

TETHERING SPIRITUALITY TO TRUTH

1 JOHN 2:18-29

Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which 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 they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also. Therefore 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 that He has promised us - eternal life.

These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.

And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.

Though church attendance in the US has declined in recent years, America is NOT becoming more secular.

A survey done by Pew Research reports that a whopping 75% of today's Americans still see themselves as "spiritual." In fact, the fastest growing segment of our population now identifies as "spiritual, but not religious."

These folks might no longer adhere to a particular faith, but they still believe in an afterlife, and supernatural phenomena, and some form of a higher power.

This is the case in all today's industrialized nations...

Did you know that in Russia there are now more occult healers than there are medical doctors? In France, 38% of the population believes in astrology. Among the Swiss 35% agree that "some fortune tellers really can foresee the future." And apparently, nearly everyone in Japan is careful to have their new car blessed by a Shinto priest.

Superstitions and occult practices are common.

Even today, at the beginning of the 21st Century, in an increasingly technical and secular world four out of every five people still belong to a religion - that's 80%.

The truth is, despite all our scientific advancements and technological breakthroughs, you can't shut off the longing in the human heart for meaning and purpose.

Our Creator has planted a homing device in our chests to keep us searching and groping until we find our way back to Him. My point is, Planet Earth is still an actively spiritual place... *exactly as the Bible predicted.*

In today's passage, John acknowledges humanity's inclination toward spirituality, and its rise in the last days.

He stresses that all spiritual activity has to be evaluated in light of the truth. Our inherent spirituality can be manipulated by false teachers. It can set us up for deception. The inner longing for our Creator and transcendent meaning has to be tethered to God's truth.

And there is a truth! John reveals it in our passage.

We begin this morning in verse 18. John pens, "Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour."

Realize, the first disciples who walked and talked with Jesus - *who were part of His first coming to Earth* - **believed they would also see His second coming.**

They were expecting Him to invade their world again.

Both Peter and Jude spoke of their day as "the last time." Paul, James, the writer of Hebrews, and again, Peter, used the term "the last days." Here, John takes this expectation one step further. Alive after the others had died, he believes that he's living in "*the last hour.*"

The Bible has much to say about "*the last hour.*"

Understand, biblical history is Jewish history. God chose Israel to be His people. His plan was to save the Gentile world through the promises He made to Israel.

Daniel was a Hebrew prophet who lived in the sixth century BC. He was given a vision of the remainder of Hebrew

history. From *his time* until the *end of time* there would be a period of 490 years. Those years began with the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem - 483 years later Messiah would come to His people.

Calculate Daniel's prediction, and it was fulfilled to the very day Jesus made His triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Afterwards, only 7 years remained for God to fulfill His promises to Israel and to save the world.

The same author who wrote the book we're studying, the Apostle John, wrote another letter that described in great detail what would happen in those final 7 years.

He called it, "[The Revelation of Jesus Christ.](#)" It depicts the Lord's return and its preceding judgments.

As John said in verse 17, "[The world is passing away, and the lusts of it...](#)" This final 7 years will hasten that passing with cataclysmic judgments on a global scale. God's fury will shake the Earth's foundations.

John says that during those final 7 years humanity's rebellion will reach its pinnacle. All the nations will gather under a sinister leader known as "[Antichrist.](#)"

At first he'll come across as a man of peace. He'll have answers. He'll capture the world's imagination.

And he'll use the values described in verse 16 - "[the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life](#)" - to capture the allegiance of most of humanity.

People from all over the world will wear his seal on their forehead or their right hand. We're not sure whether it's a

tattoo, or an embedded chip, but the Bible says it'll be in the form of three digits, 6-6-6.

The Antichrist will call on all the world to worship him, and with that singular act of unmitigated gall, *God will have had enough!* Judgments will rain from heaven.

Shortly thereafter, Jesus will split the eastern sky, destroy the Antichrist with one blaze of His glory, crush his global revolt, rule the earth a thousand years, and in the process restore it to the paradise God intended.

But a careful reading of Daniel 9 reveals that God intends for an undetermined gap of time to exist, *after the first 483 years and before the final seven.*

Daniel foresaw two events that would occur inside this gap - Jesus would be crucified, and the Temple toppled... *I believe another event lies within this gap...*

The Church is born, and grows, and gets raptured.

