

# Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, July 3, 2024 – First Baptist Church Buda  
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



## THAT YOU MAY KNOW – A STUDY OF 1,2 & 3 JOHN *Avoiding Spiritual Deception – Part 1* *1 John 2:18-23*

*“<sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. <sup>23</sup> Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.” -1 John 2:18-23 (NKJV)*

### **BACKGROUND AND SETTING FOR 1<sup>ST</sup>, 2<sup>ND</sup>, & 3<sup>RD</sup> JOHN:**

**(1) AUTHOR = The Apostle John** – If you will notice, the letter of 1 John bears no inscription (name, autograph, signature). It doesn't give us a name of an individual in the actual letter itself. For that reason 1 John is often called an “anonymous letter,” but 2 and 3 John do carry an inscription. They are written by someone called “the Elder,” a reference to one of Jesus' closest disciples/apostles who was a part of Jesus inner circle, John. The moniker “Elder” does indicate that John is advanced in years when these letter were written. The language and style of all three letters are identical to each other as well as to John's Gospel, so the traditional view and the most commonly held view is that all three were written by the “disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 21:20-24). There is no reason to doubt this and early church leaders titled these three little book by John's name.

John actually wrote 5 books in the New Testament... not just these three.

### **5 Books Written by the Beloved Disciple:**

- 1. The Gospel of John**
- 2. First John**
- 3. Second John**
- 4. Third John**
- 5. The Book of the Revelation**

And this I think is significant... all of his books were written later in life and after all the other books in the Bible were recorded.

### **Here are some facts we know about John:**

- **He was the son of Zebedee and Salome (Mt. 4:21; 27:55-56; Mk. 15:40-41)**
- **He and his brother James were fishermen with their father (Mk. 1:19-20)**
- **He and James were called Boanerges or Sons of thunder by Christ because of their fiery behavior at times (Mk. 3:17; cp. Lk. 9:53-54)**
- **He was one of the 3 most intimate disciples of the Lord (Mt. 17:1ff; 26:37)**
- **He was a close associate of Simon Peter... the first ones to arrive at the tomb (Jn. 20:2-8), they suffered imprisonment together after healing a lame man (Acts 3 & 4), and they traveled together to Samaria after the gospel was preached (Acts 8:14-17) not to mention that they were the disciples closest to Jesus**
- **He was one of the pillars (prime leaders) of the church in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:9)**
- **From external and extra-biblical sources (history/tradition), like Polycarp, Papias (*pappy-us*), and Justin Martyr (early church fathers) we are told the following about John from his writings – These early church fathers often quoted John and used his writings**
- **Polycarp and Papias were identified as pupils of John - They have writings dated as early as the 2nd century**
- **John was eventually banished to the isle of Patmos by the Roman emperor Domitian, from where he received the visions and wrote The Revelation (cp. Rev. 1:9)**
- **He returned to Ephesus to live out the rest of his life, from where he wrote these three epistles as well as the gospel that bears his name - Archeological remains bear his name in ruins of churches and shrines**
- **John outlived all the other apostles**
- **The book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ was written by John probably close to the same time he wrote these small epistles which bear his name.**
- **Remember the book of the Revelation was written about the vision that John saw while banished to the Greek island of Patmos on the Aegean sea.**
- **Tradition says that this was after John had been sentenced to death by martyrdom.**
- **We know little about John's later life and death from the Bible**

- **The most insightful bit of information comes from John 21 when the risen Christ was talking to Peter about Peter's death** - After Jesus told Peter that he would not live long Peter asked about John's death. Jesus replied that if John lived until Christ's return, that was not Peter's concern. This was not a promise that John would live until the Lord returned, but it does seem to indicate that the Lord knew John would live a long time (John 21:19-23)
- **Tradition holds that John was sentenced to death in a boiling vat of oil, yet he emerged unharmed from the experience**
- **Again tradition tells us that John lived into old age perhaps dying sometime after AD 98... He is thought to have died in Ephesus** – But in fact the mystery and unknowns concerning John's death and what happened to him are not known and are varied...

### **God Questions? How Did the Apostle John Die?**

We know that the apostle John was exiled for his faith late in life (Revelation 1:9). The Bible does not give us details on how the apostle John died, but tradition gives us a few theories.

