

The Lie

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[0 : 00] person who ever walked this earth, assuming you believe that he actually walked this earth. Not simply controversial because of his miracles, although they attract a fair degree of comment, criticism and controversy. Not just because of his teaching, wise things, profound things, loving things, bold claims as well. Not simply his death on a cross, one of hundreds in the Roman Empire, but probably the most significant one of those hundreds, with astonishing claims being laid about his death and its efficacy for salvation and forgiveness. But perhaps at the heart of the controversy is the extraordinary claim of Jesus himself, of the scriptures, of Christian believers and theologians for 2,000 years, that Jesus was not only fully human, but also fully divine. God incarnate. See, in Jesus Christ, there is one whom Christians believe, and the Bible makes clear, was fully God without any limitation or compromise, and yet at the same time on earth, in that 30, 33 years, whatever it was on earth, and since, fully human, within a human body exactly like yours and mine. Here is the astonishing meeting of God and humanity in the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

That's why Christmas is so extraordinary. Any baby's birth is fantastic. The couple whose baby's going to be born tonight were here in church this afternoon in our congregation. Now she'll be on an operating table, I guess. I was amazed they were in church. But they're so excited their first child's going to be born, and they will be excited, I trust, when he or she is born. But at Christmas, that baby was divine.

There is God in this tiny little baby smaller than a Christmas turkey. And it's fully human and fully divine. A real person seen, heard, touched, as John made clear in the opening paragraph of this letter.

That is, it's real. It's not a made-up fantasy. Really Christmas. Real baby. Really God. And really human. An amazing thing. Now, of course, not everyone believes that. There are many who go under the name of Christian who don't believe that. And of course, most of those who wouldn't claim the name of Christian don't believe that. So for Muslims, he was just a prophet. Fully human, but not divine.

Likewise for Jews, or some Jews, that he was a prophetic figure. In the line of Old Testament prophets, perhaps. And for others, he was just a man. A. N. Wilson, a fiction writer, a biographer, a columnist in England, quite influential, quite popular. Has argued at length, and I suppose has persuaded some, that he was just a person to whom all these extraordinary claims were later attached far beyond the reality.

[3 : 27] In the 60s or 70s, there was a book that theologians had essays in called *The Myth of God Incarnate*. So-called Christian writers, even an Anglican minister. Terrible. But it's true that God was never incarnate in Jesus Christ. It's a myth. Jesus was fully human, but not divine.

For some, they've claimed that Jesus was divine, but not human. In the old church days, in the centuries immediately after Jesus' life on earth, some of those went by the name of docetists. That is, they, it seemed that Jesus was human, but he wasn't really. He was God with the sort of appearance of being human, but not real flesh and blood fully. Maybe an apparition, maybe not quite human.

Part of that thinking came from some Greek thinking that spirit and matter could never mix. Now, if I was a chemist, I could give you a chemical analogy, oil and water, I think, but I'm not totally certain about that. But spirit and matter wouldn't ever mix, so how could they mix perfectly in Jesus Christ? He's either one or the other, not both and not both fully.

And there are many moderns around who would pick up one of those theories that he's not fully human, or he's not fully divine, or he's a bit of both, but not fully both. And they're just old theories regurgitated, probably in order to pay royalties to some stupid scholar.

At the heart of Christianity is Jesus Christ. That goes without saying, that's not controversial. But much is at stake with respect to who he is. You see, this is not a matter for the ivory towers of theological colleges in the United States or England or even in Australia. It's not an abstract idea. It's of fundamental importance who Jesus was. For if he wasn't perfectly God and perfectly human, fully God and fully human, both at the same time in his human life, born four or six BC or whatever it was for 30, 33 years or whatever on earth. If he wasn't totally God and totally human together at the same time in that period of time and subsequently, then Christianity just falls apart.

[5 : 59] We're wasting our time here tonight. For if he wasn't both, there's no perfect mediator between human beings and God. There's no atonement on the cross that wins our salvation and our forgiveness.

