

COMMUNITY GROUP GUIDE

The Church at Martinsburg

Secure: Certainties from 1 John

Knowing the Truth (1 John 2:18-29)

May 18, 2014

SECURE

CERTAINITIES FROM
1 JOHN

MAIN POINT

The realization that false teachers (antichrists) are present and actively seeking the attention and affections of followers of Jesus must not be ignored or swept under the rug. Christians must consider what they hear and evaluate what they believe in order to ensure their primary influences are the apostles teaching and the Holy Spirit. As John writes he is deeply concerned that those listening to him are abiding in the person and work of Jesus not some false understanding that leads to a denial of Jesus. John's warnings guard us from passionate heresy (1 John 2:15-22) and dead orthodoxy (1 John 2:26-29).

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

1. What are some of your thoughts or insights from last weeks message? What challenged you, encouraged you, or ministered to you?
2. When you hear a word like “antichrist” what are some of your immediate thoughts? Apocalyptic stories? A powerful figure during the end times? Does it frighten you? “End times prophecies?”
3. Define “deceive.” See 1 John 2:26.

READING

Have a volunteer read 1 John 2:18-29.

“Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you

heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life.

I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him. And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.”

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

1. What is the “antichrist?” Consider other passages such as 2 Thess. 2:3-5; Matt. 24:4-5, 11, 15-16, 24-25; Mark 13: 14, 22-23; 1 John 2:18; Rev. 13:1, 4-6. How does John define “the antichrist”? See 1 John 2:22.
2. Who are the “antichrists” John mentions in 2:19? What was the shocking about these people? How did these antichrists oppose the true person of Christ and the gospel message?
3. According to 2:26, why is John “writing these things”? In what ways were John’s opponents trying to deceive his readers? See 1:6, 8, 10; 4:3.
4. What does it mean to for the Christian to “abide” (2:24, 27-28)? See John 15:1-11.
5. What is “eternal life” according to 2:25? Consider 5:11 and 20. How has God fulfilled his promise? Consider 1 Cor. 15:3-5.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

1. What does your relationship with your Bible look like? Does God’s word abide in you? Do you have roots planted deeply in God’s word for your growth, maturity, and more fervent devotion to Jesus?
2. Do you listen to other “Bible-teachers,” preachers, etc.? Who are some of your influences? Do you take in “Christian” teaching that is contrary to the true message of the Bible? How can you discern false teaching from true teaching?

3. Read 2:26. What are some ways you can be deceived into believing false teaching about Jesus, the gospel, and other things that are foundational to the Christian faith? What are some things you can do to guard yourself and others around you from deception and false teaching?
4. How can you abide in Christ daily? How can your group as a whole grow deeper in dwelling in Jesus and his gospel? Consider these passages: Phil. 4:8; Col. 3:1-4; 1 Cor. 10:5; John 15:1-11.

PRAY

As you pray with your group, ask volunteers to pray that your group would:

- Abide in Christ and rest in the hope that comes from knowing God has fulfilled his promise by giving us eternal life in Christ (2:25; 5:11, 20).
- Grow in their discernment of what is true and a lie regarding Christ, his word, and their identities.
- Hold fast to what is good, true, and right according to God's word both in belief and practice (Rom. 12:9; 1 John 2:29).

WEEKLY UPDATE

Remind your group of some of the important things coming up for the church.

- **Graduate Recognition:** On 6/1, we as a church want to recognize all those who are graduating with some sort of degree for all their hard work and their accomplishments! If you or anyone in your group is graduating or has graduated, register for Graduate Recognition at graduate.martinsburgchurch.org.

FOLLOW-UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email, text, etc. to your group with some or all of the following:

- A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
- Encourage individual members of your group with specific passages of scripture that deal with something they might be experiencing.
- A challenge to memorize 1 John 2:24-25, 29.
- A reminder to pray for the requests made during your group time.

1 John 2:18-29**Overview of the text**

In this important section the author turns from encouragements and exhortation to warning. He urges his readers to allow the message they heard from the beginning to remain in them because already there are many antichrists in the world, and the antichrists will try to deceive them. Surprisingly, these antichrists are identified as people who were once members of the author's own Christian community but have seceded from it. The readers' protection against being deceived by these people is threefold. First, they are to remember the truth that they heard from the beginning. Second, they are to recognize the deceivers for what they are: by their denial that Jesus is the Christ, God's Son, they show that they are antichrists. Third, they are to remember that they have an anointing from the Holy One, an anointing which teaches them all things so that they do not need others (namely the false teachers) to teach them anything. As the anointing teaches them, so they are to remain in Christ. The passage has two sections: 2:18-19, in which the author speaks of the coming of antichrists and identifies them as the Gnostic² false teachers; 2:20-27, where he warns his readers about the secessionists' attempt to deceive them and seeks to arm them against it.

2:18. Children, it is the last hour. In several places in the NT, expressions such as "in the last days" or "in the last times" are found. In some cases these refer to the whole period begun by the first coming of Jesus and running through his final parousia (final coming) (Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:2; 1 Peter 1:20). In other cases they refer to the last part of that period, just prior to the final parousia (2 Tim. 3:1; James 5:3; 2 Peter 3:3; Jude 18). The last part of the period, it is said, will be marked by various difficulties and tribulations (2 Tim. 3:1; Jude 18). This corresponds with the general thrust of the teaching of Paul in 2 Thess. 2:3-4 and of Jesus in Matthew 24 and Mark 13. What the author says in 2:18-27 about the last hour (and the coming of the antichrist) appears to fall into the same category as these other texts, and this indicates the affinity between his teaching and that of other early Christian teachers.

And as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come.

