

Focus on Truth

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Preacher: Steve Ellacott

[0 : 00] So let's turn to that passage in 1 John then. 1 John chapter 2 starting at verse 18.! So John tells us that he's written these letters so that his hearers and through them us also may know that we have eternal life.

And if you remember there were three tests he gave of true Christianity, obedience, truth and love. There was also a warning that there are those who are trying to lead us astray. And in particular John focuses on that to some extent in this passage.

They try to lead us astray in all sorts of ways but particularly in undermining the truth that was told to the believers at the beginning.

And so that's the focus in a sense in this passage is on that second of the three tests, the test of truth. Now let's note first of all that John tells us this is the last hour.

[1 : 17] That might worry us slightly since he wrote this close on 2,000 years ago. But when the Bible talks about the last hour, the last time, it's not necessarily a short time.

As John tells us here, we know it's the last time because the Antichrists are out in the world. The last time is the time of the Gospel. And the opposition is taking the field.

And that's a characteristic of the last time. It's not clear what time scale John envisaged but clearly he didn't mean literally an hour because otherwise he wouldn't have bothered to write his letter.

And if you look in books of Revelation or some of the prophecies of the last time, you find that in fact there is a great deal that needs to happen. And if you remember those words of Mary recorded in Luke 1 verse 48, from now on, all generations shall call me blessed.

It's not necessarily something that John was expecting to happen even the next hour or even the next few days or years. But this is the last hour because it is the time of the final confrontation between good and evil, between Christ and the Antichrist.

[2 : 35] And that is indeed the very evidence that this is indeed the last hour as that passage that we read from Paul talked about the man of lawlessness being revealed. So, I'd like to look at three aspects of this passage.

First of all, I'd like to point out that it's all about anointing. And then I'd like to focus a bit on what it says about the spirit of truth.

And then conversely what it says about the great lie. What I'm not going to do is repeat the actual gospel that John was preaching or had preached to them.

In a sense, he's assuming that they know that. He says, you heard it from the beginning. The point of this passage is how can you have confidence in it and know that it's worth maintaining.

So, that's the way we're going to look at it. So, first of all, all about anointing. And we lose a little bit in translation here because, of course, we forget that what Christ, Christos, actually means is the anointed one.

[3 : 52] And so Christ was the anointed one to be the great king. He came and left his message, as it were, with the apostles.

And he says to the hearers, to his hearers, you also have been anointed. He says that in verse 20. You are also anointed from the Holy One.

In other words, the spirit of the Holy One, the Holy One in Scripture usually means the Father, I think the God, so probably that's what's meant here. But the Holy One has anointed you with the Holy Spirit so that you do know the truth.

And because of that, you're children of the truth. If we could use John's favourite phrase, he refers to them as dear children or little children all the time. And so we are children of the truth.

But it's not quite as simple as that. I've tried to do a diagram here. We had a diagram this morning. Phil is very keen on diagrams, as we know, so I thought I'd call this a Wells diagram.

[5 : 03] But anyway, it tries to illustrate what John is getting at here. So there's a bit more to it than this, because there is opposition.

And there is someone or something called the Antichrist, a usurper, a false king. And as John suggests in verse 19, perhaps initially it wasn't very obvious who he was.

He might have looked very much like the real thing. And yet his kingdom is heading in an entirely different direction. But he tells us they also have apostles.

And it seems they've also been anointed with the spirit of their king. Chapter 4, verse 1, he says, Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they're from God.

So there is another spirit at work, the spirit of Antichrist. And although these false apostles, these false teachers, claim to be teaching the apostolic message, John says, They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us.

[6 : 25] For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. But their going that showed that none of them belonged to us. Perhaps, possibly he means they went out literally, physically.

They left the Jerusalem church, or wherever the apostles were, to preach their own message, because they found they couldn't do it, where the apostles were. Or perhaps he means they went out spiritually.

They just headed in a different spiritual direction. I suspect he actually, really including both here, they went out physically from us, to try and catch somebody else out.

And they went out spiritually. They were heading in an entirely different direction. And we notice that there are many Antichrists.

