

## False Teachers - Part 1

1 John 2:18-27

March 11, 2018



The New Testament consistently warns God's people to watch out for false teachers! Jesus Himself warns us in Mathew 24:4-5, %Jesus answered: %Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, I am the Messiah, and will deceive many.+ The Apostle Paul warns the Ephesian church in Acts 20:29-30, %know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.+ And now, the Apostle John, explains one of his key reasons for writing this letter. In 1 John 2:26 he says, %am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray.+ The threat from false teachers was real 2,000 years ago, and it is still very real today! This morning, we'll begin a 2-part series on False Teachers. We'll cover part 2 on March 25. A good place to begin this series is by recognizing that

**1. False teachers are a very real threat!** Please turn in your Bible to 1 John 2:18, %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.+ This phrase %last hour+ is obviously not a literal hour. Rather, it refers to a period of time that began at Christ's 1<sup>st</sup> coming and will end at his 2<sup>nd</sup> coming.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the last hour is this very hour, it's the time period that you and I are in right now. It didn't surprise John's readers that there would be antichrists or false teachers in their day. It shouldn't surprise us either, to find false teachers in our world today.

Don't let the label %antichrist+ cause you to focus on only watching for some big end times Villain, like Hitler or whoever. The %anti+ in antichrist simply means %against+ Christ.<sup>3</sup> According to 1 John 2:18, there are MANY of these.<sup>4</sup> The term %antichrist+ is a loaded word in our culture today. This is why I am focusing on calling them false teachers rather than antichrists. We need to pay attention to their particular false teachings and not get distracted by their particular persona. Therefore, our goal this morning is not to try to predict who the ultimate, final Antichrist will be, nor to articulate a particular view on the end times or to exegete the entire book of Revelation. Our focus is to consider the important reality of all kinds of false teachers in our world. William Barclay makes this helpful observation, %Antichrist is not so much a person as a principle, the principle which is actively opposed to God and, ÷ as incarnating itself, in those [people] in every generation, who have seemed to be the blatant opponents of God.<sup>5</sup>

In John's day, these false teachers were trying to lead them astray in at least 2 key areas: First of all, they were trying to lead them astray

**1) With false claims about sin.**<sup>6</sup> Please turn in your Bible to 1 John 1. 1 John 1:6 taught us about their claim that we can have fellowship with God while walking in the darkness. John clarifies that this is a sinful lie; this kind of hypocrisy is not living out God's truth. 1 John 1:8 taught us about their claim to be without sin.<sup>7</sup> This is a self-deception, showing that God's truth is not in them. 1 John 1:10 taught us about their claim that they have not sinned. This is calling God a liar. It proves that God's Word is not in them. The second way that they were trying to lead them astray was

**2) With false teachings about Jesus.** 1 John 2:22 says, %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.+ They were

<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, Jesus said this in context of the temple being destroyed (Matthew 24:3). This happened in 70 AD, ~20 years before 1 John was written.

<sup>2</sup> Consider Acts 2:17-21 and the fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32. Also read 1 Peter 1:20 and Hebrews 1:1-2.

<sup>3</sup> *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2128.

<sup>4</sup> This is a step beyond an agnostic or an atheist, this is an antagonist who rallies against Christ and His cause. This is not someone who is neutral, but rather someone on the attack! Consider Matthew 11:12.

<sup>5</sup> William Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude*, Rev. Ed., Westminster, Philadelphia, PA, 1976, p. 63.

<sup>6</sup> Also consider the claims in 1 John 2, verses 6 and 9, and 4:20.

<sup>7</sup> This is something different than our ability to overcome sin by God's power within us.

teaching them that the man Jesus was not the same person as the divine Christ, the Messiah.<sup>8</sup> They were also teaching them that Christ did not come in the flesh.