And after Jesus rescues His Church; the countdown begins on the final seven years predicted by Daniel.

Realize, when John and his fellow NT writers penned their letters they were all cognizant of where they stood on God's timeline. They were still in that undisclosed gap of time. How long would it be to the end they weren't sure, but in their minds it couldn't be long.

Thus, they used terms like "last time," "last days," "last hour." They saw themselves standing on eternity's threshold. *We would've drawn the same conclusion.*

Of course, two-thousand years later and counting, we recognize that the gap between Jesus' first and second comings has been sizable. But we're still in "*the last hour.*" In fact, if it was "*the last hour*" for John; then today, for us, it must be "*the last split second.*"

Remember, in Matthew 24, just days before Jesus' crucifixion, the disciples asked Him, "*And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?*"

And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many."

It's interesting, for the thousand years between the giving of the Messianic promise to King David, until Jesus' actual coming, not a single person said they were the Messiah. Yet over the two-thousand years since Jesus' death and resurrection we've seen a long parade of Messianic imposters making that very claim.

Here John says a sign we're in "*the last hour*" are the many *false-christs* who'll set the stage for *Antichrist*.

I read recently that 40% of the art sold to galleries and collectors around the world are actual forgeries. To me that's a staggeringly high percentage, *almost half!*

Yet I wonder if the spiritual deception that goes on today, isn't occurring at an even higher rate.

As we grow closer to Jesus' return it only makes sense that the devil will try harder to ply his deceptions.

And this is what concerns John.

Notice what he calls his church, verse 18 - *“Little children.”* He loved these people. His responsibility to the believers under his care paralleled the responsibility a father has toward his children. It was John’s job to protect his spiritual kids at all costs.

John knows the Antichrist will be preceded by a proliferation of teachers who are both *anti-God* and *anti-Christ*. In fact, John was watching a rise of this deception in his day - *and it has only escalated since.*

And sadly people today are just as vulnerable to deception as in John’s day, if not more so.

When a person (or people) pride themselves in their spirituality, yet lack God’s criteria for what’s right and wrong, true and false - they’ve put themselves in peril.

A spirituality untethered to God’s truth becomes Satan’s opportunity to deceive and ultimately destroy.

This is why John wants his readers to understand the nature and origin of the anti-christs in his day. He writes of them, *“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 they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.”*

Often a perpetrator of false theology starts out in a sound, Bible-believing church; yet they become proud, *and they bend, or stray, or deviated from God’s truth.*

Rather than be faithful, their goal is to be novel.

Instead of helping folks, they try to draw a crowd.

In place of glorifying God, they inflate their own ego.

Rather than bow to the authority of Scripture, many a person has exalted their own reason and intellect, and clung stubbornly to their own interpretations. **Do you approach the Bible to *inform* your thinking, or do you approach the Bible to get support *for* your thinking?**

The birth of a heretic occurs when a person uses the Bible to justify a prejudice or support a supposition.

John is saying if they had been "*of us*" they would've had a different attitude. They would've been humble, honest, sincere, seeking - *and not self-serving*.

Realize there is a difference between a **backslider** and a **heretic**. **Look deep into the heart of a backslider and you'll find Jesus.** You might have to dig deep, or look behind a lot of stuff that's gotten in the way, but He's there. And He's calling the backslider back home.

A born again backslider is a miserable person. He's living a lie. The sin their participating in is not who they are, or what they really want. God won't let them be happy in their sin. There's no relief until they repent.

Whereas, **look inside the heart of a heretic and you'll find a devil.** You might have to push back the religious trappings, and the theological pride - the devil may be hiding behind some self-righteousness - but he's there.

A heretic never knew God. He was blinded by his pride. He sold his soul to a lie. The deception he now passes off as God's truth is nothing more than **the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.**

If you're shooting a bow and arrow at a target 100 yards away, but you're a fraction off in your aim you can miss that target by 10 yards. A fraction off at the site can cost you 10 yards at the target. And the same is true spiritually. Just a little error on the foundational level can cause an enormous deviation later on.

This is often how a false teacher gets their start.

They were *"from us"* but not *"of us"* - a heart matter wasn't quite right. There was an attitude they wouldn't let go. There was a failure to fully embrace a truth. And it didn't come out until years down the road. You can say, they *confessed Jesus* but never *possessed Jesus*.

