



Christian writer Tim Stafford tells of an unusual approach to teaching about religious truth adopted by a pastor he knows. You might expect this, for the pastor, Stephey Bilynskiy, holds a PhD in Philosophy from Notre Dame University! Whenever he runs a confirmation class the pastor takes a jar full of beans with him. He then gets the students to guess how many beans are in the jar, and writes down their guesses on a notepad. Bilynskiy then asks the class members to list their favorite songs, writing them down alongside the bean estimates. Bilynskiy then returns to the bean guesses, revealing the actual number and then whose guess was closest to being right. After congratulations have been offered attention is then refocused on the song list. “And which one of these is closest to being right?” Bilynskiy asks. Invariably the students argue that when it comes to “favorite songs” there is no right answer. It’s purely subjective, a matter of taste. It’s at that point that Pastor Bilynskiy asks “When you decide what to believe in terms of your faith, is that more like guessing the number of beans, or more like choosing your favorite song?” Always, Bilynskiy says, he gets the same answer: Choosing one’s faith is more like choosing a favorite song.

What that really says is there’s really no right and wrong answer to what’s true when it comes to God and faith and what we believe. Choosing your faith is just a matter of taste. Most people today say it doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you believe it sincerely. It’s okay to believe in God, but it’s not okay to say your belief in God is right while someone else’s is wrong. Choosing your faith is like going to the food court at the mall. You choose to eat what kind of food you like and no one would ever say what you like is somehow wrong.

It’s interesting how we operate that way when it comes to our faith but we wouldn’t dare operate that way in other arenas. Suppose you take your family out for a hike and your seven-year-old daughter spies some juicy, inviting, red berries. She sincerely believes they would taste good, and such beautiful berries couldn’t possibly harm her. Would you encourage her to go ahead and act based on the sincerity of her belief? No! It’s possible to be sincerely wrong!

This is what the apostle John is dealing with in the passage before us today. John was living in the city of Ephesus and there were several churches in that area he was called to oversee. Recently, there had been people in those churches teaching things contrary to the foundational truths of the Christian faith. These folks considered themselves followers of Christ. They knew much of

the lingo and probably had their own personal testimony. Make no mistake, they were sincere, but they were sincerely wrong. Have you ever met someone who uses much of the same language as you do, but the more you talk to them the more you realize that what they mean when they use those words is different from what you mean? It’s like they’re wearing the right jersey, but you’re not sure you’re playing for the same team.

How do you deal with that in a church? How do you know what you believe in contrast to what they believe is right? How do you know what you sincerely believe is true? Listen to what John says in 2:18–27.

Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.

But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist—denying the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

As for you, see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he promised us—eternal life.

I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.

Exposing False Teachers and Their Followers

Notice John is writing as a spiritual father to his dear children. He loves them. He’s concerned about them. And he speaks in very bold terms about these people who are teaching things that are wrong.

First, he says they come in the spirit of antichrist. Well, that’s a great way to start, John. You know, kinda ease into it. No! He

goes right for the jugular. He says, "You know how we taught you that in the last days a powerful figure called the antichrist would arise? Well, these people are in cahoots with that guy. There's the big antichrist to come but there's a bunch of little ones running around now. They're a manifestation of the spirit of that antichrist. And the fact they're here means we really are getting near the end."

When John says, "this is the last hour" he's referring to the whole period between the first and second coming of Christ. From God's perspective, there's only one climactic event in history that remains to be accomplished, and that's the return of Christ as King and Judge. That whole period is marked by hostility from the world and the persecution of Christians, but towards the end of that period things will get worse. Paul even wrote to Timothy, *"But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons..."* (1 Tim. 4:1).