Some deny that Jesus is the Christ. Some deny that the Christ is a man. We were looking at these Trinitarian heresies this morning, weren't we? Some deny that Jesus is God's chosen king, and is the only way to the Father.

[7 : 31] They don't all speak the same message. The conventional wisdom is that John's letters were written against Gnostics, who believed that Jesus had not come in the flesh, in some sense.

Some later scholars, recent scholars, have suggested that these people might actually have been Jews, who denied that Jesus was the Messiah. It may be that, well, it certainly is the case, that there are different Antichrists, and on the face of it, they come with different messages.

And John says that, doesn't he? There are many Antichrists. Yet they all represent the Antichrist. Antichrist is what John tells us.

We may ask who this is. Is the Antichrist a single person? And the Antichrist with a capital A, as it were, a single person, and the Antichrist here, some sort of avatars of him?

Or is John saying that there is a principle of Antichrist, a principle of opposition to Christ, and that that principle finds its incarnation in these individual Antichrists?

[8 : 46] Or is the Antichrist Satan himself? Paul, in Thessalonians' passage, suggests a man of lawlessness, so it might refer to a particular man, but my own view is that the Antichrist is probably Satan himself, as represented in the beast of revelation, and so on.

But we can't be entirely certain. But the idea, certainly, is that there is a single source of the opposition to the Gospel trying to lead us in an entirely different direction.

But what characterizes the Antichrist is that they're all anti-Christ. The word anti-Christ is just a direct transliteration from the Greek.

It's anti-Christos, one who is opposed to Christ. So whatever the differences they might have about their messages, and they all disagree with each other and have different messages, and yet they all are heading away from the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It's not what they care for, come from, that matters. They may even appear to have some sort of apostolic authority. But their behavior and their message denies it. Even their immoral behavior, which we read about in chapter 1, verse 10, isn't the most important issue.

[10 : 11] The most important issue, the vital issue, is the denial of the foundational truth of the Gospel, that Jesus is the Christ and provides the only access to the Father, the only way to Christ.

And so some Antichrists threaten violence, there are others that are seduced, don't they, with words of comfort and ease. Why do you need to be on your guard all the time?

Take it easy, lay back, just enjoy the ride. If the Holy Spirit is with you, you've got nothing to worry about. There are different Antichrists' voices, yet what they have in common is that they are the Antichrist.

They deny that Jesus is the Christ. And just as they tried to pose as apostles, so they're always trying to infiltrate the church and divert believers onto their path. And that's why John needs to warn us. If they've just gone off in a different direction, we might say, well, good riddance. But it's not as simple as that. They're always trying to divert us off track. [11:29] And so John needs to warn us about them. So don't think you're being paranoid. They really are out to get you. So, let's look, secondly, at what John says here about the Spirit of Truth, the Spirit of the Holy One.

John tells us that his hearers have been anointed with the Spirit of the Holy One. Verse 20. Probably, I say, the Holy One probably means the Father here. Well, that's terrific, John. So I was beginning to get a bit worried by all these warnings you're giving us. But now you're telling us that we've anointed with the Spirit of the Holy One and we know the truth. But only in that case, why are you bothering to write this letter? If the Spirit leads to the truth, and you say that in verse 20, and in fact again in verse 27, the anointing you receive from him remains in you and you do not need anyone to teach you. If that's the case, why are you bothering to write this letter? Surely the written words are unnecessary. Well, what does John actually say about this?

[12:48] He writes, all of you are anointed, but clearly John is not suggesting that anyone who might possibly ever read his letter has the Spirit of Truth. That wouldn't make sense at all.

That would be nonsense. Rather, he seems to be saying that those who believe the Gospel in the first place, verse 24, what you heard from the beginning were anointed with the Holy Spirit. And that's important to note that. They were anointed from the beginning with the Holy Spirit because if they hadn't been, they wouldn't have understood what the message was. I was in town a week or so ago and was handed this tract by a group of Pentecostals. Now, I'm sure that basically they are preaching the truth of Jesus Christ, but when I read this tract, I must say, I was really quite confused as to what they were saying because they seemed to be saying you can't be born again unless you speak in tongues or something like that. And therefore, they said you can be a Christian but not being born again. That seemed to be the implication of it. Now, perhaps they didn't mean to say that, but that was the way I read this tract and I was really quite disturbed by it because it was the anointing of the Holy Spirit that enabled the believers to receive God's word in the first place.

