

An Expository Study of 1 John
Part 4 (of 10 parts):

An Exposition of 1 John 2:18-28

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In the preceding portion of the epistle (1:5-2:17) John presented grounds for assurance through the test of fellowship. He wrote of the contrasts between light and darkness, truth and error, obedience and disobedience, things temporal and things eternal. In the long section beginning with 2:18 John turned to offer his readers assurance through the conflicts of faith (2:18-4:6). Assurance concerning one's Christian faith can be drawn from the nature of the enemies he encounters. John insisted that these enemies must be exposed for what they are and believers encouraged to understand the dangers they present and to defeat them with the spiritual equipment God has provided. These conflicts are portrayed under four aspects: (1) the conflict between truth and falsehood (2:18-28); (2) the conflict between the children of God and the children of the devil (2:29-3:12); (3) the conflict between love and hatred (3:13-24); and (4) the conflict between the Spirit of God and the spirit of error (4:1-6).

Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth. 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. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also. As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what

you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life. These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him. And now, little children, abide in Him, so that if He should appear, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming (1 John 2:18-28).

The conflict between truth and falsehood is brought into sharp focus by the presence of the anti-Christian false teachers. John called attention to the crisis facing believers (vv. 18-19), indicated the resources of believers to deal with these opponents (vv. 20-21), underlined the test to distinguish true from false believers (vv. 22-25), and instructed his readers in the face of the dangers (vv. 26-28).

The Crisis Facing Believers

In launching into his discussion on the conflicts of faith, John first declared the reality of the crisis hour (v. 18) and then delineated the nature of the crisis (v. 19).

THE REALITY OF THE CURRENT CRISIS (v. 18)

John marked a new beginning by again addressing his readers as "children" (Παιδία; cf. 2:14). In support of the view that the term includes all his readers, Plummer remarks, "It is difficult to see anything in this section specially suitable to children: indeed the very reverse is rather the case."¹ The term suggests John's fatherly concern for his beloved readers as needing his guidance in facing the current crisis.

The assertion (v. 18a). "It is the last hour" (ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν) marks the crucial, situation. The term "last hour" obviously was not intended as a literal chronological assertion. Since the original does not have the definite article, two renderings, "the last hour," or "a last hour," are possible. In support of the former rendering, commonly used in English versions, it is held that the expression is sufficiently definite without the article, "for there can be only one last hour." Or it may be viewed as a technical term that does not need the definite article.² But some like Westcott³ insist on render-

¹ A Plummer, *The Epistles of S. John*, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (1883; reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), p. 105.

² H E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (reprint, New York: Macmillan Co., 1967), p. 149.

³ Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John: The Greek Text with Notes and Essays* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950), p. 68.

ing the phrase "a last hour." Since this exact expression occurs only here in the New Testament, Lenski feels that it cannot be treated as a well-known concept that needed no article, and so he asserts, "The term is plainly qualitative."⁴

The rendering "the last hour" is commonly understood to denote the period immediately preceding the return of Christ. Thus *The Living Bible Paraphrased* renders the phrase by the words "this world's last hour has come."⁵ But this view is open to the charge that "John was wrong."⁶ While accepting the eschatological reference, Marshall notes that "John does not commit himself to any time-scale. Like the New Testament authors generally he does not delimit precisely the expected date of the parousia."⁷

Jesus told His disciples that the time of His return was unrevealed (Matt. 24:36), but He instructed them to live in constant readiness for His return (Matt. 24:44; 25:12-13; Luke 12:40). He also told them that before His return apostasy and the presence of false prophets would characterize the scene (Matt. 24:11-12; Mark 13:22-23). As John contemplated the appearing of "many antichrists" in his own day, he was fully aware that the characteristics of the end-time, as foretold by Jesus, were present. While John avoided any specific time declaration for the return of Christ, he stressed the urgency of the time, which manifested eschatological characteristics. Clearly the characteristics of the end-time as foretold by Jesus already manifested themselves before the close of the apostolic era.

The powers of the future eschatological kingdom actually entered the scenes of human history during the first advent of Christ (Heb. 6:5). The presence of the incarnate Messiah brought human history face to face with the reality of the eschatological kingdom. Because Israel rejected her King, the kingdom in its eschatological character was not established; that awaits His return in glory. But according to J. H. Newman that encounter with the eschatological future changed the direction of history.

Up to Christ's coming in the flesh, the course of things ran straight toward that end, nearing it by every step; but now, under the Gospel, that course has (if I may so speak) altered its direction, as regards His second coming, and runs, not towards the end, but along it, and on the

⁴ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude* (1945; reprint, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966), p. 429.

⁵ *The Living Bible Paraphrased* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1971).

⁶ William Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude*, *The Daily Study Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958), p. 71.