That's exactly what was going on in John's churches and this is where the idea of antichrist comes in. It's important we understand what this term means. That little word "anti" can mean "against" as well as "instead of." So this person and these people are against Christ but they might also pretend to be Christ. Remember Jesus predicted, *"False Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders..."* (Matt. 24:24). It doesn't appear the false teachers of John's day were claiming to be Christ, but no doubt they were against him. The bottom line is anyone who isn't for Christ is against him and anyone who is against Christ is antichrist. That could be your university professor who says Jesus was just another first century Jewish rabbi or your next door neighbor who says they're "spiritual" but not into traditional religion.

Does it make any difference what you believe? You bet it does! It's the last hour; the spirit of antichrist is working in the world. He's in the books you read and the shows you watch and the classes you attend. He works in lies. That's his thing, so it's important for you to know the truth.

Second, he says eventually they'll depart from the fellowship. In verse 19 he says these people had already left, which shows they didn't really belong there in the first place. Their defection revealed their true colors. You have to wonder if John has a former friend named Judas in mind. Judas did all the things the other disciples did. He preached and cast out demons and followed Jesus for three years. But Judas was never a genuine believer. No one had any idea that was true until he finally left Jesus and his disciples in the Upper Room. His departure was his unmasking, and so it was with these people leaving the church in John's day. Their departure revealed who they really belonged to.

Today we have people who leave churches all the time. Church hopping is like a national sport for some Christians. We choose a church like we choose a hair stylist. When we get tired of one we

just find another that meets our needs. As wrong as that is, that's not what John is talking about here. He's talking about those who leave the church altogether because they no longer buy into the Gospel. They somehow feel they've reached a higher plane; they've grown out of their "religious phase" or they've moved beyond "institutional religion." But that's their unmasking. Their departure reveals their true colors.

Not everyone who is member of a church is in fact a member of the body of Christ. When you're born again of the Spirit you're placed into the body of Christ and you become part of what we call the universal church. That's a different thing from becoming a part of a local church. As John indicates here, not everyone in the local church has been born into the universal church. You can be in church but not in Christ, and that usually comes out over time because eventually you leave. This doesn't mean staying in church keeps you saved; rather, it's an indication that you're saved. If you investigate the history of various cults you'll find in most cases their founders started out in a solid, local Bible preaching church. They were "with us" but they didn't "belong to us" because "they went out from us."

Third, he says they deny the deity of Christ. Look again at verse 22, *"Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ--such a person is the antichrist--denying the Father and the Son."* Notice the word "deny" is used twice here. These people deny the human Jesus was in fact the Christ; God come in the flesh. You see, everything hangs on what you believe about Jesus. Jesus is the center. Remember, these people would have claimed to believe in Jesus, but they couldn't accept the fact that God could really become flesh and especially that he would suffer and die on a cross. They came up with a fancy explanation of how Jesus only became God after the Spirit came on him at his baptism and then stopped being God when the Spirit left him before the crucifixion.

This sounds far-fetched to us, but there are many people today who call themselves Christians but wouldn't go so far as to say Jesus of Nazareth was God. I know some pastors who wouldn't say that. John would say, "You call them pastor; I call them antichrist." There are a lot of things we as followers of Christ can disagree on. We can disagree on how and when people ought to be baptized. We can disagree on how and when Jesus will come back. We can disagree on whether our kids should go to Christian schools, public schools, or home schools. All those things are important but they're not the main thing. They're not crucial to our faith. The only thing that's crucial to our faith is the person and work of Jesus Christ. He's the main thing. And, as John says, if you don't have him, you don't have the Father either because they always go together.

On March 25, 1861, in the first sermon delivered in the newly constructed Metropolitan Tabernacle, Charles Spurgeon said, "I would propose that the subject of the ministry of this house,

as long as this platform shall stand, shall be the person of Jesus Christ. I am never ashamed to avow myself a Calvinist, but if I am asked to say what is my creed, I think I must reply, 'It is Jesus Christ.' The body of divinity to which I would pin and bind myself forever, God helping me, is substance of the gospel, who is himself all theology, the incarnation of every precious truth, the all-glorious personal embodiment of the way, the truth, and the life." Thirty years later, in his last words from that same pulpit, he said of Jesus, "He is the most magnanimous of captains. If there is anything gracious, generous, kind and tender, lavish, and superabundant in love, you always find it in him. These forty years and more have I served him, and I have nothing but love for him. His service is life, peace, joy. Oh, that you would rather enter it at once! God help you to enlist under the banner of Jesus even this day!"