[14:21] And it's the work of the Holy Spirit, among other things, to enable them to detect the great lie. That's what he says in verse 22. But they still need to be on their guard because what is the evidence that they did indeed receive the Spirit of truth is that they remain in the Son and in the Father and they do that by holding to the message they have heard from the beginning.

So it's not as simple as saying the Spirit leads you into truth. Rather, he's saying you were anointed with the Holy Spirit when you received the truth and you shouldn't forget that because the Spirit is still pointing to the truth in Jesus Christ.

And in fact, in verses 26 and 27 we have a very typical sort of John-like passage in which he appears to contradict himself in order to make the point. you can compare that to John 1, 19 to 13 where he writes his own did not receive him but to those who did.

It's a way John likes to put things sometimes. I think there's a posh word for it. I can't think what it is. But anyway, it's a kind of a paradox to make the point.

A contradiction to make the point. And he says in verses 26 and 27 I'm writing these things to you about those who you are trying to lead you astray.

[15:53] As for you, the anointing you receive 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 is taught you, remain in him.

So he's saying, he does seem to be saying that, I'm writing those things to warn you, to remind you that the Holy Spirit vindicates the word and points to Christ and therefore to remain in him.

The teaching that John is bringing is the teaching of the Spirit. It's not that there's a distinction between the teaching of the Spirit, the testimony of the Spirit and the words that John is writing because the words of John are the teaching of the Spirit and it is, if you really have that Spirit, you will recognise it and that's what John is saying.

And any one of us who stand up here to teach and preach need to keep that in mind. I'm not standing up here to try and substitute for the work of the Holy Spirit.

I'm not standing here to try and say that the Holy Spirit is not adequate to point to Jesus Christ but I'm standing up here rather to demonstrate the power of the Holy Spirit.

[17 : 23] My words and my teaching style might be inadequate but when the word of truth is proclaimed the Spirit himself writes it on the heart of people. Paul said something in 1 Corinthians similar, didn't he?

He said, when I came to you brothers I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God for I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

I came to you in weakness and fear and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power so that your faith might not rest on man's wisdom men's wisdom but on God's power.

So as the word of God is proclaimed far from taking away from the Holy Spirit the proclamation of the word of God is the way that the Spirit uses to point people to Jesus Christ and if we allow a wedge to be driven between the word and the Spirit then that again is yet another lie of the Antichrist trying to divert us from the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It may be a very subtle one and yet that is the result of it. So let's look now at the wake up the great lie.

[19 : 05] So John wants his readers to remain confident and unashamed of the message they were first taught. Says that in verse 28 doesn't he? Continuing him so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him that is coming and that if we're looking for righteousness that righteousness is to be found in Christ verse 29 we know that he is righteous and you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him so it's folly to look elsewhere.

Of course knowing the truth here in verse 20 is not just a matter of knowing facts although it includes that we are to hold on to what we heard from the beginning but it is a relational knowledge again we were thinking about this this morning because it is a matter of by the Holy Spirit remaining in the Son and in the Father remaining in a relationship with the Son and the Father through the Holy Spirit but how?

By adhering to the truth believing what we have heard from the beginning to deny the truth is actually to break that relationship with the Father and the Son and to deny that Holy Spirit's anointing that we received and against that stands the great lie the liar from the beginning I don't know if you ever thought of this but actually for all his cunning Satan really only has one line and he used it first of all in Genesis 3 verse 1 did God really say all his strategy is really around that one line to get us to deny what God has actually said and so

Jesus said the work that God requires is this to believe the one whom he has sent if we believe the one whom he has sent everything else follows from that and we have the relationship with the Son and with the Father that's what John says isn't it we have the Son and the Father and so Satan is very keen for us to cast doubt on that and that's why he sends the Antichrist out into the world with all these different messages one message perhaps is not good enough it might appeal to some people and not others and yet in the end there is only one lie there is only one line and I say it's when Satan says did God really say that and all of the Antichrists really have this same message but that fact that there is only one truth that there's only one way to the