⁷ I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.), p. 149.

brink of it; and is at all times near that great event, which, did it run towards it, it would at once run into it. Christ, then is ever at our doors.⁸

Marshall, after quoting and diagramming this comment, declares,

This is a helpful analogy. It preserves the sense of urgency and imminence found in the New Testament on the basis of the principle that God is capable of extending the last hour (for the excellent reason in 2 Pet. 3:9) while retaining his own secret counsel on its duration.⁹

Since John's day human history has repeatedly been marked by the characteristics of "the last hour." And the present times strongly cry out with the sense of impending destiny. Only God's longsuffering mercy holds back the manifestation of Christ's impending eschatological return (2 Pet. 3:8-9).

The sign (v. 18b). With "and" (καὶ) John immediately added the justifying sign for his assertion. "And just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour." The words "just as you heard that antichrist is coming" recall the prophetic teaching John's readers had received as part of their instruction in the faith. The aorist rendered "you heard" (ἠκούσατε) summarizes the varied occasions when they heard the apostolic teaching that "antichrist is coming" (ἀντίχριστος ἔρχεται). The present tense "is coming" (ἔρχεται) is futuristic, conveying the "future of prophetic fixity,"¹⁰ while the singular "antichrist" points to an individual yet to come. John's readers were familiar with the apostolic teaching concerning the coming of a final, personal "Antichrist" (2 Thess. 2:3-4, 8-9), a teaching rooted in the ministry of Christ Himself (Matt. 24:11-15; Mark 13:14). The term "antichrist" (ἀντίχριστος) occurs only in 1 and 2 John (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7), but the concept is important on the pages of Scripture (Dan. 7:11-14; Matt. 24:24-28; Mark 13:14-23; 2 Thess. 2:3-12; Rev. 13:1-10; 19:19-20). In the compound term the prefix ἀντι may mean either "against" or "instead of." The biblical picture of the "antichrist" suggests that both thoughts are involved in the designation. The term is synonymous with Paul's "man of lawlessness . . . who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship" (2 Thess. 2:3-4). As Plummer remarks, "The Antichrist is a usurper, who under false pretenses assumes a position which does not belong to him, and who opposes the rightful owner. The idea of opposition is the predominant one."¹¹

⁸ J. H. Newman, "Waiting for Christ," *Parochial and Plain Sermons* (London: Longman's, 1896), p. 241.

⁹ Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, p. 150.

¹⁰ Henry Alford, *The New Testament for English Readers* (reprint, Chicago: Moody Press, n.d.), p. 1712.

¹¹ Plummer, *The Epistles of S. John*, p. 107.

In writing "just as . . . even now" (καθὼς . . . καὶ νῦν, 1 John 2:18b) John placed the future coming of the personal Antichrist as a parallel reality to the existence of the "many antichrists" (ἀντίχριστοι πολλοί) when he wrote. "Many" implies they were a strong group. His use of the perfect tense "have arisen" (γεγόνασιν) recognizes their historical arrival and their present impact on the church and the world. The verb, literally "have come into being," marks a contrast between these antichrists who have their origin during the course of history and Christ who is from all eternity (John 1:1; 1 John 1:2).

From the presence of these antichrists John drew his conclusion about the character of the time: "from this we know that it is the last hour" (v. 18c). Their presence pointed to the coming Antichrist and showed that "the mystery of lawlessness is already at work" (2 Thess. 2:7), making clear the character of the hour. While John felt it necessary to remind his readers of the spiritual significance of the situation, his use of the comprehensive "we know" (γινώσκουμεν) implies that "the *actuality* is evident to every believer without exception."¹² John was well aware that these contemporary antichrists were possessed by the spirit of the coming Antichrist. But it is unwarranted to assume that John thereby "historicized" and "rationalized the myth" of the personal end-time Antichrist.¹³ John simply insisted that these "many antichrists" point to the coming of the future Antichrist in that they already manifest the spirit of that final opponent of Christ.

THE NATURE OF THE CURRENT CRISIS (v. 19)

John's statement, "They went out from us, but they were not really of us," relates the appearance of these antichrists to the Christian church. He omitted all details since his readers already knew what had taken place. The clause "they went out" (ἐξῆλθαν) implies not that they were excommunicated but that they voluntarily withdrew. Clark suggests that perhaps "they were psychologically incapable of bearing up under strong orthodox teachings."¹⁴ Clearly the orthodox majority refused to accept their views. Their withdrawal was not simply a matter of leaving one church to join another. Rather, their "departure, like Judas's going out from the community of disciples, pointed to betrayal, denial of faith, and sepa-

¹² Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 51 (Waco, TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1984), p. 100 (italics his).

¹³ Rudolph Bultmann, *The Johannine Epistles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), p. 36, n. 3; C. H. Dodd, *The Johannine Epistles*, The Moffatt New Testament Commentary (New York: Harper & Row, 1946), p. 49.

¹⁴ Gordon H. Clark, *First John: A Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., n.d.), p. 75.

ration from God's grace."¹⁵ "From us" (ἐξ ἡμῶν), placed emphatically at the beginning of the sentence, underlines John's self-identification with the orthodox majority. "Us" includes all true believers, whether of Jewish or Gentile origin. Van Gorder notes that "this pronoun is used five times in verse 19, underscoring the wonderful fellowship that marked the early believers."¹⁶

The departure of the heretics revealed their true nature, making clear that "they were not really of us" (ἀλλ' οὐκ ἦσαν ἐξ ἡμῶν). The strong adversative "but" (ἀλλ') marks the clear contrast. Their definite act of departure is contrasted with their continuing state of "not of us." Outwardly they had been members of the church, but inwardly they never shared the inner spiritual fellowship of the group. Their defection had the effect of purifying the church and marking the clear distinction between truth and error.

