV). When John said that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” he was summing up a Christology that began in the prologue with “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14, RSV). Jesus was God in the flesh, incarnate. This high Christology is reflected in the way John spoke of Jesus. Jesus was the pre-incarnate Word of God (John 1:1); He and the Father were one (14:9); no one had power to take His life, whatever happened was because He willed it (10:18). Even His death was a glorification. Upon reading this gospel, some were so enamored with its high view of the divine Christ that they doubted or denied that He was really human. The theology of 1 John is best understood as a response to this overemphasis on a high Christology.⁶ In the letter, John said that those who deny that Jesus is the Christ (2:22) are not so much denying that there is a Messiah, but that Jesus of Nazareth, who came in the flesh, could also be the Messiah of God (4:2-3). Such belief, for John, was really “antichrist” (2:18-23; 4:1-3).

Can we further identify these heretics? They were apparently gnostic, probably docetic, and perhaps followers of Cerinthus. But what do these terms mean? Gnostics, among other things, had a dualistic worldview. Spirit (thus God) is good, but the physical (thus humanity) is evil. From this gnostic dualism there developed a docetic (from the Greek word *dokein*, “to seem”). The Gnostics claimed that Jesus only seemed to experience humanness, for the Messiah of God would certainly never inhabit flesh, which is by definition evil. Ignatius of Antioch, who wrote not long after 1 John was written, was the first to use the word “seem” in describing their theology. Writing to the Trallians he said, “Be deaf, therefore, whenever anyone speaks to

you apart from Jesus Christ ... who really was born, who both ate and drank; who really was persecuted under Pontius Pilate, who really was crucified and died ... who really was raised from the dead.”⁷

Cerinthus, who according to some traditions was from Ephesus,⁸ was a gnostic who assumed this distinction between spirit and flesh and thus made a distinction between the divine Christ and the human Jesus. Cerinthus asserted that the Christ (spirit) came on Jesus (flesh) at His baptism (thus the formula, “This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased”) and left Him just before the crucifixion (thus the formula, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”). While it may be too much to say with certainty that John was addressing docetic gnostic followers of Cerinthus, theirs is the kind of heresy he attacked.

The second error 1 John confronted was ethical. When the heretics rejected Jesus’ humanity, they likewise depreciated the life that He lived. Their lowered Christology issued in a lowered morality. And since the evil body was for them only an envelope for the spirit within, nothing the body might do could affect the spirit, so the matter of right and wrong was a non-issue. John was “refuting a system of thought that lacked moral earnestness.”⁹ Their new theology produced a new morality that was, in fact, immorality.

This docetic Christology produced a group of gnosticizing Christians who were all too ready to say, “I know him” (2:4) and with that knowledge to claim to be above sin (1:8,10). All the while their lives demonstrated that they did not “know him.” Their spiritual elitism coupled with their attitude toward sin resulted in a loss of love for the brethren (2:7-11; 3:10-18; 4:7-5:3). Clearly they did not know Him, for they did not keep His commandments: “He who says ‘I know him’ but disobeys his commandments is a liar” (2:4, RSV). John then sums up the commandments: “And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he commanded us” (3:23, RSV)¹⁰ Ethics for John was primarily a matter of love, growing out of God’s saving love for us (4:10-11).

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