Father has always been a stumbling block to people and it's even more so isn't it in our pluralistic and sceptical society today shouldn't the gospel be something more philosophical anyway don't Jews and Muslims worship the same God as Christians anyway surely how you live is the important thing isn't it well John is not afraid to talk about philosophy in fact of all the New Testament writers he's probably the most philosophical in the beginning of his gospel he talks about the logos and he talks about ideas of light and some of those ideas were actually not derived from at least sort of cognate to ideas that were current in Greek philosophy of the time so John is not afraid to talk about philosophy and yet he says he's tied with

[23 : 17] Paul on the view that the wisdom of God makes nonsense of the wisdom of the world well Muslims believe there is only one God Jews believe there is only one God John certainly believes there's only one God but as James points out even the demons believe that and they tremble so just because you claim to believe there's only one God does not mean that God is the true God God and John has already said in this letter that how you live actually matters he's already told us that these people will try to lead us away morally as well as in terms of the truth and yet he realized that the crucial issue is do you acknowledge the son with all that entails because every message there

is in the world either acknowledges that Jesus is the

Christ or is the message of the antichrist that comes with the question did God really say that does it make sense can we really believe that but John wants us to make sure that we do believe that because if we do through that same truth we have access to God now of course we need to be careful with this it's not just a matter of words Romans 10 verse 9 says confess with your lips and believe in your heart I've already said the truth believing the truth is not just a matter of head knowledge but it's a matter of relationships and yet it is a matter of knowledge it is a matter of saying to Satan yes God did really say that and what's more I'm going to believe it and I'm going to put my trust in it as John has already explained that belief must be put into practice and into how we live but in the last analysis if we have the son we have the father and if we don't have the son we don't have the father so if we don't acknowledge that Jesus

Christ has come in the flesh we don't have the son and so we don't have the father verse 29 makes the same point again if you know him you know that right actions display the new birth and show that you are indeed born not just of water but of the spirit so let's just sum up I'm not going to be very long this evening but I think it's an important truth so John writes to these Christians wherever they were we're not entirely sure where they were but he writes to them because they perhaps get confused or at least certainly they're in danger of becoming confused there are those who appear to be bringing a new and super message or perhaps there are those who are saying you've really got to be

Jews as well after all it's a Jewish God you're worshipping you've got to worship in the Jewish way whatever it is the message that they were bringing John wants them to be on their guard and to hold on to that which they were taught from the beginning that actual true apostolic gospel they were taught by the apostles and which the apostles received from Christ himself and so how can we be sure how can we know that we have eternal life well John tells us doesn't he that the spirit witnesses to the truth we have that inner witness of the spirit within us that this is the truth but can we be sure that this spirit is the Holy Spirit well we need a test of truth because the truth witnesses to the spirit the Holy

Spirit is the one who says that Jesus has come in the flesh and that Jesus is the Christ and that there is only one way to the father so the spirit testifies to the truth and the truth testifies that this anointing is the anointing of the Holy Spirit and not the anointing of the Antichrist and how do we know that it's the Holy Spirit because he testifies to the truth how are we sure of the truth well the spirit testifies but the apostles testify also he says you received that message from us I think by us here he means the apostles he says what you've heard from the beginning remains in you I think he means the message you received from the apostles and they received it as I've said from Christ himself so we know that this message is the truth because it is the truth we heard from the beginning the very truth of Christ himself and so the three witnesses together remember through three witnesses the case is proved and there is the witness of the spirit the witness of the written word and the testimony of the apostles that this word is true so we don't need to be confused and if we hang on to the truth says

[29 : 10] John we can indeed know that we have eternal life that's a radical claim in itself because there are all those even who claim to be Christians who would deny that they would say well you can't really know there's no way you can actually be sure how do you know that you might not drift away well certainly John tells us to be on our guard certainly we have to check that we are indeed in the faith and certainly you know if we're not living consistently with that claim then we probably conclude that we're not and yet John does say we can know that we have eternal life if we hold to that truth that we were given from the beginning ending ending ending ending ending ending ending ending ending ending ending ending ending ending