With the word "for" (γάρ) John added the significance of their departure, "for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us." The "if" construction assumes a condition contrary to reality: "If they had been of us (but they weren't), they would have remained with us (but they didn't)." Their departure proved that they had a different spiritual origin, that they belonged to another camp. It proved that they did not have the inner life of true believers. The test of experience had made clear the distinction between true and counterfeit believers. As Bruce observes, "Continuance is the test of reality."¹⁷ "He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6). Stott remarks, "This verse also gives biblical warrant for some distinction between the visible and invisible Church."¹⁸

The added words, "but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us," point to a divine purpose behind their departure. "But" (ἀλλ') points to a strong contrast between their hypothetical continuance and their actual departure. The Greek construction (ἀλλ' ἵνα) is elliptical, implying the words "they went out." The phrase "in order that" (ἵνα) sets forth the purpose, not of the heretics, but of God, in their departure, "that it might be shown that they all are not of us." God used their departure to lay

¹⁵ Glenn W. Barker, "1 John," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), p. 324.

¹⁶ Paul R. Van Gorder, *In the Family: Lessons from First John* (Grand Rapids: Radio Bible Class, 1978), p. 88.

¹⁷ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles of John* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1970), p.

¹⁸ J. R. W. Stott, *The Epistles of John*, *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), p. 106.

bare the true nature of these departing heretics. It was decisive proof "that they all are not of us."¹⁹ Westcott points out that when the Greek verb stands between the negative (οὐκ) and "all" (πάντες), as here, the negation is always universal rather than partial. Their departure made clear that "none of them belonged to us" (NIV). Bruce suggests that John thus sought to assure "that his readers should not be shaken in the faith by the secession of their former associates."²⁰ John used "of us" (ἐξ ἡμῶν) four times and "with us" (μεθ' ἡμῶν) once in this verse to stress the unity of the true believers with whom John associated himself. "Not those who deny the Christ are important, but the believers."²¹

The Resources of the Believers

John now reminded his readers of the resources they had to meet the crisis. They had an anointing from the Holy One (v. 20a) and the knowledge of the truth (vv. 20b-21).

THE ANOINTING FROM THE HOLY ONE (v. 20a)

With his "but you" (καὶ ὑμεῖς) John again turned directly to his readers with assuring words. The use of the emphatic pronoun (ὑμεῖς) lends support to the rendering "but" for the conjunction (καὶ), usually rendered "and."²² In spite of the claims of these heretics, John assured his readers that they truly had the spiritual equipment to resist these antichrists. Of primary importance is the fact that "you have an anointing from the Holy One" (χρῖσμα ἔχετε ἀπὸ τοῦ ἁγίου). The noun "anointing," the object of the verb, stands emphatically forward. Based on the verb χρίω, "to anoint," the noun does not denote the act of anointing but rather the result of the action. In the Septuagint the noun is used of the "anointing oil" (cf. Exod. 29:7; 30:25), and in Daniel 9:26 it is used metaphorically of "the Messiah." In the New Testament the term occurs only in 1 John (2:20, 27

¹⁹ The Greek is somewhat ambiguous and two renderings are possible: (1) "that not all in our company truly belong to us" (NEB), implying that not all formal members are truly saved, and (2) "that none of them belonged to us" (NIV). Since the verse deals with the exodus of the antichrists, the latter is preferable. The latter is the commonly accepted reading in modern translations. The former is the reading of the KJV, but the New King James Version reads, "none of them were of us."

²⁰ Bruce, *The Epistles of John*, p. 70.

²¹ Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle of James and the Epistles of John*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), p. 276.

²² If the conjunction καὶ is rendered "and" or "also," the implication seems to be that these anti-Christian heretics made the vaunted claim that they had received a special "anointing" that distinguished them from the rest of the church members. Whatever the claims of the heretics, John assured his readers that they did indeed have "an anointing from the Holy One."

[twice]). John did not identify this anointing, but it is generally agreed that it refers to the Holy Spirit imparted to the believer at regeneration. The figure of anointing is used of the Holy Spirit in connection with Jesus' ministry (Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38), and in 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 it is used of God's work in establishing the believer. John's statement here seems reminiscent of the promise of Jesus in the fourth Gospel about the coming of the Spirit (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). The verb "you have" (ἔχετε) indicates the continued possession of this anointing. The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit establishes believers in their faith and enables them to understand God's truth.