1 John 4:1-3 warns them, "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because MANY false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world."<sup>9</sup> John writes to warn his dear bro/sis in Christ that these false teachings are a very real threat. And, he writes to tell them that these false teachers were out and about spreading heresy and lies in their neighborhoods. But, justō

**2. Who were these false teachers in 1 John?** Honestly, it's actually a little unclear exactly who they were. John never specifically names the particular school of thought that he is arguing against in this letter. But, we can make some pretty good deductions by reading between the lines a little. First of all, **1) These false teachers were Secessionists.** In other words, formerly they had been a part of the Christian community, or at least they had seemed to be a part of it. 1 John 2:19 says, "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."<sup>10</sup> The current danger in these 1<sup>st</sup> century churches was not persecution from outside the church, it was seduction that came from within the church.<sup>11</sup> Now, this is something that sends chills up/down my spine. Likely, this was a case of syncretism, taking the truth of Christianity and blending with all kinds of false ideas. After many years of Gospel proclamation and biblical teaching, apparently there were some who wanted to modernize or combine parts of traditional Christian teaching with that which was new and trendy. But rather than supposedly "improving" on God's truth, they fell into heresy.<sup>12</sup> It seems that people from within the church thought that they were making it better, making it intellectually respectable and more fitting with contemporary thought.<sup>13</sup> In fact, the initial motivation of these false teachers may have simply been "to translate the gospel into terms of [current] culture." This was taking the desire to be relevant too far!

Now that's scaryō and sobering! I wonder what supposed "improvements" Christians may be trying to make in our culture today? Can you think of any? ò How aboutō

...**Eternal Conscious Punishment.** Some are questioning the Bible's clear, but unpopular teaching, regarding hell. They claim: "If God is loving, surely there can't be a literal hell."

...**God's design for marriage.** Some churches have felt inclined to set aside God's design for marriage as between one man and one woman. They claim: "As long as 2 people love each other, who are we to judge?"

...**Jesus as the only way to God.** Some have even come to the point of compromising Jesus as the one and only way to salvation. They claim: "Surely there are many great religions in the world and many different paths to the one true God."

Unfortunately, sometimes our well-intentioned cultural apologetics can actually weaken our core doctrinal truths. We compromise orthodoxy in the name of tolerance or inclusiveness. Or, perhaps even worse, our modern-day arrogance deludes us into thinking that we are just so much smarter and more advanced in our thinking than people of long ago. People like the Apostle John, or Paul and Peter, or evenō Jesus. This is why daily time in God's Word and Bible study are so important! It's where Sunday School and small groups fit into a healthy spiritual diet. Christian maturity requires consistent theological instruction and extended time in God's Word. The false teachers in John's day

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<sup>8</sup> Here, for the first time, John identifies the false teaching of those who left the community. Combining this with other statements [in chapters 4 and 5], it becomes clear that their aberrant Christology involved a denial that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, God's Son, come in the flesh, whose death was real and vicarious. +*The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2565 footnote on 1 John 2:22.

<sup>9</sup> We find this echoed in 2 John 7.

<sup>10</sup> Some see this verse as evidence in support of the doctrine of eternal security. There are godly people within the EFCA who do not hold to the doctrine of Eternal Security and those who do. All are welcome in our fellowship. Robust debate on this is good, but we do not view eternal security as a major point to divide over. For example, consider Hebrews 3:14 but also 2 Peter 3:17.

<sup>11</sup> William Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude*, Rev. Ed., Westminster, Philadelphia, PA, 1976, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> See Dodd's discussion on p. 296 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 1981, (1, 2, 3 John by Glenn W. Barker).

<sup>13</sup> See discussion by William Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude*, Rev. Ed., Westminster, Philadelphia, PA, 1976, p. 5.

were secessionists. They came from within the fellowship of the church. A second thing to understand is that

**2) These false teachers were likely Cerinthians.** Cerinthians should not be confused with Corinthians, people who lived in the city of Corinth. The Cerinthians were followers of a guy named Cerinthus. This school of thought was an early form of Gnosticism. However, we should be careful not to overstate this because Gnosticism wasn't fully developed until some 100 years later in history. One of the things that the Cerinthians taught was that the divine Christ came upon the human Jesus at his baptism and then left him at the cross, so that it was only [a man named] Jesus who died.<sup>14</sup> In other words, it wasn't until John the Baptist baptized the man Jesus that the Spirit of Christ entered Him. And, Christ departed from Jesus at some point during Holy Week, before His suffering and death. In essence, what happens here is a significant discrediting of Jesus' incarnation. Because of an overemphasis on the divine, spiritual essence of Christ, the physical existence and full humanity of Jesus is diminished and made to seem unimportant.