There's no access to the throne of God's grace. God is light and we're sinners and ne'er the twain shall meet. If Jesus is not perfectly human and perfectly divine, both at the same time after or from his birth at Bethlehem. That's why in this letter, John is so blunt about this issue and so warm and encouraging in his assurance to the readers because he wants them to be in no doubt what is heresy and he wants them to be absolutely assured that they believe the truth, that they are not becoming vulnerable to false teaching and heresy purported by those around them in their midst or outside the church. This is not a matter for advanced Christianity. It's not a matter for theologians alone. This lies at the very heart of the reality of the Christian faith. And John pulls no punches here, as indeed we've seen in the last couple of weeks. There is absolutely no inkling here that your view out there that Jesus may not be fully human or that your view out there that Jesus may not be fully divine, they're equally valid with ours that he was both. Not a hint of that sort of relativism or pluralism or post-modernism. Not because this is just primitive and old-fashioned, but because John knows what is true and what is not. And he's not going to blind or deceive people by pretending this is a matter of opinion. It's not. It's a matter of truth and a matter of lies.

And there is no room for a middle ground here. Jesus is either fully human and fully divine, or he's not. And he can't be both at the same time. The issue of sincerity often deceives people these days. That somebody can sincerely hold to a view and therefore we've got to give them the pretense of the validity of their view. Not at all. You can sincerely hold to something that is wrong and it's a lie. And it matters at the point of who Jesus is and was.

John is writing, you see, to the context where there are false teachers. He's writing to a church whom he loves and cares for. He writes with tenderness and compassion for them. He writes so that they do not get led astray. He writes in the context of false teachers abounding in their midst. But he also makes it clear that this should not surprise his readers. For after all, Jesus, a generation or two before, had said just as much in the days before he died, that before his return there would be false teachers, false Christs, false messiahs, people claiming to be the Christ or people purporting something or someone else to be the Christ that was false. And John is saying exactly that what Jesus predicted is now happening.

[9 : 27] Don't be surprised. Don't feel that this is sort of swamping your faith. Not at all. Jesus prepared his followers for this very eventuality. And you can read some of that prediction, for example, in Mark 13, a passage I preach from before Christmas here in the morning service. That's why John says in verse 18 of chapter two, children, it is the last hour. That is, it's the end times, if you like. We're living in the last days leading up to Jesus' return.

Of course, if John could write that, what, 1950 years ago or maybe thereabouts, then we're certainly, of course, in the last days, the end times. And he says, as you have heard that Antichrist is coming, so now many Antichrists have come. From this we know that it is the last hour. That's what Jesus predicted. What you elsewhere find in the New Testament, in Paul's writings to the Thessalonians, for example, in the book of Revelation, etc. The Antichrist is either the one who's deliberately opposed to the real Christ or the one who claims to be the Christ but claims that falsely. That is, the Antichrist may or may not be himself claiming to be the Christ but is opposed to Christ or the Antichrist may be claiming to be the Christ and therefore set up over and against the real Christ, the Lord Jesus Christ. And we ought not to be confused by either of those possibilities. It's just the possibilities of the idea of Antichrist. And John is saying that he's come indeed. Many have come. Not just one, but many. That is, many who either purport to be Christ or claim that the Lord Jesus Christ is not the real Christ or Messiah. Well, who are these people?

There's a bit of a shock in the next verse, I think, verse 19. They went out from us. That is, they used to be within church Christian fellowship. They've now left that fellowship to propagate their

heresy. The shock is they were within Christian fellowship to start with. The danger from within. So often we think that it's the world out there that's against us and yet sometimes it's even within Christian churches and fellowships that we find the heresy's roots springing up. In this case, those heretics have left the church but are still a threat to it. Sadly, in our own day and age, they haven't all left the church. And many of them, at least in Anglican circles, wear miters and purple and other fancy robes and deceive many, many people. That is, these enemies of the church and Antichrists come from within the church, at least to start with.

[12 : 23] They appear to be Christians. There's an element of discernment that's needed in order not to be deceived. John's readers are facing the threat from this false teaching.

