

## **I John 2:18-28, Jesus is the Christ**

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### **Introduction**

In 2016 we are looking at how the Bible describes problems in the church and how to solve them. We have learned that many problems in the New Testament are still found in the church of today. In today's text John gets to the reason for writing his letter. The church that he was leading had split over doctrine, and people had left. Does that kind of thing still happen? It sure does. John's letter encourages those who remain to discern the issues and their own faithfulness to God. For John, unity is not a goal for its own sake. Unity must be grounded on the conviction that Jesus is the Christ, the Son from the Father. Without that belief a person knows neither the Son nor the Father, and does not share the same Spirit with believers.

**Let us pray:** Lord God, may the words of this meditation and the reflections in our hearts come from your Spirit to mold us and move us in your will, in Jesus' name, amen.

### **1. The Last Hour**

On the issue of belief John makes clear what is at stake for the community. First of all, the world and its desires are passing away, so the cravings and lusts of the sinful person are for things that will soon be no more, but, as he writes in verse seventeen, "the one who does the will of God lives forever." In other words, eternal life is at stake in a world that is passing away. John builds on that in verse eighteen as he moves into a discussion about the "last hour."

John's readers have already learned that the Antichrist will appear before Christ returns in power. John now informs them that the spirit of Antichrist has already surfaced. For John this means that all the conditions for the final hour are already met, and the last days could

commence at any moment. That was true then, and true now. In the last days the Kingdom of Darkness ruled by Satan, which functions on lies and threats, will be wiped out. It has already been defeated by the cross and resurrection, but Satan, being evil, is fighting on in vanity and spite, hoping to drag down as many as possible. The war for our souls is waged over this claim: That the promised Christ of Israel is Jesus of Nazareth, by whom God has appeared in the flesh. The unbeliever, deceived by the spirit of Antichrist, rejects either that Jesus of Nazareth is the Divine Son, or rejects that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ of Israel, or rejects both of these beliefs. The choices presented by John are these: to believe that God is revealed in Jesus Christ, or, to believe as the world believes, which is to believe falsely, coming under the power of the antichrist.

As I look to God's Word I shudder, for the scriptures describe the rule for faith, doctrine, and conduct, and by this text I discern that the Spirit of Antichrist has led astray much of Protestantism in western culture. I am glad for revivals in Africa, Latin America, and the Pacific Rim, but Protestants in the United States are draped in a spiritual veil, and are being drawn into the world's web of lies.

In the Protestant Churches of western culture there are many people who are very nice, who are kind to others and meek in their opinions, who are sincere and intelligent, and deceived. They hold the view that the historic faith of the Church is outdated and irrelevant. They are convinced that Jesus was a good man, a teacher of ethics, an important prophet, right up there with Moses, Mohammed, Baha Allah, and maybe even the Dalai Lama. Friends, I am not exaggerating. Protestant scholars and doctors reach these conclusions by picking apart the belief that the scriptures perfectly reveal God's character and will. Yes, I shudder. I read First John's description of the spirit of Antichrist as God's warning to millions of Americans who call

themselves Christians and are even in church a lot, but they have no idea who Jesus really is or what he has done for sin, salvation, and eternal life.

I shudder, but not for you or for your souls. When I read First John it looks to me like the letter could have been addressed to the members of Elgin Covenant for your encouragement. I see faithful people here, in whom is found blessed assurance and the seal of the Holy Spirit. As you remain in Christ you have nothing to fear from the final hour, whether it is the world's final hour, or the nation's, or the final hour of American Protestantism, or your own final hour – may that come upon you in peace. As John writes, Christ is all you need to endure every storm of darkness and every thunder of lies. My exhortation, then, for you believers is the same as John's for his readers: that you will stick together and support one another and build each other's faith no matter what may come against you from a world of lustful cravings that is hostile to Christ.

## **2. The Basis for Unity**

John is clear that the basis for unity in the church is the confession that Jesus is the Christ, for in that confession those who receive the Son receive the Father. The confession is the measure of the truth of one's faith, and opposing that confession is the spirit of Antichrist.

Some spirits of Antichrist are openly hostile to believers. Hostility surfaces in many ways: sometimes with laws, sometimes with violence, as is well known. Other spirits of Antichrist do not think of themselves as hostile to Christians or the Church. Some want the Church to save itself from itself and get with the times. This is easy to do, when one has already denied the authority of scripture and rejected its claims about Jesus. Unless revival turns this tide, the world's lusts and cravings will become more brazen, and more churches will choose to comply with the culture. I predict – I do not foretell, for I have had no visions, but I predict—that churches will start apologizing for having preached what the Bible teaches --that all have sinned

and fallen short of the glory of God and need the blood of Christ for their ransom. They will apologize because the Bible's urgent call on all people to repent will be called "hate speech." Today's Protestant gospel is I'm Okay, You're Okay, and evangelicals are already feeling the pressure to cave in to it.