The last thing John says about these trouble makers is they try to lead believers astray. *"I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray"* (v. 26). So they don't just passively and quietly leave the fellowship. They actively try to bring others with them. They're armed with very persuasive arguments. They quote the Bible. You can pick a verse here and a verse there and make the Bible say almost anything you want it to. We know Satan is the "father of lies." Jesus called him that in John 8:44. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 11:3, *"I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ."* He's crafty. His lies twist the truth ever so slightly. He came to Eve and the first thing he said was, "Did God really say...?" He's not an originator; he is a counterfeiter. He imitates the work of God, but in the end he has counterfeit ministers who preach a counterfeit gospel who produce counterfeit Christians.

So beware! It makes a difference what you believe! You're living in the last hour. The spirit of antichrist is working in the world. He works in lies. He's crafty. But he always leaves the same fingerprints: people denying the deity and the sufficiency of Jesus Christ, and departing the fellowship of believers because they no longer buy into it.

Responding to False Teachers and Their Followers

But it isn't enough just to be able to recognize these people. We also need to know how to respond to them. We've all heard of the importance of having a "firewall" as an essential component for the proper functioning of our personal computer. To ignore a firewall's value is to put yourself at risk of losing all that's dear to you on your hard drive. A lifetime of important information can be lost if you fail to maintain an adequate firewall. If a virus attacks your system, it cares little about your knowledge base, your good intentions, your busy schedule or the value of what's lost. In this passage, John reveals the believer's firewall against these attacks.

The first firewall is what John calls the anointing. He mentions it four times in this passage. In verse 20 he says, *"But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know."* Then down in verse 27 he says, *"As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him."*

What's this anointing that we have as followers of Jesus? The Greek word is *chrisma*. We all have a *chrisma* from the moment we trust in Christ as our Savior. You go to some churches and you think only one guy has the anointing. He wears a three piece suit, sweats a lot, waves a hanky around, and makes Jesus into a God into a three syllable word! In the Old Testament, the anointing was for Kings, priests and prophets, but under the New Covenant we're all anointed ones. You don't have to pray for God's anointing in your life or on your ministry; you have it already. It abides in you. Furthermore, in the Old Testament, these special people were anointed with oil, but under the New Covenant every believer is anointed with the Holy Spirit. It's interesting that the word for Christ is *Christos*, which literally means "the anointed one." We know Jesus wasn't anointed with oil but with the Spirit, which was seen at his baptism. So *Christos* has given us the same *chrisma* that he had!

The result of this, John says, is you all know the truth. The Holy Spirit is a teacher. Jesus called him *"the Spirit of truth"* (John 15:26). He said, *"He will teach you all things"* (John 14:26). This is why even a baby Christian knows the truth in full and can discern whether something being taught is true or false. John even says that, because you know the truth, you don't need any of these so-called enlightened people to come in here and teach you. It's not that we don't need teachers; God has gifted people to teach. It would be strange for John to say you don't need anyone to teach you when he was doing just that! But even John says he writes not because they don't know the truth; they do know it. In a way, they don't even need him to teach them, but just to remind them.

It's important to know as a follower of Jesus you've been equipped with a built-in teacher in the Holy Spirit. Again, he's like a built-in firewall that blocks unwelcome information and welcomes truth into your network. For example, in Matthew 16 when Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do men say that the Son of man is?" they named various unwelcome possibilities, and then he said, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter replied, "You're the Christ, the Son of the living God." Peter had been observing the Lord, he was drawn to him, but he was puzzled by him, as all these disciples were. But when Jesus asked that question, "Who do you say that I am?" suddenly it all came clear to Peter. He saw it in a sudden grasp of truth, and he said, "You're the Christ, the Son of the living God!" The Lord said to him, "Peter, blessed are

you! You didn't learn that by flesh and blood. You didn't reason that out, you didn't amass all the evidence and come to a conclusion; my Father revealed it to you."