Presumably, the thrust of the letter suggests this, that some of them were feeling uncertain about their own beliefs and views and life and practice, perhaps being bewildered or maybe feeling that they just perhaps aren't Christians after all. And John is wanting them to be assured of where they stand. This letter actually rings with assurance while at the same time clangs with significant warning. So notice verse 20. In contrast to, they went out from us and they did not belong to us, for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. For by going out, they made it plain that none of them belonged to us. But you, the readers, my dear children, as verse 18 began, but you, the contrast is emphatic. You to whom I'm writing, you have been anointed by the Holy One and all of you have knowledge. That is, there's a ringing assurance for the readers here that they hold real faith, real truth. The word is in them. As we saw, in fact, in the verses preceding this, for example, verses 12, 13 and 14. Those wonderful words of assurance. We ought not see anything elitist in the expression, you've been anointed by the Holy One. In fact, possibly even a counter-elitism. That is that the false teachers may be claiming a special subsequent anointing to move on from the beginnings within the church. They have now left the church to set up their own teaching and heresy and probably from the language have said, we have a special anointing here that you can now move on to us for this special anointing. John's saying, none of that is true. You've been anointed by the Holy One, which has probably got a two-part aspect to it. The reception of God's Holy Spirit himself given by the Lord Jesus Christ from the day of Pentecost onwards to all believers. But not just subjectively holding the truth with the Spirit within, but the Spirit who actually takes the word of God and writes it on the hearts of believers. So we keep seeing in these earlier verses of this book or letter, the word is in you, the truth is in you. That is the work of the Spirit. So it's the Spirit taking the word, which is very objective in the scriptures, writing it on the hearts. You've been anointed. That's what he's referring to in verse 20. By the Holy One, by Jesus himself that is. And all of you have knowledge. What a wonderful assurance for people who are feeling perhaps vulnerable or bewildered by the threats that are posed by the heretical teaching around about them. As I say, John's probably picking up the language of those heretics, correcting it to reassure his readers.

So God's word, John is in fact saying in verse 20, gives you sufficient knowledge of the truth. Not knowledge of all things about everything, as though we're perfectly knowledgeable and we'll win every quiz that's ever put on the radio or television. But rather that our knowledge is sufficient to make us wise for salvation in Christ.

[15 : 52] is in effect what John is saying here when he says you have knowledge. That's why verse 21 follows. I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it. And you know that no lie comes from the truth. That is, John is not in a sense adding knowledge to what they already have.

This letter is in fact, in one sense, clarifying the knowledge they already have and reassuring them of the knowledge they already have. He says, I'm writing to you because you know the truth. Stand firm in that truth. Hold fast to it is the implication of what he's saying here. So he's saying, don't be rattled by the false teaching. It's expected. Jesus predicted it, for example. So don't be rattled by it. Don't be misled by it. Don't be led astray by it, down paths of sin or down paths of unbelief. Don't be confused by their elitist or grandiose claims that they've got advanced knowledge. It's not true. You've got sufficient knowledge from the scriptures and the Holy Spirit already. You don't need further knowledge. Don't be misled, perhaps, by their scholarly sophistication, which sadly seems to dupe people these days. And they come to me with the latest heresy trash that you pick up in some Christian bookshop or often a non-Christian bookshop and say, well, this person's a professor. He must know this person's a bishop. He must know.

And so people get duped by such scholarly so-called sophistication. It's just fantasy and heresy. Remember back to chapter 1, verse 6, which I preached on last Sunday night.

People who claim to have fellowship with God, but walk in darkness. Primarily, that was a moral darkness of sinful behavior. But now we see that it's not alone a moral darkness. It is a theological darkness as well. For so often, right theology goes with right practice and wrong theology with wrong practice. And so John has both strands running through his letter. The right practice in your life of walking in the light goes hand in hand with your right thinking and theology as well.

[18 : 14] Well, what do these antichrists in particular teach? Now we come to the heart of their teaching. And verse 22 begins that section. Who is the liar? But the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ.

This is the antichrist. The one who denies the father and the son. It's a strong word denial. Twice in that verse, once in the next. It's not somebody who is just ignorant of the truth, but one who explicitly, downrightly denies the truth. It's a denial of the incarnation at its heart that Jesus is the Christ, fully God, fully human. It's in part why John began his letter the way he did, to make it clear that Jesus is real, not just a divine spirit that might be hovering over some human prophet, but fully divine and fully human, one and the same time. This is not defective thinking that is challenging. It's diabolical thinking that is challenging. It's worth getting that right. There are plenty of people who are just ignorant of the truth. John is attacking those who are denying the truth. That's diabolical and not defective. And notice that John says that the antichrist is the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ and then follows that up with the one who denies the father and the son. That is, the two run in parallel. It's the denial of the divinity of

Jesus, the denial of Jesus, and by implication then a denial that God the father is the father of Jesus the son. That it's a challenge to the whole understanding of who God is himself.

