

1 John 2:18-29

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[0 : 00] Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we ask that you would fill us with your Holy Spirit, that the word of Christ may dwell in us richly, and that we may know the promise of eternal life that you have given us.

We ask these things in Christ's name. Amen. You may be seated. Amen.

They're part of us. And then a little bit later, you hear him saying they were actually liars, and they were trying to deceive you. So John comes right out, and things are a little bit spicy from the beginning.

So what's going on here? What's this all about? Essentially, at its heart, this passage is about fellowship. It's about fellowship.

This is what John has been about from the very, very, very beginning. The whole letter is about fellowship. John starts off, do you remember, in verse 3 of chapter 1 by saying, We saw Jesus.

[1 : 28] We saw Jesus. We touched him. We heard him with our own ears. We felt him with our own hands concerning the word of life. And what we saw and touched and heard from him, we proclaim to you so that you may have fellowship with us.

And our fellowship is with the Son, is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. So the whole letter for John is all about fellowship.

And the highest good of the human person is to be in holy and loving fellowship. And John here gets straight to the heart of what it is that erodes our fellowship or can potentially destroy our fellowship.

That's what the Antichrist is all about. I read an article this last week on Gen Alpha. Do you guys know what Gen Alpha is? I just learned about this.

It's all those born between 2010 and 2025. So that's my kids. And this article was arguing that that generation is the wealthiest and most tech-savvy generation ever to live.

[2 : 33] And they may be the generation that lives the longest of any other generation. And yet they argued, what is it that's on young people's hearts? What are they longing for? And the simple thing was one word, belonging.

There's a longing for belonging. So their highest value in life is no longer home ownership or job satisfaction or financial security or Instagram-worthy experiences.

But what the Bible would call fellowship. To whom do I belong? Where do I belong? Where will I find welcome and close connection?

And the whole letter of John is about bringing this fellowship to us that our hearts so desperately long for. John says to us that Christ came to give us fellowship and to purchase it with his blood. John tells us that the Spirit was sent to seal and sanctify and strengthen our fellowship through his presence. And John tells us that the apostles devoted their whole lives to proclaiming this fellowship so that we may experience it.

[3 : 40] And the reason why John is writing here is because the fellowship of the Christian community that Christ came to give is under threat. So our passage very simply is about what protects fellowship and what poisons it.

What deepens fellowship and what destroys it? What tears fellowship apart and what builds it up? So those are our two main points. What destroys fellowship and what deepens it?

The simple answer that John gives for what destroys fellowship is lies. More specifically, he says lies about Jesus. Now there's lots of things that can hinder fellowship.

We've experienced this in our lives, in our church, in our history. And John's already named a number of them. In chapters 1 and 2, he's talked about a flippant attitude towards sin can break down fellowship.

A laxadaisical attitude towards God's Word can break down fellowship. Or a hateful, resentful, prideful attitude to your brothers and sisters in Christ can break down fellowship. Or a wrong attitude toward the world, sharing its loves and desires, can break down fellowship.

[4 : 53] But here, in this passage, at the end of chapter 2, John gets to rock bottom. And he says, underneath all of those things is our attitude towards Jesus, which matters most.

He says, our attitude toward Jesus is what will determine our attitude towards sin and God's Word and others in the world. And the surest way to derail your faith and to destroy the fellowship is to believe or tell lies about the person of Jesus.

So, look at verse 22 about how John describes the Antichrist. He says, I write to you, he says, who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?

This is the Antichrist, says John. He who denies the Father and the Son. In his book, The Knowledge of the Holy, A.W. Tozer starts with these startling words.

He says, what comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. And then he continues on and he says, the whole history of humanity will probably show that no society rises above its religion.

[6 : 11] And humanity's spiritual history will probably demonstrate that no religion rises higher than its idea of God. And I think if John were to edit A.W. Tozer's book, he would change just one word.

He would say, what comes into our minds and hearts when we think about Jesus is the most important thing about us. You tell me who you think Jesus is, and you haven't told me everything about yourself, but you have told me the most significant and important thing about yourself. Because this is the one thing that will shape everything else about you and set the whole trajectory for your life. And interestingly, John is telling us that the Antichrist is the one who tells just one lie about Jesus.

It's just a single lie. Only one lie is what the Antichrist tells. He or she denies that Jesus is the Christ, meaning that he is the Son of God come in the flesh.

And interestingly, that's the one thing that Peter confessed to Jesus. Remember at the Sea of Galilee when Jesus asked Peter, who do you say that I am?

[7 : 21] And Peter responds to him, says, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. So, according to John, the Antichrist is the one who tells lies about Jesus, and just one particular lie, that he is not the Christ, the Son of the living God.

And according to John, lies are not neutral little things. Lies have a negative and active and destructive spiritual power.

So, it's like a spark on a hot summer day. A spark seems small and inconsequential until you see a whole forest ablaze and reduced to ash. If you take away Jesus coming in the flesh, John says, the whole of the Christian faith collapses like a house of cards and becomes ash.