The most plausible theory of John's death states that John was arrested in Ephesus and faced martyrdom when his enemies threw him in a huge basin of boiling oil. However, according to the tradition, John was miraculously delivered from death. The authorities then sentenced John to slave labor in the mines of Patmos. On this island in the southern part of the Aegean Sea, John had a vision of Jesus Christ and wrote the prophetic book of Revelation. The apostle John was later freed, possibly due to old age, and he returned to Ephesus, in what is now Turkey. He died as an old man sometime after AD 98, the only apostle to die peacefully.

Another theory concerning John's death is associated with a second-century bishop named Papias of Hierapolis. According to one commentary on Papias's writings, John was killed by a group of Jewish men. However, many historians believe Papias was misquoted or misread and doubt the credibility of this theory.

There is also a legend that says John did not die but rather ascended straight to heaven like Enoch and Elijah. There is no biblical evidence to lend validity to this story.

Ultimately, it is not essential to know how the apostle John died. What is important is the fact that he was not ashamed of Christ (see Luke 9:26) and was willing to die for his faith. A man will not die for something he knows to be a lie. John knew the truth that Jesus had been resurrected, and he was willing to die rather than to renounce his faith in his Savior.

- (2) **DATE = A.D. 90-95** - As with most books in the Bible, we cannot know for certain when and from where these epistles were penned. As to a date, it is commonly believed to have been written close to the end of the 1st century, with a fairly wide possible time frame... somewhere between 90-95 A.D. Again, we don't know the exact time or order of the books having been written, but here are some possible dates for John's writings...

### **Dates for John's Biblical Writings:**

1. **The Gospel of John = AD 80 to 98**
2. **First, Second and Third John = AD 90 to 95**
3. **The Book of the Revelation = AD 94 to 98**

Of course we know God inspired the Bible and that it was written with His leading, but this may explain why the book of John seems so applicable to the readers of today. **Think of this... John had more time to think about what questions were raised in the 50 or more years after the resurrection of Christ. He knew what doubts had been raised and how to answer the questions before we knew to ask them.**

**(3) PLACE OF WRITING = Ephesus** – Again, as with most books in the Bible, we cannot know with certainty when and from where these small letters of John were written. Some guesses are better than others, but are still just that guesses. It is believed by most Biblical scholars that John wrote these letters from Ephesus, the place believed to be where he died. It is usually accepted that John wrote them late in his life. Supporters of this point to 2 John 1 and 3 John 1. In both verses, the author calls himself “the elder.” In the original text, there is a definite article before “elder.” Thus, the reference is probably to an older man rather than to one who serves as an overseer in a local church. Also, 1 John 2:1,12,28; 3:7,18; 5:21; and 3 John 4 all reference John's readers as his “little children.” Such a fatherly concern points to John as an older man.

**(4) RECIPIENTS = 3 different audiences** - The Epistles of John were written to various audiences. They were all written after John was an old man living in Ephesus.

### **3 Recipients of John's Letter:**

1. **Letter 1 = The Ephesian church (and/or surrounding churches)** - The first epistle was not addressed to anyone in particular, but was written more as a sermon
2. **Letter 2 = Elect lady** - The second was written to an unnamed “elect lady.”
3. **Letter 3 = Gaius** - The third to a man name Gaius. There are three men who bear that name to whom the letter could have been written. There was a Gaius in Macedonia (Acts 19: 29), Corinth (Rom. 16:23), and Derbe (Acts 20:4).

**(5) PURPOSE = Multiple purposes** - In terms of a positive stated purpose, John actually gives us reasons why he wrote these epistles:

### **3 Stated Positive Purposes for These Letters:**

1. **That your (our) joy may be made complete = 1 John 1:4**
  2. **That you may not sin = 1 John 2:1**
  3. **That you may know that you have eternal life = 1 John 5:13**
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*“<sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. <sup>23</sup> Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.” -1 John 2:18-23 (NKJV)*

### **Some Preliminary Application Questions for this Study :**

- 1. What is the difference (if any) between being discerning and being distrustful? Is it wrong to be distrustful of someone?*
- 2. How do you develop discernment without becoming skeptical of everyone and everything?*
- 3. Since there are so many views of different doctrines, how can you know that you are right? How can you hold to being right without becoming arrogant?*
- 4. How do you determine which doctrines are core doctrines, worth dividing over, and which are more peripheral?*

These are some very important and relevant questions for us to ask ourselves today in our own lives. We are living in a day when “spiritual deception” is a very real threat. It’s not new, but it is more pronounced, worse in some ways. It has perhaps grown thicker, more thoroughly permeating of our times. And that is not surprising for the Bible/Scripture told us it would be so...