Therefore we know that it is the last hour. The Greek prefix *anti*, added to some person's name or title, can either mean (a) the claim to be that person, or (b) opposition to, equivalence to, or substitution for that person. Jesus taught that false Christs would appear in the last days (Matt. 24:24; Mark 13:22). In practice there is little difference between a false Christ and an antichrist, for both are opposed to the true Christ. It is very likely, that when the author says his readers have heard that antichrist is coming he is referring to the message they heard from the beginning (when they were first instructed in the faith), which included teaching about the coming of the antichrist(s).

2:19. Referring to the antichrists mentioned in the previous verse, John says **they went out from us, but they were not of us.** Those whom John describes as antichrists were in fact once

¹ For further study on 1 John, see the commentaries by Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John* and John R. W. Stott's, *The Letters of John*.

² Gnostic – someone who adhered to the philosophical teachings of Gnosticism. Gnosticism was a mystical philosophy that blended Christian thought with Greek philosophy, teaching that only a small number of people could receive special, spiritual knowledge from the "Supreme Being." Gnosticism affirmed that all physical matter, including the flesh, was evil and denounced the dual nature of Jesus as the God-Man. Gnosticism was deemed by the early church as heresy.

members of his own Christian community, but they had seceded from it. Their secession, as far as the author is concerned only showed that they had never really been true members of his Christian community, and this is reiterated in his next statements: **for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.** If these people had been true members of his community, which they were not, they would have remained as members, and not seceded as they had done.

2:20. To arm them against the deception of the false teachers, John begins by reminding his readers of one outstanding resource they have: **But you have been anointed by the Holy One.** The verb “to anoint” in the Greek is consistently used in the NT in relation to an anointing whose agent is God and whose medium is the Holy Spirit. The anointing the readers have from the Holy One is best interpreted as a reference to the Holy Spirit with whom they had been endowed by God (when they first believed), and who confirms to them the truth of the message that they heard at that time.

You all have knowledge. Some manuscripts translate this as, “you know everything.” The original text literally translates to “you all know” but there is also a variant reading of “you know all things.” There is a significant difference in the two readings but it is most likely the second reading that is the correct because the statement **you all have knowledge** (you know all things) in 2:20 is balanced by the statement “his anointing teaches you about everything: in 2:27.

2:21. I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it. John does not think they are ignorant of the truth and so need him to instruct by his letter. Rather, he writes to them *because* they know the truth.

2:22. Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? The liars are not explicitly identified by the nature of their lie. Anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ is a liar. 1:5, 8, 10; 2:6, 9 demonstrate the allude to the claims made by the liars. In this verse for the first time, we encounter a reference to their teaching: they deny that Jesus is the Christ. **This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.** John explicitly identifies the liars as antichrists. Anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ is in fact an antichrist, and his/her denial, as far as the author is concerned, is not only a denial of the true identity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Messiah, but is also a denial of God the Father himself.

2:23. No one who denies the Son has the Father. The Gnostics claimed to have fellowship with God (1:5) and even to live in God (2:6), but such claims are empty when made by people who deny that Jesus Christ is God’s Son come in the flesh. When people deny the Son, they show that they do not have the Father.

2:24. Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. One of the strategies that the author urges his readers to employ against the influence of the false teachers is to hold on to the very message of the gospel that they heard at the beginning. Recalling people who are being faced with false teaching to the message of the gospel as they first heard it, and which converted them, is a strategy that is also employed elsewhere in the NT (1 Cor. 15:1-11) and needs to be practiced today.

2:25. And this is the promise he made to us—eternal life. Elsewhere in 1 John eternal life is identified with, or said to be found in, Jesus Christ, God’s Son (5:11). He in fact, is eternal life (5:20), the eternal life that was with the Father from the beginning (1:2). Those who believe in the Son have eternal life (5:13). Those who acknowledge the Jesus Christ have the Son (and the Father) (2:23), and those who have the Son have eternal life (5:12). To have the Son, to believe in

his name, is to have eternal life in the here and now. But in line with primitive Christian belief, the author can also speak of eternal life as something “promised” to believers, something they will experience in the future (2:25).

2:26. I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. For the first time in the letter, John makes quite clear that the heretics are targeting the readers hoping to attract them to their teaching, and away from the message that they heard from the beginning.

2:27. But the anointing that you received from him abides in you. The anointing they had received is the Holy Spirit, and here, in the light of the attempts of the liars to lead them astray, John reminds his readers that the Holy Spirit remains in them. By his Spirit God himself indwells the readers, and this indwelling by God is their most fundamental defense against deception. As he writes later in the letter, “he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (4:4). **You have no need that anyone should teach you.** The author insists that when he himself writes to them it is not because he wants to teach them the truth, but because they know the truth (2:21). **But as his anointing teaches you about everything...** The reference to “everything” needs to be understood in the context, where the subject under discussion is the denial that Jesus is the Christ, God’s Son come in the flesh. Nothing the readers need to know about these matters has to be learned from the heretics. Everything they need to know is taught to them by the anointing they have received. **Just as it has taught you, abide in him...** the thrust of this verse is that as the Holy Spirit has taught them the truth about Jesus Christ, so the readers are to remain in him (Christ).

2:28. So that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. It is the future appearing of Jesus Christ that John has in mind (Matt. 24:3, 27, 37, 39; 1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 2 Thess. 2:1, 8; James 5:7; 2 Pet. 3:4; 1 John 2:28). To be confident is equivalent to not being put to shame. What all this means is best understood in the light of 4:17, where John speaks about having confidence on the day of judgment.

2:29. The treatment of the connecting between knowing God and doing righteousness is introduced in this verse. **If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.** The “he” who “is righteous” is God, and if the readers know that God is righteous they may be sure that everyone who does right is born of him. Those who do what is right, the author says, are people who have been born of him.