Dodd understood the metaphor differently; he held that this anointing is the Word of God and he said it is "a prophylactic against the poison of false teaching."²³ Dodd felt that this view of the anointing freed the believer's knowledge of the truth from the danger of subjectivism.²⁴ But Burdick replies that Dodd's argument "that the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit is too subjective to be trustworthy loses its force in the light of Paul's declaration, 'The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God' (Rom. 8:16)."²⁵ Kistemaker notes that "Scripture never mentions the Word of God in relation to anointing."²⁶ It is preferable to hold that the "anointing" denotes the Holy Spirit, "since, according to verse 27, the anointing 'teaches.' This clearly suggests that the 'anointing' is conceived of as a Person."²⁷

Marshall suggests that these two interpretations of the "anointing" should be combined.²⁸ The objective truth of the Word and the inner work of the Spirit must not be divorced in Christian experience. Both are essential for balance in Christian faith and life. In verse 24 John insisted that his readers' adhere to the objective message they received. The Spirit is the Agent who enables the believer to appropriate and apply the Word of God in daily experience.

The anointing was received "from the Holy One" (ἀπὸ τοῦ ἁγίου), stressing the sanctity of the Giver. The reference may be to God the Father, "the Holy One of Israel" (Isa. 1:4; etc.) or to the in-

²³ Dodd, *The Johannine Epistles*, p. 63.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 63-64.

²⁵ Donald W. Burdick, *The Letters of John the Apostle: An In-Depth Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), p. 197.

²⁶ Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle of James and the Epistles of John*, p. 279, n. 55.

²⁷ Zane C. Hodges, "1 John," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, 2 vols. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 2:892.

²⁸ Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, p. 155.

carnate Son, "the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24; John 6:69; Acts 2:27). Views differ as to the intended identity. Biblical references associate both the Father and Jesus Christ with the coming of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26; Acts 2:33). The Spirit is indeed "the Spirit of God" (Rom. 8:9) as well as "the Spirit of Jesus" (Acts 16:7). While a study of the pronouns in 1 John 2:27-28 strongly suggests that the reference is to Christ Himself here, Smalley suggests that "John is possibly being deliberately ambivalent at this point."²⁹ Elsewhere John's pronouns often do not draw a sharp distinction between the Father and the Son, implying John's unquestioned acceptance of the full deity of the incarnate Son.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH (vv. 20b-21)

The connecting "and" (καί) introduces a second resource which the readers possess, "and you all know" (καὶ οἴδατε πάντες). The Greek manuscripts have two different readings, depending on the case for "all." The reading in the King James Version, "and you know all things," with πάντα as the direct object of the verb, follows the Textus Receptus and the majority of the later manuscripts. The reading "and you all know," taking πάντες in the nominative in apposition to the subject of the verb, follows important early manuscripts.³⁰ The Textus Receptus reading certainly cannot mean that the readers "know all things"; but those supporting the reading reply that "all things" is limited by "the truth." But Lenski replies, "Even so, this says too much and says it unnecessarily. A Christian does not need to know everything in order to know who is an antichristian liar."³¹ The reading "you all know" is preferable, for it is consistent with John's assurance that his readers do have an anointing and are not dependent on an elite few. They know the reality and reliability of God's truth through the teaching of the indwelling Spirit. The Greek verb "know" (οἴδατε) suggests that the reference is not to studiously acquired knowledge but to innate knowledge. This knowledge, wrought in their hearts by the Holy Spirit, enables them to know the difference between God's truth and the spurious claims of the Gnostics.

Verse 21 reiterates John's assurance that his readers knew and were adhering to "the truth" they had received. "I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it" assured them that he was not seeking to impart new truth but to sup-

²⁹ Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, p. 108.

³⁰ For the textual evidence see Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 26th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung).

³¹ Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude*, p. 436.

port them in their adherence to "the truth" in the face of the false teachers. With his epistolary aorist, "I have written" (ἔγραψα), John placed himself at the time they would read what he had written. The reference may be to the whole epistle, but more probably he was thinking of what he had written in verses 18-20.

Negatively, he said he had not written "because you do not know the truth" (ὅτι οὐκ οἴδατε τὴν ἀλήθειαν). The conjunction ὅτι can mean "because" or "that," but clearly it here indicates the reason for writing, not the content of what he wrote. They were not to feel that he was seeking to lead them into a new understanding of "the truth" (τὴν ἀλήθειαν) "as the living (not abstract, or purely intellectual) reality of God, whose 'true' nature has been supremely revealed in ... Christ."³²

In typical Johannine fashion, the positive is added: "but because you do know it" (ἀλλ' ὅτι οἴδατε αὐτήν). This pastoral assurance was designed to confirm their rejection of the many antichrists that had arisen (v. 18). As Barclay observes, "The greatest Christian defense is simply to remember what we know."³³

The precise rendering of the words "and because no lie is of the truth" (καὶ ὅτι πᾶν ψεῦδος ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας οὐκ ἔστιν) is less certain. Here ὅτι may have the meaning "that" and the following words understood as dependent on the preceding "ye know," "and know that no lie is of the truth" (RSV).³⁴ Thus understood, John's positive reason is given a double statement. He was referring to the knowledge of the readers as it relates to falsehood. But Plummer insists that if the conjunction means "because" in the first phrase "it is the simplest and most natural to take the second and third in the same way."³⁵ Then these words express a further reason for John's assurance concerning the readers. He was certain that truth and falsehood cannot mingle, that a lie can never be an inherent part of the truth.