There's no more forgiveness of sins if you take away Jesus in the flesh. There's no more cleansing from unrighteousness if you take away Jesus in the flesh. There's no more command to love as we have been loved if you take away Jesus in the flesh.

And there's no more eternal life in the face of death if you take away Jesus from the flesh. So, John is trying to be very clear from the beginning. If you deny this about Jesus, it destroys what Jesus came to give you, which is fellowship.

[8 : 49] Look at verse 19. He notes how it destroys fellowship with one another. 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 are not of us. And what distinguished, what revealed why they were not a part of us is because of what they believed about Jesus.

So, John is saying that if lies about Jesus will destroy our relationships with one another ultimately. And then down in verse 22 and 23, he says it will destroy our fellowship with God.

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. Verse 23. No one who denies the Son has the Father.

There's a breakdown of relationship. I think one thing that John is trying to teach us is that fellowship or relationships do not flourish where truth is not told and treasured.

[9 : 58] Especially about Jesus. And it's a reminder, John tells us, of the importance of truth and a faithful teaching of the gospel of truth for our fellowship.

Day in and day out, being rooted and grounded in the truth is not simply a matter of having all the right answers in our heads. But it's a matter of right relationships flourishing.

And there's always a temptation in the church to think that muting or softening the truth is what's going to ultimately preserve our fellowship and hold us together in the midst of difference.

Or if we put some other truth at the center other than the truth of Christ, we deny or we displace, then we can find a way forward together that is more achievable and tactile and reasonable and experiential and agreeable.

And so John warns us through this image of the Antichrist. He says, lies about Jesus are what will destroy your fellowship.

[11:04] So be on guard. And then John instructs us, secondly, what is it that deepens our fellowship? I love James Wagner at the 730 service.

He said, what is the antidote to the Antichrist? In other words, if the Antichrist and lies about Jesus are what destroy our fellowship, then what is it that deepens it?

What develops it? What energizes it? What makes it grow and builds it up? And John's very clear here. He says it's very simple.

It's the word of God working by the spirit of God. It's the spirit of God working through the word of God. It's the apostolic word with the anointing spirit.

And you notice here in this passage, you'll see this as you look. Six times in our passage, the language of abiding shows up. Language of abiding, by the way, is just the language of hospitality.

[12:04] It means remain in us or dwell in us. Or some places in scripture literally make your home in us. And so six times the language of abiding is used here.

And three times in the passage, the language of abiding is about what abides in us. And three times the language is about us abiding in God. So there's a two directional thing happening here.

And one of the key things is to understand that what abides in us is what leads to us abiding in God. In other words, it's God's abiding in us that leads to our abiding in God.

Does that make sense? I think it's worth pausing here for just a second because getting this right is absolutely key for understanding how the Christian life works. It's not our abiding in God that leads to God abiding in us.

It's God's abiding in us that bears fruit in our abiding in God. And I'll show you this in just a second. But I think this is really important because I think we have this tendency to fall into a problematic logic in our relationship with God.

[13:13] Even as Christians, those have been Christians for a long time. There's this sense that, you know, God can be a bit difficult and demanding and hard to please sometimes. And if I just do enough right things, then I might satisfy him sufficiently to get his love.

Now, most of us, because we have good theology, would never state this theology. We would never write it down. We would never say it with words. We'd never confess it on a Sunday. But it may be how we actually feel when it comes to God.

And the New Testament blows this logic out of the water. It says God is like a shepherd who leaves the 99 to go after the one. He's like a woman who stays up all day and night to search for the one lost coin.

The New Testament says God cannot love you more than he already does and more than he already has on the cross. And so the major problem of the Christian life is not that we cannot earn God's love.

We know we cannot earn God's love. But it's that we have not fully opened ourselves to it. And so a very unique vision of the Christian life emerges where our experiential connection and communion with God is strengthened, not just by doing all the right things and meeting all his demands, although he loves when we obey him and loves when we are carefully attentive to his word, but it's by becoming open and receptive to his truth and his love abiding in us by his word and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

[14:50] So everything that we do, like Bible study and prayer and fasting and spiritual practices and communal gatherings and counseling, you name it, it's not about trying to get God to abide in us.

It's about being in a posture of open receptivity to the God who already abides in us. It's about being ready to receive what he's already given and to hear what he's already spoken and to experience what he has already shared.

Let me show you this in a couple places. Look at verse 24. John says, Let what you have heard from the beginning abide in you.

Notice that. This is something that he is saying you have already heard. You already know this. And what you have heard from the beginning is the truth about the Lord Jesus Christ, who he is, what he came to do, what he has done for you.

Let this message, it's not a new message, you already know it, but let this that you have heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, notice the logic here, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father.

[16:12] Did you notice that? So John's saying, let what you've heard from the beginning, let the truth about Jesus abide in your life, remain in your life, dwell in you, make its home in you.