And of course, there was a specific case John had to be thinking about when he wrote, *"They went out from us, but they were not of us"* Who was that but Judas?

Remember, John was there the night Jesus broke bread with Judas. Together the two men dipped their bread into the sauce that sat in front of them. It was a gesture of friendship. Jesus was reaching out one last time to Judas, appealing to any slither of loyalty left in his heart not to do the dastardly deed he had planned.

And it's interesting that it was John, in his Gospel, that explained what happened next. John 13:27 tells us, *"Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him."*

Look in a heretic's heart and you'll find a devil! John is saying Judas was *"from us but he was not of us..."*

In verse 20, John writes of what Judas lacked. He says, *"But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all*

things.” Here’s a believer’s safeguard against deception - *the anointing of the Holy Spirit*.

Throughout the OT the pouring of oil was a symbol of the outpouring of God’s Spirit - and to each of us His Holy Spirit has been given to teach us and instruct us.

Jesus promised in John 16:13, **“When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth.”**

God’s Spirit is a believer’s spiritual watchdog. He sniffs out lies, detects deception, and protects us from danger. We need to trust, and listen to the Holy Spirit.

Of course, the anointing of the Holy Spirit comes to us in two ways. There’s the Spirit’s still, small voice that speaks to our hearts... But there’s also the book the Spirit authored. The Bible is the result of the anointing of God’s Spirit. Peter explained it’s origins, **“holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”**

And I love how this dual anointing works in tandem.

When I read the Bible I sense an **anointing in the text**. It talks to me. It’s powerful. The words can jump off the page and challenge me in unexpected ways.

But I also sense an **anointing on the text**. As if the Holy Spirit is along side of me, instructing me as I read. I’m understanding things I have no business grasping. The Bible is the only book I know where the author promises to be there with you every time you read.

I love the story of the man who spoke to two Mormon missionaries. The Mormons tried to convince him that Joseph Smith was a latter day prophet. The fellow asked, **“Well, what**

did he prophesy? If it's in the Bible I don't need it. And if it's not in the Bible I don't want it."

That's exactly how I feel. The Bible is more than sufficient. We *"have an anointing from the Holy One..."*

Then John adds in verse 21, *"I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth."* God had preserved John's life so he could combat a dangerous heresy that would become a great threat to the church.

John dealt with the seeds that later sprouted into Gnosticism. We'll learn more about the Gnostics as we go along, but for now let me say, they were deceptive not just in their teachings, *but in how they postured.*

They built fanciful tales and intriguing theories. They claimed to have special knowledge. Supposedly, they were privy to secret truths other men lacked. They were spiritual elitists. If Pew Research interviewed a Gnostic he'd claim to be *"spiritual, but not religious."*

His spirituality was untethered to God's truth.

A Gnostic might have an affinity for Christ, but then express his spirituality by mixing it with paganism, and mysticism, and superstition. *John encourages his flock not to be intimidated by such nonsense.*

He writes to them, *"You know the truth!"* Don't let anyone tell you otherwise or back you off that truth!

“And no lie is of the truth...” This is what the false teachers of John’s day were doing. They were serving up lies in appealing presentations to look like the truth.

John is saying, **no one eats a poisoned stew just because it’s served in an fancy bowl. Don’t buy the lie!**

“No lie is of the truth.” We’ve all heard folks who use the latest terminology and can spin a phrase. They sound so smart, yet they say nothing of substance.

John says, **“You know the truth” You know better!** Don’t be intimidated by a slick talker or a spiritual bully.

And then John mentions the big lie that was being floated in his day - **which remains the big lie today...**

Verse 22, **“Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son.”**

Author John Phillips writes of this verse, **“Some lies are mere factual errors, but other lies reveal the utter rot and decay of the innermost soul.”**

It’s one thing to be misled or confused over a detail of theology. *We can hold various views on the end times, and disagree on the security of the believer, and vary on how we see spiritual gifts, and parse certain verses differently - and still be on **the Christian team.***

But no matter how nice and sweet a person you happen to be, if you attack the deity of Jesus, and the eternal equality between the Father and the Son; then you are *antichrist*. I don’t care if you have *“Christian”* or *“Christ”* in the name of your church, if you deny He’s the only Savior you are spewing a lie that originates in the pit of hell. **You are *NOT* on the Christian team!**

As John said earlier, deny Jesus and you might have come *“from us, but you were not of us.”* In other words, **for a time you shared our company, but never our birth.**

To deny the true identity of Jesus is not just an error in thinking, it's the unveiling of a deep, dark rebellion.