The Cerinthians basically denied the validity of Christ's suffering. They taught that He didn't actually suffer and die on the cross for sin. Now, if this were true, you can see how it would change the very Gospel we honor on Good Friday and the resurrection victory we declare on Easter morning. Frankly, it also takes the meaning right out of Christmas. It disregards the wonderful truth of God's immanence, how He drew near in the person of Christ. It wrongly portrays Him as only a distant, transcendent God. This is a blatant rejection of who Jesus Christ actually is and what He actually did for us. Back in 1 John 2:2 John taught us, "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world." But, "Jesus died only as a man, [then] his sacrificial atonement would not have been sufficient to take away the guilt of human sin."<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the Cerinthians of John's day were false teachers who were out and about teaching heresy and keeping people from the true gospel message.

**3. How do we guard against false teachers?** John gives us 3 ways. First of all, we guard against false teachers

**1) By remembering our anointing.** 1 John 2:20 begins, "But you have an anointing from the Holy One" + And 1 John 2:27 agrees, "As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you." The word anointing<sup>16</sup> has a pretty cool definition. It carries the idea of being chosen by God, consecrated to his service, and endowed with his power to accomplish the assigned task.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, our task of guarding against false teachers is doable because we have been chosen by God and consecrated to His service. Plus, we have His power within us.<sup>18</sup> We don't need fancy new Gnostic teachings or some secret, higher knowledge. A 2<sup>nd</sup> way that we guard against false teachers is

**2) By remaining in the original truth.** 1 John 2:24 says, "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."<sup>19</sup> This word "remain" really resonated with me this week.<sup>20</sup> I just felt my spirit filling up and gaining strength as I pondered over this idea. John uses this word "remain" 5 times in our passage this morning. Using today's lingo, we might say, "HOLD FAST!" This is a nautical term, referring to the importance of securely gripping a ship's rigging. To bear down, grit it out,



<sup>14</sup> NIV Study Bible, 2011, p. 2129.

<sup>15</sup> NIV Study Bible, 2011, p. 2131, footnote on 1 John 5:6.

<sup>16</sup> To assign a person to a task, with the implication of supernatural sanctions, blessing, and endowment. To anoint, to assign, to appoint, assignment, appointment. Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 483). New York: United Bible Societies.

<sup>17</sup> NIV Study Bible, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1620 footnote on Matthew 16:16.

<sup>18</sup> John 16:13-15 says, "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you." + What a great Trinitarian expression of how God guards us against false teaching. He works all things together for our spiritual protection and blessing. This is why we pray that God will enlighten us through His Holy Spirit, that He will illuminate our understanding of God's truth and lead us to apply it correctly. See NIV Study Bible, 2011, verse 27 footnote on p. 2128.

<sup>19</sup> This word "remain" occurs 5 times in today's passage, see 1 John 2 verses 19, 24, and 27.

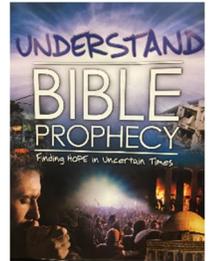
<sup>20</sup> Remain = someone who does not leave a certain realm or sphere: remain, continue, abide. Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 631). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

stay the course.<sup>21</sup> HOLD FAST to the truth that we heard from the beginning! The key here is fidelity to the original message. John opened his letter in 1 John 1:1, "What which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched- this we proclaim concerning the Word of life."<sup>22</sup> HOLD FAST to the truth that we heard from the beginning!<sup>23</sup> <sup>24</sup> Another way that we guard against false teachers is

**3) By recognizing that false teachers are a very real threat.** This is how we started out this sermon. We talked about a healthy awareness that false teachers are out there. John's readers were aware of this threat because he cared enough to write and warn them about it. So, we've come full circle. John teaches his readers, and us, that we guard against false teachers at least 3 ways:

- 1) By remembering our anointing.
- 2) By remaining in the original truth.
- 3) By recognizing that false teachers are a very real threat.