### **Some Scriptural Warning Concerning Spiritual Deception in our Day:**

- (1) **1 Timothy 4:1-2** - “<sup>1</sup>Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, <sup>2</sup> speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron.”*
- (2) **2 Timothy 3:1-5** – “<sup>1</sup>But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: <sup>2</sup> For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, <sup>3</sup> unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, <sup>4</sup> traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, <sup>5</sup> having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!”*
- (3) **2 Timothy 4:3-4** – “<sup>3</sup> For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; <sup>4</sup> and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.”*

- (4) **2 Peter 2:1-3** – *“<sup>1</sup>But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. <sup>2</sup>And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. <sup>3</sup>By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.”*
- (5) **Matthew 24:4-25-** *“<sup>4</sup>And Jesus answered and said to them: ‘Take heed that no one deceives you. <sup>5</sup>For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.’ ... “<sup>11</sup>Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. <sup>12</sup>And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.” ... “<sup>24</sup>For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. <sup>25</sup>See, I have told you beforehand.”*

What are these verses telling us....

### **3 basic level take aways on spiritual deception from the 5 passages above:**

- (1) Spiritual deception will be at it's peak in the last days –**
- (2) Spiritual deception will be very potent and powerful in the last days –**
- (3) Spiritual deception will potentially affect even the saved in the last days -**

In a fairly recent issue of *Reader's Digest* they features a cover story on ten money scams to beware of. It seems that the Internet and other modern technologies have opened many doors of opportunity for con artists who are after your money. To avoid being ripped off you must stay alert.

It's traumatic when thieves steal your identity and your money, but there is something far more traumatic and tragic, namely, when spiritual con artists, who claim to be Christian, deceive the unsuspecting. The stakes are much higher than someone's life savings. The eternal destiny of souls is at risk! Since the days of the New Testament, Satan has planted these deceivers in Christian churches, where they prey on the untaught/ungrounded or on those who are disgruntled. To avoid spiritual deception, you must develop biblical discernment and be vigilant at all times.

But we live in a day when the whole idea of spiritual discernment is minimized because spiritual truth is minimized. The slogan is, “Doctrine divides. Let's set aside our doctrinal differences and come together on the areas where we agree.” Another popular mantra is, “Jesus said that they will know that we are His disciples by our love, not by our doctrine.” The implication is, “Set aside your doctrinal views and accept anyone who says that he believes in Jesus.” Tolerance, unity, and love are viewed as much more important than doctrinal truth, which often smacks of pride.



I have had my share of unpleasant encounters with those who arrogantly claim to have the truth. They beat you up with it, not showing much grace or kindness. But we should not allow such experiences to cause us to throw out the biblical emphasis on sound doctrine. It is *not* a minor theme in the Bible!

It is highly significant that John, the apostle of love, who has just written that love is an essential mark of the true Christian (2:7-11), now calls these false teachers “antichrists” and “liars”! He doesn’t call them “brothers in Christ,” who just have different ways of understanding things. He makes it plain that they were trying to deceive the true Christians and that they were not Christian in any sense of the term. True biblical love is not divorced from an emphasis on biblical truth. To compromise the truth about the person and work of Jesus Christ is to be hateful to the core, because such error results in the eternal damnation of those who embrace it.

In these verses, John applies his third test by which you may evaluate the soundness of a teacher, as well as your own life. He has already given us the moral test of obedience to God’s commandments (2:3-6). He has given the relational test of love (2:7-11). Now he gives the doctrinal test of truth about the person and work of Jesus Christ (2:18-27). He says,

***To avoid spiritual deception, be discerning of people and doctrine.***

Our passage in 1 John 2:18-27 falls into three parts...