And if that is happening, then the result is going to be that you are going to be abiding in God. You're going to be making your home in God. You're going to be dwelling and remaining in God. And notice here how it's the word. It's what you have heard that is so key. Now go down to verses 26 and 27.

John does a parallel statement. He says, I write things to you about those who are trying to deceive you, but the anointing that you receive from him abides in you.

So notice how the first thing he was mentioning is, let the word that you have heard abide in you.

And now he's saying, the anointing that you have received abides in you.

[17:13] And this is a reference to the Holy Spirit. You have been anointed and received the Holy Spirit. And the Spirit abides in you. And he goes on, 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 is taught you, abide in him.

There it is again. So his anointing abides in you and teaches you everything you need to know, and it leads to you abiding in him.

Does that make sense? Now this anointing is quite interesting. Here, John is talking about the gift of the Holy Spirit.

And he says that the Holy Spirit is going to teach you all things, I think, or everything. I think he's referring to Christ specifically. He's not going to teach you everything about everything. He's going to teach you everything you need to know about the Lord Jesus Christ to stay rooted and grounded and abiding in him.

Now this is, this is really, this is actually quite an amazing thing. Because John is showing us that the Word and the Spirit go together in the Christian life.

[18:34] It's not one or the other. It's both working together. And in our own lives and in the church, we can tend to err one way or the other. We can honor the Word and sometimes neglect or forget the Spirit.

Who alone can teach us. And sometimes we can honor the Spirit, but we can neglect the Word that he teaches to us. And here, John is telling us that the Spirit works through the Word, and the Word works in us by the power of the Spirit.

To use Paul's language, it's let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, be filled with the Holy Spirit. Both happen simultaneously.

And I think if we have any temptation at St. John's, it may be that we honor the Word, but sometimes forget the Spirit. The anointing that God is giving us. We might sometimes be tempted to confess, I believe in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Bible.

So I think it's worth pondering the gift of the Spirit for just a moment. What does the Spirit do for us that is so essential?

[19:46] The Spirit takes the Word and lights it on fire in our hearts. The Spirit takes the words of the Gospel and makes them come alive in us so that the person that the words are speaking about, the person and work of Jesus Christ, feel that they are the most supreme and delightful and satisfying reality in our lives.

So what the Spirit does is the Spirit opens our minds to see the truth about Jesus in Scripture, and then the Spirit opens our hearts to savor the truth that we see in Scripture, and then the Spirit transforms us to become like the one that we see and savor in Scripture.

And it's a little bit like meeting a person. So you can, these days, you can Google anybody on the Internet, right?

So if you're going to meet somebody or you hear about someone and you haven't met them before, you can Google them on the Internet and you can probably find out a whole lot of things about them. Or for me, when I was dating my wife, we were in the same friend group, but we weren't

directly friends with each other for about two years before I asked her out.

And I learned a lot of things about her during that time. I learned about how she related to other people. I learned about her character. I learned about her faith. All these things from watching at a distance.

[21 : 12] But there came a certain moment in time where I had to directly engage her. And the only way for me to get to know her more deeply is for her to actually speak to me.

And when she started speaking to me, it confirmed some of the things I knew. Oh yeah, I saw that from a distance. I can tell. That rings true with what I said. But as she started speaking to me about herself, it actually revealed deeper things about her that I didn't know.

Or it revealed some things that I thought I knew and I was actually really wrong about. And there comes a point in time in any given relationship where if that relationship is going to go anywhere, if it is going to deepen, if it's going to be truly life-giving, we have to come to trust what that person is speaking about themselves and revealing to us.

And what the Holy Spirit does is the Holy Spirit brings us from distrust to a place of trust. That is what is being spoken about the Lord Jesus is true.

And that we can bank our whole lives on it. So John tells us the Antichrist has come and is spreading lies about Jesus and that destroys our fellowship.

[22 : 27] But God has given something much more powerful than the world throws at us. He gives us his word and his spirit to minister to us the truth and the life of the Lord Jesus.

And John also tells us that this fellowship that he gives us is a precious gift from the Lord. It's a danger if we take it for granted or just pay attention to it when it's convenient or needed.

Like a marriage or a friendship, fellowship, if neglected over time, can break down. And we actively need to protect it and deepen it. And this happens as we let the word and the spirit abide and dwell and remain and make its home in us.

And in verse 25, one of the special things that John highlights for us, and this is where I want to end, is that it is the special power of God's gifts of the word and spirit to draw us into the depths of God's life.

He says, this is the promise that God made to us, eternal life. If you have the word of God and the spirit of God in you, then you have Jesus.

[23 : 38] And if you have Jesus, then you have the son of God. And if you have the son of God, then you have the father. And if you have the father and the son and the Holy Spirit, then you have eternal life.

And John says, this is what he came to give you. This is what he came to protect in you. This is what he came to develop and deepen in you. And if you cling to him, then you will never lose him. Brothers and sisters, I speak these things to you in the name of the father and the son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.