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A Stern Warning and Sure Promise (1 John 2:18-29)

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Max Lucado, in his book In the Eye of the Storm, tells the following story of an experience of the crew of a battleship:

Shortly after dark, the lookout on the wing reported, "Light, bearing on the starboard bow."

"Is it steady or moving astern?" the captain called out.

The lookout replied, "Steady, Captain," which meant it was on a dangerous collision course with that ship.

The captain then called to the signalman, "Signal that ship: 'We are on a collision course, advise you change course twenty degrees.'"

Back came the signal, "Advisable for you to change course twenty degrees."

The captain said, "Send: 'I'm a captain, change course twenty degrees.'"

"I'm a seaman second-class," came the reply. "You had better change course twenty degrees."

By that time the captain was furious. He spat out, "Send: 'I'm a battleship. Change course twenty degrees.'"

Back came the flashing light, "I'm a lighthouse."

Warnings are all around us. From our earliest days, our parents and others try to point us in the right direction based on their knowledge and experience. Whether we heed it or not is another story, but warnings are an important part of living life successfully. In this study, John presents a crucial warning to his readers that we need to hear as well, two millennia later.

I. THE PROBLEM DEFINED - ANTICHRISTS

1 John 2:18, 19, 22, 23a, 26 - Children, 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. They 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. 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. No one who denies the Son has the Father. I write these things about those who are trying to deceive you.

The early church had been taught about the coming of the antichrist. He was prophesied as the individual who would rise to power in the

end times to lead many astray before the second coming of Christ. Here John refers to him, but also speaks about many antichrists, or many leaders who have the same purpose and spirit of denying who Jesus is and falsely teaching other "gospels". It is this deception that John warns his readers about.

At the time of John's letter, the major false teaching was known as Gnosticism. It basically taught that matter was bad and spirit was good. This would naturally result in a false view of Christ, who, even though was God, became a man. Gnostics would hold that Christ's humanity wasn't possible and had several explanations for the incarnation, including the idea that Christ was actually a spirit whose "body" only seemed to be real. That's why John started this letter as he did:

1 John 1:1 - 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 first characteristic of these antichrists is that they began as part of the church, then **departed**. John says they "went out from us, but they were not of us". That's a sobering realization when you consider that it can still happen today. False teachers can begin well as confessing followers of Christ, but may then leave the church to promote a sub-Christian approach. That means as we look around in the church today, there may be those who are not of us, whose true colors will someday be shown.

That is the reason for John's warning to know that this evil exists and not follow it. Even Jesus said that some who claim to serve God will not see heaven:

Matthew 5:21-23 - Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

The Bible is clear in its teaching that one of the proofs that a person is a true believer is if they persevere in the faith.

Hebrews 3:14 - For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

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The second thing we see about the spirit of an antichrist is that they **deny** who Jesus really is. “No one who denies the Son has the Father”, John says. This is one of the first questions to ask to determine if any teaching is biblical. It is intentionally exclusive, flies in the face of our world’s notion of multiple ways to God and echoes Christ’s own words:

John 14:6 - Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Thirdly, the false teacher’s purpose is to **deceive**. Any teaching that is opposed to the Scriptures is false and is meant to lead people astray.

2 Timothy 4:3, 4 - For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

II. THE PROBLEM DESTROYED - ABIDING

1 John 2:20, 21, 23b, 24, 27, 29 - But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. 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. 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. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

John’s solution to avoid the pitfalls of false teaching is to stubbornly hold onto accurate teaching and know the Scriptures well so that any counterfeit will easily be seen. “Abiding” is a common word in John’s writing that encourages us to rely on the Lord for what is right and good, and not look to ourselves for the right answers.

When John says that believers do not need anyone to teach them, he is not saying that we should not listen to any human teacher because God has spoken through many faithful teachers through the centuries. He is saying that the Holy Spirit, which we receive as an

anointing when we believe in Christ, is our true teacher and his truth will always come from the Scriptures – our standard for truth.

John 15:26 - But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.

What a key encouragement in this world of lies. Abiding in Christ and in his Word as we have studied it and been taught is the way to combat the false ideas Satan has put into the minds of many who have departed the faith, deny Christ and seek to deceive.

II. THE PROMISE DELIVERED - APPEARANCE

1 John 2:25, 28 - And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life. And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.

The blessing of God’s Word and the confidence we can have in it not only changes our lives here on earth, but gives the believer hope for the future. The warnings of this chapter are meant to keep the true believer on the path of righteousness which leads to eternity with the Lord. The added benefit is that this can happen with a clear and God-honoring conscience without shame.

Will believers experience shame and regret when Christ appears on earth the second time? I imagine we will all know that we could have cooperated more with God and followed him with a truer heart. But if we are growing in him and abiding in his truth, John says there will not be shame when he appears. But the promise here is sure. God does not lie and will bring about what he has said.

Titus 1:1b, 2 - . . . for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began . . .

While God does not lie, his detractors have to deal in lies to oppose him. We are to know him and his Word so well, we cannot be shaken by false teaching and attacks against the clear meaning of Scripture. Let me urge you to give yourself to the One who loves you most and revealed himself so that you could have the assurance of eternity with him. Heed the warning against falsehood so that you can experience the blessing of true hope.