This is the lie that springs from a diabolical, evil heart. To reject Jesus as the Christ or King - makes a person... not ***the Antichrist***, but ***an antichrist*** for sure.

And John is telling his readers not to get suckered.

They know the truth and they have the anointing.

God's Word and *God's Spirit* agree on the nature of Jesus, so don't cave in to a lie. If a man or woman denies the Son of God he has denied God the Father!

For **“Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also. Therefore 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.”** John is saying, don't be swayed by Nuevo, avant-garde religion. Don't dabble in *spirituality that isn't grounded in the truth that comes from God's Spirit and from God's Word*. In short, **Are you really going to let Oprah determine your eternal destiny?**

Some people have turned in their Bible - the book that's *made sense and saved souls and brought peace* for 2000 years - for a 50 cent self-published paperback written by a

guy who's been married to three women, just because it sounds hip. *Don't fall for that deception.*

If you're an Oprah fan you'll recognize the name [Deepak Chopra](#). He's a Hindu, holistic health guru. He's authored 84 books. He's the spiritual guide to Oprah, Lady Gaga, and host of other celebrity types.

Recently, the Wall Street Journal reported on a seminar Chopra did for the Columbia Business School.

Around 65 students were meditating with their eyes closed, while Chopra encouraged them, "[Bring your awareness into your heart. Ask, 'who am I?'](#)" He then summoned a Hindu goddess and asked the students to diagram their '*soul profile*' - whatever that means.

Chopra believes everything is one, and the divine is within us. It's spirituality without dogma and doctrine. To Chopra truth doesn't exist, nor does it even matter.

And while Chopra is in downtown New York selling his pop-sounding, 21st century version of New Age Hinduism, **what's happening on the other side of the world?** Real Christianity - faith in Jesus and the Bible - is exploding in the *Hindu* country of Nepal.

There, Chopra's Hinduism, stripped of its glitz and glamor, is being rejected hands down as a vain and empty spirituality - and people are embracing the truth of Christianity in record numbers. In 1961 Nepal had 458 Christians. Today, there're over 3 million believers.

It testifies to the fact, it's not enough to be spiritual if your spirituality isn't tied to the truth of God's anointing.

People today are looking for ways to express their spirituality without the constraints of truth and error.

*Just **be free to be spiritual** is the new way!*

But John has different advice. He encourages his flock to hold on to the truth they've heard and learned from the beginning - from the mouth of Jesus Himself.

The problem isn't that the truth from Jesus didn't work, *it's that you never worked at taking it seriously.*

There's an old saying that applies to today's seekers, "If it's true it's not new. And if it's new it's not true."

My job as a pastor is not to be novel and creative in my interpretations, but to take the timeless truths of God's Word and communicate them in timely ways.

In the words of the old hymn, "Tell me the story often, for I forget so soon. The early dew of morning has passed away by noon." We need constant reminders.

And John writes in verse 25, "And this is the promise that He has promised us - eternal life." Recall, shortly after Jesus miraculously fed the 5000, it dawned on the masses that He wasn't just a meal ticket. His miracles served a purpose other than filling their stomachs.

That's when the crowds that followed Him dispersed.

And Jesus asked His disciples if they were going to leave Him too. It was Peter who had the memorable reply, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

No one else but Jesus could guarantee eternal life.

And remember “*eternal life*” is not just *longevity of life* - it also speaks to a *quality of life*. Jesus puts His Holy Spirit in you. Your life swells with His resources...

He lives out His love, and joy, and power in you...

His smile shows up on your face... His laugh is heard in your voice... His love bubbles up in your heart... His compassion flows through your hands... and His strength is seen in your stand...

Eternal life doesn't begin when you die - eternal life begins the moment you give your whole heart to Jesus!

For “*These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.*” When John says, “*you do not need that anyone teach you...*” he's not saying teachers are of no value. According to the NT one of the gifts of the Spirit is *teaching*. Christians need good Bible teachers.

But it's ultimately God's Spirit that works through a good Bible teacher - *so that, you don't need any one particular teacher*. The false teachers of John's day claimed that without **them**, and their special knowledge you could never know the truth. No way! The Spirit is our teacher, and He speaks through various voices.