### **3 Parts to Avoiding Spiritual Deception in 1 John 2:18-27:**

- (1) Avoid spiritual deception through discernment of others** - In 1 John 2:18-20, John shows that to avoid spiritual deception, you must develop discernment with regard to people
- (2) Avoid spiritual discernment through discernment of doctrinal truth** - In 1 John 2:21-23, he shows that you must develop discernment with regard to doctrine, especially, the truth about Jesus Christ
- (3) Avoid spiritual discernment through discernment by abiding in the Word of God** - In 1 John 2:24-27 (which we will study next week), he shows that the means of developing such discernment is to abide in the Word and in the Spirit

So, let’s look the first two of these in verses 18-23...

### **TO AVOID SPIRITUAL DECEPTION, BE DISCERNING OF PEOPLE (1 John 2:18-20)**

*“<sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup> But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things.”*  
*-1 John 2:18-20 (NKJV)*

John contrasts the false teachers with true believers. He addresses all of his readers as “children,” (see 2:13), implying their vulnerability and the need to be on guard against these unprincipled men who were trying to deceive them (2:26). As a wise spiritual father, John is giving important counsel that will help us avoid being deceived.

He says (v.18), “... *it is the last hour.*” The way that we know it is the last hour is that “*many antichrists have come.*”

- Some have said that John mistakenly thought that Jesus would return in his lifetime. Such a view undermines the divine inspiration of Scripture.
- If you buy into it, you cannot trust anything that the apostles wrote.
- You become the judge of Scripture according to what strikes you as true.
- This view also impugns the intelligence of the apostles.
- John had heard Jesus say that no one knows the hour of His coming (Matt. 24:36).
- It is not reasonable to accuse him of being mistaken here about the time of the second coming.

Rather, John is calling the entire period between Jesus’ ascension and His return “*the last hour.*” No one knows how long this period will last, but the phrase, “the last hour,” implies a sense of urgency, in that Jesus may come at any moment. Jesus concludes His teaching on the end times with this application to the wise hearer in Mark 13:33... “<sup>33</sup> *Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is.*”

John says that a distinguishing feature of this age is that “antichrist” is coming and that even now many “antichrists” have appeared.

John is the only New Testament writer to use this word, and it only occurs five times in four verses (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7).

### **5 Uses of the Word “Antichrist” in John:**

- (1) **1 John 2:18a** – “<sup>18</sup> *Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming...*” **What does this verse tell us about antichrist? John told us, warned us in God’s Word that the “Antichrist” was coming, with a capital “A”.**
- (2) **1 John 2:18b** – “<sup>18</sup> *... even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour.*” **What does this verse tell us about antichrist? There were “antichrists” in John’s day and today also... this also confirms to us that we are in the last days.**
- (3) **1 John 2:22** – “<sup>22</sup> *Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son.*” **What does this verse tell us about antichrist? The**



***“Antichrist” and antichrists try to deceive other concerning who Jesus is, they lead others to deny Him.***

- (4) **1 John 4:3** – *“<sup>3</sup> And every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.”* **What does this verse tell us about antichrist? *The “Antichrist” rejects Jesus Christ and His incarnation, and this spirit of rejection is in the world.***
- (5) **2 John 7** – *“<sup>7</sup> For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.”* **What does this verse tell us about antichrist? *There are many antichrist and they are deceivers.***

But the concept of the “antichrist” is more frequent than just John’s writing, and there are other names and references to the spiritual deceiver(s)...

### **3 Other Names/References for the Antichrist in the Bible:**

- (1) **The Horn** – Daniel 7 talks about the horn. **Verse 8** of Daniel 7 says, *“<sup>8</sup> I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words.”* And in Daniel 7:20-22 we give this interpretation of the horn, *“<sup>20</sup>And the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn which came up, before which three fell, namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth which spoke pompous words, whose appearance was greater than his fellows. <sup>21</sup> “I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them, <sup>22</sup> until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom.”* The powerful horn that followed the 10 horns is a reference to the Antichrist. A.W. Pink says *“‘Little Horn’ refers to the lowly political origin of the Antichrist, and describes him as he is before he attains governmental supremacy.”*
- (2) **The Beast** - Revelation 13 talks about the beast, which refer to antichrist. Revelation 13:11-17 talks about this reference to the antichrist when it says, *“<sup>11</sup> Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. <sup>12</sup> And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. <sup>13</sup> He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. <sup>14</sup> And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. <sup>15</sup> He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. <sup>16</sup> He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, <sup>17</sup> and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.”*