The Confrontation with the Antichrists

The presence of the many antichrists demands that believers know the identifying mark of these antichrists (vv. 22-23). Having identified them, they must use their resources to resist them (vv. 24-25).

³² Smalley, *I, 2, 3 John*, p. 109.

³³ Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude*, p. 78.

³⁴ *The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version* (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Co., 1962). Similarly *The King James Version* (Cambridge University Press); Helen Barrett Montgomery, *The New Testament in Modern English* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1924); Gerrit Verkuyl, ed., *The Modern Language Bible, The New Berkeley Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1969); and apparently *The Living Bible Paraphrased*.

³⁵ Plummer, *The Epistles of S. John*, p. 112.

THE MARK OF FALSE AND TRUE BELIEVERS (vv. 22-23)

John emphatically established the identity of the antichristian liar (vv. 22-23a) and simply stated the basic criterion of the true believer (v. 23b).

The mark of the liar (vv. 22-23a). The rhetorical question, "Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ?" uttered without any connecting particle, is arresting in its abruptness. The words "Who is the liar" (Τίς ἐστὶν ὁ ψεύστης) call for the personal identification of such an individual when encountered. The articular masculine noun, "the liar," marks the change from the abstract to the concrete, calling for identification of that one as belonging to that category. "But the one who denies" (εἰ μὴ ὁ ἀρνούμενος, literally, "if not the one denying") indicates that anyone characterized by this crucial denial cannot escape justly being branded as "the liar." If he is not "the liar," then no one is. He is the liar par excellence. He is identified by his characteristic denial, "the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ" (ὁ ἀρνούμενος ὅτι Ἰησοῦς οὐκ ἐστὶν ὁ Χριστός). The conjunction ὅτι is recitative and introduces the very words of his denial, "Jesus is not the Christ." It is not a matter of doubt but of an open refusal to accept this basic Christian doctrine. He openly rejects the apostolic teaching of the Incarnation (cf. John 1:14, 18; 1 John 1:1-3). It is not merely a Jewish rejection of Jesus of Nazareth as the personal Messiah, since John identified Him as "the Son." It is the denial that in Jesus of Nazareth God and man are indissolubly united.

The precise identity of these heretics has been much debated, but it is generally accepted that some form of Gnosticism is involved. Some form of philosophical dualism motivated this denial. Docetic Gnosticism held that the divine Christ-spirit was too holy to have been united with human nature. Cerinthian Gnosticism held that the aeon-Christ came on the man Jesus at His baptism and empowered His ministry but left Him before His crucifixion, and only a man died on the cross.

Whatever the precise identity of these heretics, John regarded their denial as the height of heresy, constituting a direct attack on the very heart of the apostolic message of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. In saying, "This is the antichrist" (οὗτος ἐστὶν ὁ ἀντίχριστος), the demonstrative pronoun (οὗτος) as it were points out the individual and stamps him as "the antichrist,"³⁶ not the personal Antichrist but the very embodiment of his spirit. His denial is "seen not merely as erroneous thinking but as diabolically in-

³⁶ The James Moffatt version suggestively renders This is 'antichrist.'" See Dodd, *The Johannine Epistles*, p. 47.

spired."³⁷ The oppositional identification, "the one who denies the Father and the Son" (ὁ ἀρνούμενος τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὸν υἱόν), establishes his diabolical anti-Christian spirit. The present articular participle (ὁ ἀρνούμενος "the one denying") portrays his open and deliberate refusal to acknowledge the reality concerning "the Father and the Son."

Whatever may have been their teaching about God, John declared that these anti-Christian heretics had no personal relationship with God as "Father" because their denial of "the Son" inevitably involved a denial of the Father, who revealed Himself in the incarnate Son. This absolute designation "the Son" occurs here for the first time in the epistle. In the first part of this verse Jesus is accepted as "the Christ"; now He is called "the Son." The two designations relate to one Person. Westcott points out that, "there is no passage in the mind of the Apostle from one personality to another, from the human to the divine, nor yet from the conception of 'the man Christ Jesus' to that of 'the Word': the thought of 'the Son' includes both these conceptions in their ideal fulness."³⁸

In verse 23a John carried the result a step further: "Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father" (πᾶς ὁ ἀρνούμενος τὸν υἱὸν οὐδὲ τὸν πατέρα ἔχει). Their denial of the Son also means that they have no personal relationship with God as "the Father." They do not stand in any child-parent relationship with Him. By their denial of the Son "they *ipso facto* excommunicate themselves from the great Christian family in which Christ is the Brother, and God is the Father, of all believers."³⁹ "Whoever denies" (πᾶς ὁ ἀρνούμενος, literally, "every one denying") marks this as a universal fact concerning all deniers of the Son.