John had great confidence in the power and abilities of the Holy Spirit to help Christians discern truth from error, and to grow up in the knowledge of God's Word.

Think of it, God could've set up one church, or one office to be the official arbitrator of divine truth.

But that's not what He did. Rather than entrust the ongoing interpretation of His Word to an *institution, or a priest, or a pope* - He gave every new generation, and every individual Christian His Holy Spirit! God conveys His truth through **an anointing** available to everyone.

And it's a good thing. Look at the Church and Christianity throughout the centuries - it's been rescued from countless heresies - and God's truth has been safeguarded - not by the faithfulness of one sect, or office, or denomination... but by the Spirit's **anointing**.

Whenever orthodoxy has been threatened, it's the Holy Spirit that stirs up a revival which brings the needed correction and God's truth back into focus.

Whenever God's message has been distorted the author Himself has restored the right interpretation.

If anyone ever tells you that you can't really understand the Bible unless you *hear their thoughts* or *read their literature* - **beware!** Your cult alarm should be buzzing. Here, John tells us that all we ultimately need to grasp the *Word of God* is the *Spirit of God*.

Good Bible teachers *can be helpful*, but they *can also be wrong*. This is why God doesn't want us to put our trust in any human teacher, but in the Holy Spirit.

And God puts this *anointing* in our hearts.

Don't always read the Scriptures through the grid of what you've been taught by someone else. Let the Spirit speak to your heart afresh. He is our teacher!

We need to have confidence when we approach the Bible. Pick it up *regularly*, and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart *personally*. God promises He will.

And then verse 28, “*And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.*”

Here John comes full circle. He started the passage thinking of the return of Jesus - now that's how it ends.

We all should be confidently looking for the return of Jesus. No longer ashamed - now abiding in Christ.

And this is the ultimate way you tether the spiritual instincts and longings of a human heart to God's truth.

The ultimate attachment, the strongest connection, the surest way to tether a soul of God is to “*abide in Christ.*” The phrase “*abide*” comes from John's Gospel, Chapter 15, when Jesus compares our relationship with Him to a branch on a vine. It's not just a promise or allegiance that holds the branch in place, it's an organic connection. It's made strong by the same life flowing from one to the other. Spiritual fruit is the result.

In the preface to his book, “*Abide In Christ,*” author Andrew Murray writes this, “*During the life of Jesus on earth, the word He chiefly used when speaking of the relations of the*

disciples to Himself was: "Follow me." (But) when about to leave for heaven, He gave them a new word, in which their more intimate and spiritual union with Himself in glory should be expressed. That chosen word was: "*Abide in me.*"

It's God's Spirit in our heart - *the anointing* John talks about - that enables us to go from *following* to *abiding*.

It's good to follow Jesus, but I can follow a person without any personal contact or even a conversation. This is not the Christianity Jesus left us when He gave us the Holy Spirit. "*Abide*" is now the operative term.

"*Abiding*" implies presence, and closeness, and harmony, and familiarity, and communication. This is the relationship that now tethers us spiritually to Christ.

And John goes one step further as he concludes Chapter 2. He says the tethering of our spirituality to Jesus shows up not just in *how we feel*, but in *what we do*. "*If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.*"

An old country singer named Paul Overstreet had a song I liked. It was entitled, "*Seeing My Father In Me.*"

The chorus goes, "I'm seeing my father in me, and that's how it's meant to be. And I find I'm more and more like him each day. I walk the way he walks. I talk the way he talks. I'm starting to see my father in me."

I'm sure many of us share his experience. I catch myself often doing a thing, or reacting in a certain way, and then thinking, "*Wow, that was just like my dad.*"

And in essence this is what John is singing!

If we're born again by the Holy Spirit of a righteous God, it stands to reason we'll end up living a righteous life... **People should be able to see my Father in me!**

And this is John's big point - yes, we're spiritual creatures. Yes, we were created with longings for more than just this material world. But our spirituality is not a ship adrift, untethered or anchored, just floating about on a transcendental sea. John says we need moorings.

We need to tie off to *the dock - which is Jesus!*

According to today's text, here is how you and I can find anchors for our faith... **through the truth we've known about Jesus - through the anointing of His Holy Spirit - through abiding in Christ - and even through practicing righteousness.** Let's be more than just spiritual, let's be children of the Father!