The next verse takes it a bit further. No one who denies the son has the father. Everyone who confesses the son has the father also. The denial of Jesus means the denial of God the father. That is, the denial of Jesus denies a person, God, in total, we might even say. But on the other hand, if you confess Jesus to be the Christ and the son, then you have the father. Perhaps behind John's thinking is this idea that through Jesus we actually come to the father, something that was clear in the end of chapter one, the beginning of chapter two, as we saw last Sunday night. But not just dealing with the act of salvation, the whole relationship within the trinity of father and son.

[21 : 17] Deny the son, you deny the father. You're not in fellowship with God, even though you might claim to be, is what he's saying. A denial that Jesus is the Christ strikes at the very heart of Christianity.

It throws it all awry. Well, how do we respond then to such antichrist claims? Verse 24 begins to get to the response to this heresy.

It's very instructive. Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. That is, hold fast to what you were first taught.

That may have even been from John himself. Hold fast to the gospel. Hold fast to the truths of the scriptures that you've been taught.

Don't move away from that. Don't move off that foundation. Hold fast. Notice that the first and primary response of the readers is not to go out with their apologetic books to try and challenge the heretics.

[22 : 32] It's not to try and kick them further away from the church. Kick up their heels with dust. It's to make sure that they hold fast. Their primary concern is for themselves.

Hold fast to what you were taught from the beginning. That is, don't be confused by claims of novelty or moving on. That's what happens these days. All these scholarly accounts of people saying, I've got a new modern theory about Jesus, about the cross, about the resurrection, about the virgin birth, and all this sort of thing, as though suddenly somehow there's this newfangled idea that puts aside 2,000 years of groping in the darkness.

There's no new idea. There's nothing new under the sun. It's just a guise to deceive people to think that now somehow there's new truth. How do we respond?

Hold fast to what you heard from the beginning. Go back to the beginning, to the gospel of Jesus Christ, as given to us through the scriptures, planted in our hearts by the anointing of God's spirit, given through Jesus himself.

That's what John is urging his readers to do. Let what you've heard from the beginning abide in you. The word abide live in you, but it's got a sense of permanence about it.

[23 : 42] Let it take up an ongoing, durable dwelling within you, if we can put it like that. Not just a tent for a summer holiday within you, but a fixed dwelling place for eternity within you.

Always let that truth permanently endure within you. But notice that it's not just this cognitive idea of truth. It's not just theological formulae and so on, as though somehow you've got to be able to recite the creed off or something like that.

See how the rest of verse 24 goes? If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father. Notice that term of intimacy.

Chapter 1 talked about having fellowship with the Father. Now it's abiding in the Father, living in the Father and living in the Son. That's a very intimate relational term. You see, it's all about relating to God the Father through God the Son.

If the word of truth that you heard from the beginning doesn't abide in you, then you have no fellowship with the Father. You don't abide in Him. You don't abide in the Son. Is what John is making very clear here.

[24 : 51] Very black and white, let me tell you. But don't think by that that it's just primitive or childish. It's not. Some years ago I was mentoring a young preacher and I was asked to take a service as an Anglican minister in a place so I got him to come and preach the sermon.

Saved me writing a new sermon. And I remember somebody very patronising at the door. My friend was about 23 or 24 at the time, saying to him, no, saying to me, standing next to him, he was very black and white, wasn't he?

Well, sadly I wasn't quick enough because I should have said the Bible's very black and white and so don't you mix it into grey. Now it wasn't one John, but it could have been. It's very black and white.

But don't think for any instance that that's just because it's childish or primitive and that in a sophisticated worldview we've got shades of grey that are valid. They're not. It's either true or it's not. There's no middle ground.

And John's very blunt on that. If the word that you heard from the beginning does not abide in you, then you have no fellowship with God the Father, no fellowship with Jesus the Christ. You do not abide in them.

[25 : 57] It's a remarkable claim to make. But it's true. So we saw last Sunday night from the end of chapter 1 a moral test in effect.

Are you walking in the light? Yes, if so, then you have fellowship with God the Father. A reassurance that the readers were. Now in a sense a theological test and a reassurance that these readers meet that test.

They do abide in God the Father. The warm assurance is to keep on letting the word abide in them. The outcome if the word abides, verse 25 goes on to say the consequence or outcome result is that this is what he's promised us.

Eternal life. Not just life in heaven, pie in the sky when you die. Future oriented though it is. But eternal life begins now.

John himself in his own gospel quoting Jesus made that clear in chapter 17. This is eternal life. That you know the Father and the Son. It's relational.