The confession of the true believer (v. 23b).⁴⁰ Over against the denials of the heretics stands the confession of the believer: "the one who confesses the Son has the Father also." The singular, "the one who confesses" (ὁ ὁμολογῶν, literally, "the one confessing"), marks this confession as an activity of an individual, not of a group. It marks his open testimony to and acceptance of the truth concerning "the Son," bringing the assurance that he "has the Father also" (καὶ τὸν πατέρα ἔχει). He possesses conscious communion with the Fa-

³⁷ Burdick, *The Letters of John the Apostle*, p. 201.

³⁸ Westcott, *The Epistles of S. John*, p. 76.

³⁹ Plummer, *The Epistles of S. John*, p. 113.

⁴⁰ The King James Version prints this part of verse 23 in italics, implying that it does not occur in the Greek manuscripts. But modern critical editions list no manuscripts that do not contain these words. This part of the verse is unquestionably genuine.

ther, since the Father unequivocally mediates His presence to the believer through the Son (John 14:6, 9).

THE APPEAL TO THE TRUE BELIEVERS (vv. 24-25)

The crucial importance of confessing the truth concerning the Son forms the basis for John's appeal to adhere to the truth they had received. John stated his appeal (v. 24a) and indicated the results of abiding in the truth (vv. 24b-25).

The admonition (v. 24a). The emphatic personal pronoun "as for you" (ὁμοίως) calls attention to John's direct appeal to his readers, and serves to heighten the contrast between them and the heretics. His appeal is, "Let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning" (ὅ ἠκούσατε ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ἐν ὑμῖν μενέτω, literally, "that which you heard from the beginning, in you let it be abiding"). "That which you heard" denotes the apostolic message, viewed as a coherent whole, to which they must adhere in contrast to any teaching the heretics might advance. "From the beginning" (ἀπ' ἀρχῆς) carries them back to the time they first heard and received that message, but the aorist verb "you heard" (ἠκούσατε) includes the entire period since then, during which they had been hearing that same message. It is the continuity of the apostolic message to which John appealed: "let it abide in you," continue to be at home and operative in your lives. Letting this original message abide in them is equivalent to their abiding in Christ (v. 28). Therein lay their safety and effectiveness as believers. Stott remarks, "The continuous obsession for 'some new thing' is a mark of the Athenian not the Christian (Acts xvii. 21)."⁴¹

The results (vv. 24b-25). In expressing the result of this abiding John deliberately restated the concept of abiding⁴² in his conditional statement: "If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father" (v. 24b).⁴³ The use of the third class conditional sentence, "If what you heard from the beginning" (ἐάν ἐν ὑμῖν μείνη ὅ ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ἠκούσατε), leaves open the matter of their fulfillment of the condition; it challenges them to make sure the condition is fulfilled. The effective indwelling of God's Word involves their cooperation.

The fulfilled condition assures that "you also will abide in the Son and in the Father" (καὶ ὑμεῖς ἐν τῷ υἱῷ καὶ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ μενεῖτε). The "also" (καὶ) assured them that with the indwelling Word they

⁴¹ Stott, *The Epistles of John*, p. 113.

⁴² In verses 24-28 John expressed this concept of abiding no less than six times.

⁴³ The NIV eliminates the reiteration of the concept of abiding by rendering "If it does, you also will...."

would also" know the reality of abiding "in the Son and in the Father." Smalley suggests that the plural pronouns have not merely an individual but also a corporate and community reference: "As the gospel dwells in *the Church*, so the *Church* dwells in the Son and in the Father."⁴⁴ The Son is now named before the Father to indicate "that He is the key to any relationship with God (John 14:6)."⁴⁵ The force of the future "will abide" (μενεῖτε) is progressive and expresses the continuing reality of fellowship with God.

The opening "And" (καί) of verse 25 introduces a further result assured to those adhering to God's Word: "And this is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life." The feminine demonstrative pronoun rendered "this" (αὕτη) most naturally looks forward to the expression "the eternal life" (τὴν ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον) and is the predicate nominative of the verb "is": "the promise which He Himself promised us is this—the life, the eternal." The relative clause "which He Himself promised us" (ἣν αὐτὸς ἐπηγγείλατο ἡμῖν) is parallel in thought to "that which you heard from the beginning" (v. 24). It relates back to the beginning of the Christian faith. This promise of eternal life connects with the repeated promises of Jesus in the fourth Gospel (3:14-15, 36; 4:14; 5:24; 6:40, 47; 8:51; 17:2; 20:31). Both the position at the end of the sentence and the repeated article with the adjective stress the nature of the life Christ promised. While this life will have its future eschatological unfolding for the glorified saints, it is already the possession of everyone in faith united to Jesus Christ (John 3:16, 36; 5:24; 1 John 3:2; 5:13). It is a life both quantitatively and qualitatively new.

The Resources of Believers in the Face of Danger

Verses 26-28 are a summary conveying renewed reminders about the conflict between truth and falsehood. John reminded of the danger from the heretics (v. 26), recalled the equipment given through the anointing received (v. 27), and pointed to the hope of Christ's return as motivation for abiding in Him (v. 28).