This anointing of which John speaks is an illumination of the mind and the heart, and a deep persuasion from the Spirit as to the truth about Jesus. It's not a case of the Holy Spirit giving information not in the Bible; it's him taking the Scriptures and opening our hearts to understand. I love what he says at the end of verse 27, "**just as it (the anointing) has taught you, remain in him.**" That word "remain" literally means to abide. As the Spirit teaches you about Christ you're to abide in Christ; remain in Christ; stay in Christ.

This brings us the second firewall: the truth we've heard from the beginning. Look again at verse 24, "**As for you, see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father.**" So what will keep us abiding in the Son and the Father? It's letting that truth we've heard and believed from the beginning abide in us. Again, we see that word *abide*. Now there's something abiding in us so we might abide in God. That something is his word, the truth of the Gospel, which we've heard from the beginning.

So often we want to learn new things. We say, "Wow! I've never heard that before." John says, "You don't need to learn anything new. What you need to do is let what you've already learned go deeper into your heart." Why go to church and listen to a sermon about things you've heard a million times before? Why get up early in the morning and open your Bible and read passages you could practically recite by memory? Why come here and sing songs your mom sang to you when you were five? It's because the Christian life is a lifelong journey of abiding in that which we've heard from the start: There's a God who created all things. We've sinned against him and deserve eternal judgment. But he loved us so much he sent his only Son into the world. He lived a sinless life and offered himself as the sacrifice for our sins. He died and rose and ascended to heaven and he'll come back to judge the living and the dead. Until then, he lives within us and calls us to take up our cross and follow him. That's it. It doesn't get any better than that. You never graduate to the next level. And so, you come to church and hear the same old thing. You get up in the morning and open your Bible and read the same old passages. You sing the same old songs. Why? Because life in this world is such that the nails of our convictions begin to work loose and they need to be hammered back into the clapboards of our faith.

The word "abide" can mean to dwell in or to make your home there. A guest comes to our house and we say, "Make yourself at home." We really don't mean that. It's a polite expression, but we really don't want them in all the bedrooms and especially rummaging around in our closets. If we really meant that statement we'd say, "Abide in this house as though it were yours. Go anywhere you like, do anything you like, make yourself at home as though you were really home."

That's what this word means. John is saying, "Let this message which was from the beginning make itself at home in your heart. Let it grip your whole being. You may understand it intellectually, but have you really let it sink into your heart and challenge the way you think and feel?" So often we really don't want God's truth to move into the whole house, we only want it to move into one room or two. So let that word abide in you, let it sink in and go deeper and change the way you live.

So let me summarize. There are two kind of people in this passage. There are those who deny Jesus is God in the flesh and those who affirm it. The former remind us we're in the last days and are a manifestation of the spirit of the antichrist who is to come. They'll eventually leave the fellowship of God's people while God's people will not.

Then there are two firewalls that believers have to safeguard themselves from the threat of false teaching. We have the anointing of God's Spirit and abiding of God's message in our hearts. This is how you know what you sincerely believe is true. You have God's anointing and God's word. You don't have to be afraid. You have these things. You have all that you need.

Finally, there are two implications. Right in the middle of this passage John says, "**And this is what he promised us--eternal life**" (v. 25). Promised who? Those who trust in Jesus and remain in him and let his word abide in them. So you either have this eternal life or you don't. And you can know you have it. Listen to what John says later in this book: "**And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life**" (1 John 5:11, 12). You see, this is something we can know. We can how many beans are in the jar. Question: How can I have eternal life? Answer: Believe in the name of the Son of God. That's the right answer. And it doesn't matter how sincere you are about whatever else you believe, it won't give you eternal life because this life is in his Son.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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