When such pseudo-Christians take over denominations and seminaries, they tend to make unity the supreme priority. Unity for its own sake helps these scholars and pastors continue in the pretense that they are the true heirs of the Reformation and of the Apostles. Some who cherish the historic faith and esteem the Bible leave these apostate churches and look for new church homes, or create them. Such persons, claim the deniers of Christ, commit the sin of disunity.

John never writes that people are right or wrong based on who leaves and who stays in a church; that is not how God's will is discerned. True believers are known by the confession they make that Jesus is Christ. That was true then, and that is true now. John exhorts the believers in verse 24, "See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you."

The gospel is unchanging. I know from your testimonies that most of you here continue to believe in the gospel as you understood it when you repented of your sins and made Jesus Lord of your life. You have persisted at Elgin Covenant through many conflicts and disappointments, because at the core you know you are united by this confession, that Jesus is the Christ, and that what the Bible says about him is true. This has not made unity easy, but you have borne one another by being grounded on that confession. That is a reason to praise God.

### **3. Anointing from the Anointed**

But to hear of the final hour and of the spirit of Antichrist can be frightening, and even disheartening. Most of you, like me, are wrestling with our own problems on the road of holiness, it is overwhelming to think that from now on our walks of discipleship have to include

sparring with the Antichrist. When I read the headlines about another court decision, when I read the dust covers of books that proclaim the gospel of I'm Okay You're Okay, I feel weak and I feel tired. Most of all I feel sad for the lost because the light is fading; it is being hidden under a bushel of false beliefs about Jesus, false doctrines of scripture, and false hopes in humankind.

But take heart, writes John. You have been anointed by the Anointed One. Jesus, whose title of Christ means "the anointed one," anoints us with his Spirit when we turn to him in faith, and by his Spirit we have the power to persevere in faith and to discern truth from falsehood. This is the remedy that dispels the Spirit of Antichrist; the remedy is direct from the power of God. This is the remedy that we will return to once we have seen that everything else, every strategy and program, has failed us and failed the lost. At the end of our strength and the beginning of our weakness, is the threshold that God can cross and begin to do the works that bring peace to the lost, revival to the saints, and glory to heaven.

As his Spirit remains in us, so do the word and the promise remain in us. God's word sustains our faith in a trustworthy, loving, unchanging, constant, almighty God, who has showed us the path of repentance and reconciliation, first in the faith of Israel, and then in the fulfillment of that faith in Jesus Christ. We are still called to bring that gospel, and no other gospel, to our world. But we are called to do that in God's power, not our own.

The only hope I have left is in God's power, God's anointing on believing churches. I have run out of optimism in anything and anyone else, including my own ability to save a single soul. God must do the anointing, reviving, and reaching. Our part is to persist in our anointing, to hang on to God, to cling to God's Word, though the world and its lusts, and the spirits of antichrist, howl at us on every side to *just give up on that stuff already, it's not relevant anymore.*

The movie *Monsters University* tells the story of how two monsters got expelled from college but learned lessons that helped them move on to successful lives. One monster, Sully, was big and hairy and scary, the ideal monster. The other, Mike, looked like a cross between a frog and a bowling ball with one big eye. Mike wanted with all his heart to be scary, but he was just funny-looking. Finally, after all their misadventures, Sully had this insight which set Mike on the right path for himself. Sully said, “You’re not scary, but you’re fearless.”

I wonder if one reason our gospel has been so diminished over the last forty years or so, is that America’s Protestants, and more recently its evangelicals, have tried to play the world’s game according to the world’s values and expectations? How long can we lust and crave for what the world calls power, before we start thinking like the world about God, Jesus, and the Bible? And now we are waking up to the reality that as far as our world is concerned we just don’t count for much anymore. But maybe we are anointed in the Spirit not to be powerful as the world thinks of power, but to be fearless in the world. Maybe we, in meekness and humility, need to start showing our world that we refuse to be intimidated by the world. Maybe then the bushel we have drawn over us will lift away and our light will start shining into the darkness again.

## **Conclusion**

I see, sadly, First John chapter two describing a large number of American Protestants today, with even some evangelicals getting pulled by the current. The opinion has grown up that what really matters is UNITY for its own sake, and what one believes about Jesus is a minor and disputable matter that should never get in the way of UNITY. Friends, the Apostle makes clear that what we proclaim and believe about Jesus is neither minor nor is it disputable. When one hears denial that Jesus is the Christ or that Jesus is God, one hears the spirit of Antichrist.

When a church gets it wrong about Jesus, it gets everything wrong, and ceases to be a church. To believe in Jesus is to believe he is the Christ, the Divine Son wrapped in flesh, dead once, and risen from the dead to live and reign forever, by whom and in whom we have eternal life. This is the ground of unity among Christians, and there is no other. Amen.