THE DANGER FROM THE DECEIVERS (v. 26)

John again referred to the crisis facing his readers: "These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you." "These things I have written to you" (Ταῦτα ἔγραψα ὑμῖν) does not refer to a previous letter; the epistolary aorist views this letter from the time the recipients will read it. "These things" (ταῦτα) could refer to the epistle as a whole, but most probably they

⁴⁴ Smalley, *I, 2, 3 John*, p. 120 (italics his).

⁴⁵ Burdick, *The Letters of John the Apostle*, p. 204.

refer to verses 18-25, since they contain the most explicit treatment thus far "concerning those who are trying to deceive you" (περὶ τῶν πλανώτων ὑμᾶς). In verse 18 John called them "antichrists," exposing their true character; now he characterized them as "those who are trying to deceive you," underlining their seductive efforts. The articular present participle (τῶν πλανώντων) points to the heretics as a group characterized by their continuing efforts to deceive, or "lead astray." Though they had formally withdrawn from the Christian community (v. 19), these former members still aggressively sought to influence the faithful, intent on "deceiving" and leading them astray from the apostolic faith and fellowship. John did not underestimate the strength and subtlety of these heretics and wanted his beloved readers to be alert to the danger from them.

THE EQUIPMENT THROUGH THE ANOINTING (v. 27)

The opening "And" (καὶ) adds that for the danger there is the God-given equipment. "As for you" (ὑμεῖς), a suspended nominative, underlines the sharp contrast between John's readers and the deceivers, and that because "the anointing which you received from Him abides in you" (cf. v. 20). He now reminded his readers of the reception and permanence of their anointing. "Which you received from Him" (ὃ ἐλάβετε ἀπ' αὐτοῦ) looks back to the beginning of their Christian life when by faith they accepted God's, saving message (v. 24) and the anointing was God's gift to them. That anointing now "abides in you" (μένει ἐν ὑμῖν, that is, it dwells in them as a continuing endowment, equipping them to stand firm against the deceivers.

"And" (καὶ) adds the result, "you have no need for anyone to teach you." John obviously did not mean that they no longer needed a teacher to instruct and guide them in gaining a fuller and firmer apprehension of the Christian faith and life. That is precisely what John was doing in this letter. Christian teachers are Christ's own gift to His church (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11; 2 Tim. 1:11). John here had in mind the teachings of Gnosticism, which professed to rise higher than the divine revelation in Christ proclaimed by the apostles. John assured his readers that, having received the apostolic message, they had no need to be taught by these new teachers with their professed higher spiritual insights.

This negative assertion is now grounded in the positive unfolding of the function of the divine anointing in their lives (v. 27c). The use of "but" (ἀλλ') marks the contrasting reality in their experience. The assertion that "His anointing teaches you about all things" establishes the personal nature of "His anointing" (τὸ αὐτοῦ χρίσμα).⁴⁶

⁴⁶ The reading "the same anointing" in the King James Version follows the Textus Receptus, τὸ αὐτὸ χρίσμα, the reading in A, K, L, most minuscules, and the Coptic ver-

This function, "teaches you about all things" (διδάσκει ὑμᾶς περὶ πάντων), parallels the promised work of the Holy Spirit as uttered by Jesus in John 14:26. The present tense marks this teaching as the continuing work of the Spirit, while the plural "you" indicates that this teaching is received by all those indwelt by the Spirit. Kistemaker notes, "Believers do not have to consult learned professors of theology before they can accept God's truth; in the sight of God, clergy and laity are the same; the Holy Spirit is the teacher of every believer, without distinction."⁴⁷ Bruce appropriately remarks that "the ministry of teaching must be exercised by men who themselves share the 'anointing' of which John speaks."⁴⁸ The Spirit teaches "about all things" (περὶ πάντων), all the things concerning which they needed His teaching to distinguish truth from error in any teaching being advanced. This teaching "is true and is not a lie." This typically Johannine positive-negative assertion assures that what the Spirit teaches is true to fact, in full keeping with revealed truth, and therefore is "not a lie," not a falsehood such as heretical teachers espouse.

"And just as it has taught you" reminds the readers of their own experience of the Spirit's teaching ministry. The aorist verb "it has taught" simply asserts the fact, whatever the length of their experience. "It" agrees with the "anointing" as the subject; the verb (ἐδίδαξεν) can also be rendered "as He has taught you" (NEB), with Jesus understood as the subject of the verb. The former rendering is preferable, in keeping with the verse as a whole.

The concluding clause, "you abide in Him" (μένετε ἐν αὐτῷ), presents textual and interpretive difficulty. The reading "ye shall abide in him" (KJV) represents the Textus Receptus.⁴⁹ Textual scholars generally agree that the present tense is the better supported reading, but there is no agreement as to whether μένετε is indicative or imperative. If indicative, the clause summarizes John's assurance that his readers did adhere to the apostolic Christ. This is in keeping with the declarative nature of verse 27 as a whole. But others hold that the verb here, as in verse 28, is imperative. "It is more reasonable," Burdick asserts, "for the apostle to repeat the imperative in verse 28 than it would be for him to declare in verse 27 that

sion. The reading "His anointing" (τὸ αὐτοῦ χρίσμα) has strong early support, being the reading in Aleph, B, C, P, about 20 minuscules, the Vulgate, and Coptic versions, and a number of the church fathers.