(3) **The Man of Lawlessness** - Paul (2 Thess. 2:1-12) mentions the man of lawlessness who will exalt himself and display himself as being God. His coming will be *“in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders”* (2 Thess. 2:9). He will deceive many, who will perish. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 says, *“<sup>1</sup>Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, <sup>2</sup>not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. <sup>3</sup>Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, <sup>4</sup>who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. <sup>5</sup>Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? <sup>6</sup>And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. <sup>7</sup>For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. <sup>8</sup>And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. <sup>9</sup>The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, <sup>10</sup>and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. <sup>11</sup>And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, <sup>12</sup>that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”*

When John says that antichrist is coming, he most likely refers to this future evil leader.

But when he says, *“even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour...”* in verse 18 of our passage, he means that the evil spirit that will characterize the final antichrist is already working in these “false teachers” “deceivers” who have left the churches.

- *The prefix, “anti,” can mean either “instead of” or “in opposition to.” It may contain both ideas here.*
- *The false teachers rise up within the church and present a system that subtly presents something instead of Jesus Christ.*
- *The false teacher may use the same label, “Jesus Christ,” but he will not be the same Jesus that is presented in the Bible.*
- *If a gullible person takes the bait, he is led farther away until finally he is in total opposition to Christ.*
- *These false teachers, whom John labels antichrists, did not carry pitchforks and wear red suits with horns and a tail, or T-shirts saying, “Warning: I am an antichrist!”*
- *Rather, they arose in the churches. Some of them may have been elders or pastors, who for a while had taught the truth.*

Paul warned the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:30, “<sup>30</sup> Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.” Now these men were leaving the churches to form new groups, saying, “We have come into a deeper knowledge of the truth. Follow us and we’ll let you in on this secret knowledge.”

John, here, gives three guidelines to watch for, to be aware and wary (cautious) of, to be discerning of in regard to these spiritual deceivers and false teachers...

### **3 Guidelines to Watch For to be Discerning:**

**(1) Beware, Satan works in the realm of religion** - False teachers invariably adopt Christian terminology and posture themselves as being Christians, but they are not Christians.

#### **Some possible and recognizable characteristics of deceptive false teachers:**

1. **Appear orthodox** - They usually begin within the church (1 John 2:19) and at first, their teaching may be orthodox -
2. **Charismatic personality** - They often have attractive personalities and they build a following of people who seem to be helped by their teaching - But, eventually, they begin subtly to veer from the truth. There may be multiple motives.
3. **Justified immorality** - Sometimes, they fall into immorality, and to justify their sin, they have to deny Scripture or make excuses for their sin -
4. **Popular and rich** - They may love the acclaim of being popular, along with the financial rewards that often go along with a successful ministry - It feels good to be in demand as a speaker, to stay in luxury hotels and speak to large crowds.
5. **Power and control** - As their popularity grows, they grow in power and control
6. **Acquired followers** - They may gather around them a circle of willing followers manipulated to agree, side with and acquiesce (agree, comply, submit) with their views and efforts - In other word he hires a loyal group of lieutenants who carry out his wishes.
7. **Unchallenged leadership** - Usually they have grown so powerful that no one dares to challenge the their teaching or lifestyle, even though he is preaching heresy and living in disobedience to Scripture –
8. **Religious** - In spite of their perhaps subtle deviance, they still traffick in the realm of religion

Note, also, that there has never been a perfect church, even in New Testament times while the apostles were still living. We sometimes idealize the early church, thinking that if we could just get back to the New Testament principles, we wouldn’t have all of the problems that we constantly battle in the modern church. But, these early churches had gone through the damage of false teachers in their midst, who now had left the churches to form new groups. Undoubtedly, they took with them people from the churches. Whenever that happens, those who still are in the church are confused and wounded.

They wonder, “Why did our friends leave? They claim that they have found the truth now and that we are in the dark. Maybe there are problems here. Maybe we should leave, too.” This is how the enemy has worked from the earliest days of the church. Don’t be surprised when it happens.

- (2) **Beware of anyone who breaks from the true church to form a new group with new theology** – Verse 19 of our passage warns us, *“<sup>19</sup> 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.”* John’s words here do not apply to people who get disgruntled in one evangelical church and leave to join or form another evangelical church. While that practice is usually regrettable and sad, it is wrong to label those who left as heretics, unless they also have abandoned core Christian truth.