Did you happen to receive this flyer in the mail? It's about a Bible Prophecy Seminar being hosted in Bemidji this week at the Holiday Inn Express. How do we decide whether this is legitimate biblical truth or whether this might be false teaching? The presenter is Pastor Joel Kratzke. I don't know Joel. He may very well be a good guy who teaches the truth. My point in mentioning his seminar is not to make you distrust him. It's simply to illustrate a point, we need to remain aware that there ARE false teachers in the world today. We need to be careful before we automatically buy into Pastor Joel's message or to my message (Pastor Jerry's) or anyone else's. 1 John 2:26 warns us, "I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray." For almost 2,000 years now, false teachers have been at work refining and polishing up their lies about Christ and Christianity. False teachers continue to be a very real threat in 2018. So, be on your guard!



Who are the false teachers we should watch out for in 2018? Are there any right here in Bemidji? We'll talk about that in Part 2 of this sermon series, on March 25. □ For today, let's close with that classic Awana acronym: Approved Workmen Are Not Ashamed. 2 Timothy 2:15 charges us, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." Amen!

*This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji  
on March 11, 2018 by Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson*

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<sup>21</sup> Urban Dictionary. Originally a nautical term probably borrowed from the Dutch "houd vast" (hold tight).+

<sup>22</sup> Philippians 3:16 says it this way, "Only let us live up to what we have already attained." It makes me think of that classic tune, "Give me that old time religion, it's good enough for me." Also see Hebrews 6:19.

<sup>23</sup> We don't need new truth, we need to remember and put into practice what we already know; allow it to be active in our lives and to impact our daily living. (William Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude, Rev. Ed.*, Westminster, Philadelphia, PA, 1976, p. 66.)

<sup>2</sup> John 9 summarizes in nicely, "Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son."+

There is immense value in having pastors at our church be licensed/ordained by the EFCA. It protects pastors from straying from orthodoxy and, as a result, protects our church from veering into heretical doctrine. Pastoral licensing isn't a guarantee, but it is certainly a great help in guarding against false teaching in churches. (Consider Ephesians 4:11-13 and 1 Corinthians 12:27-31. Also, ponder over Acts 10:38.) That's not to say that we have to have access to seminary and ordination in order to avoid heresy. As noted above, our ultimate guide into understanding and rightly applying God's Truth is the Holy Spirit. Consider Ephesians 1:17-19a.

<sup>24</sup> At this point, perhaps some of you noticed the seeming inconsistency in 1 John 2:27, "So you do not need anyone to teach you." What is John getting at here? This sounds pretty strange. Is it wrong then to have pastors and Sunday School teachers in our church? The short answer is "no." (See Romans 15:14.) We can be certain of this because of verses like Ephesians 4:11, "So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers to build up believers. Not to mention, the Apostle John himself is writing this very letter to teach these dear brothers and sisters in the faith. Furthermore, the Great Commission commands us to go and make disciples by teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."+

What's going on here is that John is pushing back against the false teachers who were saying they had some special hidden knowledge. They were confusing John's readers by claiming that the only true way to ultimate, higher knowledge was through the gnostic teachers. Therefore, in 1 John 2:27, "John is not ruling out human teachers but rather clarifying that the original message of the gospel and the teachings handed down by the Apostles was adequate. It was the only reliable truth they needed and they should HOLD FAST to it! (*NIV Study Bible*, 2011, verse 27 footnote on p. 2128. Consider also 1 John 1:1-4.)