⁴⁷ Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle of James and the Epistles of John*, p. 286.

⁴⁸ Bruce, *The Epistles of John*, p. 76.

⁴⁹ The future tense is the reading of uncials K and L (8th century or later) and most minuscules. The present tense is supported by important uncials like Aleph, A, B, C, P. For the textual evidence see Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 26th ed.

the recipients are dwelling in Him and then in the very next sentence (v. 28) to *command* them to dwell in Him."⁵⁰ Then John ended verse 27 with "an exhortation to hold fast to the teaching given by the Spirit rather than to be tempted by the false teachers."⁵¹ This switch to the imperative is another reminder that "divine providence has its counterpart in human responsibility."⁵²

THE MOTIVATION FROM THE HOPE OF CHRIST'S RETURN (v. 28)

The words "And now, little children" (καὶ νῦν τέκνία) apparently mark a concluding appeal from the realities in verses 26-27. The present imperative "abide in Him" (μένετε ἐν αὐτῷ) calls for an intimate fellowship with Christ as a standing duty. It offers the true antidote to the allurements of the false teachers. It is not a call to maintain a static relationship but rather to develop and enjoy a vital spiritual fellowship with Christ.

The expressed motivation for such continued abiding in Christ is eschatological in character: "so that if He should appear, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming." John believed that the believers' prophetic hope properly exerts a practical impact on present Christian living. "If He should appear" (ἐὰν φανερωθῆ) does not express doubt concerning the fact of Christ's coming but underlines the uncertainty as to the time. The aorist passive rendered "should appear" points to Christ being made visible when He returns to earth in open glory (cf. Col. 3:4; 1 Pet. 5:4; 1 John 3:2).⁵³ In keeping with this purpose to stimulate present abiding in Christ, John pointed to the impact on believers when He does return. The benefit of abiding in that future day is stated both positively and negatively: "so that . . . we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming." With his change to "we" John included himself in this picture. Smalley notes that "John tends to distinguish himself from his readers when he is being declarative or hortatory, but to associate himself with them when he is describing the blessings and demands of the gospel."⁵⁴

Present abiding in Christ will assure that in that day "we may have confidence" (σχῶμεν παρρησίαν). The aorist verb simply points to the experience of "confidence" in that day. "Confidence" as a

⁵⁰ Burdick, *The Letters of John the Apostle*, p. 207 (italics his).

⁵¹ Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, p. 163.

⁵² Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle of James and the Epistles of John*, p. 286.

⁵³ In 1 Peter 1:20 the aorist passive is used of Christ's first advent to denote the visible appearing of the eternal Christ in His incarnate manifestation.

⁵⁴ Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, p. 130.

compound noun (παρ means "all" and ρησις means "speech") denotes that freedom and assurance which will enable the one abiding in Him now to appear before Him and speak with confidence and candor. It denotes the result of a close, obedient relationship to Him now. Here and in 4:17 this term is used of the believer's freedom and fearlessness before Him at Christ's return; in 3:21 and 5:14 it is used of the freedom that now belongs to the believer in prayer.

Negatively, present abiding in Christ is urged to avoid the embarrassment of some unresolved disobedience or sin in that day: "and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming" (καὶ μὴ αἰσχυνθῶμεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ αὐτοῦ). The verb here rendered "shrink away" (αἰσχυνθῶμεν is used only in the middle and passive voice in the New Testament, and so may be rendered "be ashamed" (if middle) or "be put to shame" (if passive). Some hold that the words "from him" (ἀπ' αὐτοῦ) require the passive, "be put to shame," as implying rejection by Christ in that day. Thus Marshall holds that "their rejection at his coming will be the final confirmation of a life of spiritual separation from him."⁵⁵ But the continued first person plural verb indicates that John aimed at stimulating present abiding by believers to help them avoid being ashamed before Christ in that day. "This intimates divine disapproval at the judgment seat of Christ, referred to in 4:17-19."⁵⁶ The picture is that of the averted face as the result of shame.

Only here does John use the compound noun παρουσία, "coming, presence," one of three important terms for the Second Advent in Scripture.⁵⁷ Composed of παρα, "alongside of, close to," and the substantival form of the verb εἶμι, "to be," it literally means "a being alongside of" someone. The noun is sometimes used in the sense of "coming, arrival," as pointing to the act whereby the "presence" is brought about. Here, as generally, the thought is not merely of Christ's moment of coming but of His resultant presence and dealing with His own, as at the judgment seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10; 1 Cor. 3:12-15; 2 Cor. 5:10).

⁵⁵ Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, p. 167.

⁵⁶ Hodges, "1 John," p. 893.

⁵⁷ The three Greek terms are (1) ἀποκάλυψις, "an unveiling," a "revelation"; (2) φάνεια, "a shining forth," an "appearing" (Eng.: epiphany); (3) παρουσία, "presence," a "coming."

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