[27 : 00] Exactly what he's been saying in the previous verse. Our eternal destiny, you see, depends on having the right faith. Not just faith about some idea of Jesus, but about Jesus fully human, fully divine.

The one who brings us fellowship with the Father and no other. The last couple of verses for tonight, 26 and 27, in effect sum up what John has been saying. I write these things to you concerning those who would deceive you.

That is, their purpose in fact is to try and deceive them from the truth. As for you, again the contrast note, the anointing that you received from him, Jesus, abides in you.

And so you do not need anyone to teach you. You don't need false teachers. You don't need anyone, not even in one sense, John. That is, it's the word itself that teaches you. And in a sense, I suppose, that any right Christian leader or preacher is not in one sense teaching by way of, here is my instruction, but rather trying to make plain the teaching that is the word already implanted in us by God's spirit.

But as his anointing teaches you about all things and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, abide in him.

[28 : 23] Don't move off. And don't move on. You see, the ploy of the evil one is to confuse us, to create doubts in us, to undermine us, to shake us, to rattle us.

Don't be, John says. The truth that you were given from the beginning is sufficient for eternity. You need nothing more and certainly no heresy.

And notice the response again of the people in verse 27 is to abide in him with the word abiding in them.

Well, there's some instruction here for us. Firstly, I guess, heresy in any form strikes at the heart of the nature and action of Jesus Christ.

And all heresy diminishes Jesus in some way or other. This is fundamentally about his nature, fully human, fully divine, and countering that.

[29 : 24] Some heresy attacks his action on the cross. All heresy diminishes Jesus in some way. For the truth is that Jesus is the name above every name at the highest place, before whom every knee will bow.

And so it's worth thinking when you hear some theological stuff being purported, to work out is this true or not, is to focus on where is Jesus in the mix of this.

Is he at the top? If not, it's heretical. Fully human, fully divine, totally sufficient for salvation.

sometimes when people come to my door and they come from all these sects or whatever to tell me that I should become a Mormon or JW or whatever, if I'm feeling in a good mood, which is rare, and are prepared to engage in conversation with them, which is rare, but occasionally it happens, sometimes I pull out my Greek New Testament and that certainly seems to rattle them once they actually ran away, sort of.

But a very simple thing to say would be this, what can you offer me that the Lord Jesus Christ has not already done and guaranteed for me?

[30 : 51] See, we have everything we need for eternity already through the Lord Jesus Christ and his gospel. There is nothing better than anyone can offer. Secondly, we ought to be careful to ensure the gospel truth abides in us.

That's the fundamental exhortation here to the readers. Make sure the truth abides in you. We have to take measures to make sure that it abides in us.

We have to cultivate it within us. That is, we have to read the scriptures. That's the truth that's being placed within us by God's Holy Spirit. So we have to make sure that the scriptures are feeding our minds and our lives.

And not to think that, oh, well, yes, I believe the gospel once upon a time when I became a Christian and therefore I'm always a Christian, so I'm right. How easy it is to drift away. How fundamental the scriptures are here within our lives.

Not to lead us necessarily into new things and novel ideas, but to keep us grounded in the truth.

There's a priority in our own lives here for making a place for the scriptures to feed our hearts and minds and wills and praying for Jesus to keep writing it on our heart, I guess.

[32 : 09] Thirdly, we ought not to be misled by things that maybe look scholarly. Some scholarship's all right, I think, being a scholar. Some things that are popular doesn't make them right necessarily.

Some things may look reasonable, they may not be right. Some things look new, they're bound not to be right. See, people love new ideas, they love new experiences, but it's the old, old gospel of Jesus that is true and sufficient for us.

We need nothing else. It cannot be bettered, so we cannot move from it. We ought not move from it. We've got to abide in it. Fourthly, notice that John gives no commands commands for challenging or countering the heretics.

Now, in this case, they've moved out from the church. I imagine if they were still members within the church, he might give some advice about that. But now they're outside the church.

John doesn't say go and evangelize them. He doesn't say go and give them lots of apologetic books. He doesn't say go and placard them and show how they're wrong. There may not be anything bad in that.

[33 : 24] But in John's schema of things, it's not that important. What matters is you holding on to the truth. All of this is to be expected in our day and age as well.

For if John could say it's the last days, how much more can we? And there is nothing here that is no longer present in our own society. The great sadness, I think, of the Christian church, especially in