Heretics not only eventually separate themselves from true Christians to form their own groups, but also, they deviate from orthodox Christian doctrine on major issues. They claim that they have the truth and that others do not, or that they now see things that others do not see. And, invariably they try to recruit others from within the church to join them.

While such situations are painful and unpleasant, John’s words here should prepare us not to be surprised or disheartened when it happens. If it happened to the churches under John’s care, it can and will happen to churches today. But, when it happens, we need to think biblically about some issues...

**Some issues we need to think about Biblically: (and keep in mind here)**

1. ***True Christians are born of God*** - The key issue with these false teachers was, they were not of us. They did not share the new life in Christ that brings us into His body, the church. So, they felt free to leave. You can be on the membership list of the church without having experienced the new birth. While I believe that it’s important to join a church, it is far more important to make sure that you’re truly of the church through the new birth.
2. ***If you truly know Christ, you will persevere with the church*** - It is imperfect. It contains difficult and irritating people. But, it is family! You were born into it through the new birth, and so was everyone else who has truly trusted Christ. While you may not have picked these folks to be in your family, God picked them and you’ve got to learn to get along with them! Although they often grate like sandpaper against your soul, it’s by persevering with them that God smoothes your rough edges. You will experience hurt feelings and misunderstandings if you get involved in a local church! Be committed to work through these matters. Don’t bail out on the church!
3. ***Note that John was more concerned about purity of doctrine than he was about church growth or unity*** - He never says, “We should go after these dear brothers and

bring them back!” Or, “Let’s set aside our differences and love these men.” Rather, he says in effect, “Their departure shows their true colors. Let them go!” Of course, we need to evaluate the seriousness of the doctrinal matter at hand. Sometimes sincere Christians have to agree to disagree or even to work in separate parts of the Lord’s vineyard. But if the doctrinal issue is a core matter of the faith, purity is much more important than unity or church growth. We should not measure a church’s success by the numbers who attend, but rather by its faithfulness to the truth of the gospel.

So John says, “Beware, Satan works in the realm of religion. Beware of anyone who breaks from the true church to form a new group with new theology.”

**(3) Beware of anyone who offers “new truth” that others have missed** - The test of orthodoxy is submission and adherence to the apostolic teaching contained in the New Testament... to the Word of God. If someone comes up with some new “truth” that no one else has discovered since the days of the apostles, beware!

The heretics claimed that they had now been initiated into a deeper level of truth than the average church member had experienced. It always flatters our pride to think that we have some level of truth that others lack, or we have had some special spiritual experience that other poor souls are missing out on. These false teachers were claiming such knowledge and offering it as bait to those who had yet to be enlightened. This is probably the background to verse 20 in our passage, “<sup>20</sup> But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things.” There is a textual variant here. The KJV (and New KJV) follows the reading, “you know all things.” Most other versions follow the reading (probably original), “you all know.” John is telling his readers that spiritual knowledge is not restricted to some elite inner circle. Rather, they all know the truth of the gospel because they all have the anointing from the Holy One, which refers to the indwelling Holy Spirit that Jesus, the Holy One, promised to send. The false teachers may have been using the word “anointing” as a technical term for being initiated into their special gnosis, or knowledge (John Stott, *The Epistles of John* [Eerdmans], p. 107). But John takes their term and uses it of the Holy Spirit. ★

At the moment of the new birth, God’s Spirit opens our blind eyes to see the truth about our sinfulness and the all-sufficiency of what Christ did on the cross to pay for our sins. This simple gospel message is what these believers had heard from the beginning (2:24). Rather than moving on from it to some “new truth,” they needed to abide in the old gospel truth that they had believed from the start. So John’s first point is that to avoid spiritual deception, be discerning of people. Satan disguises himself as an angel of light and his servants disguise themselves as servants of righteousness (2 Cor. 11:14, 15). But, they are liars and deceivers!



## TO AVOID SPIRITUAL DECEPTION, BE DISCERNING OF DOCTRINE (1 John 2:21-23)

*“<sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. <sup>23</sup> Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.” -1 John 2:21-23 (NKJV)*

The late philosophy professor **Allan Bloom** began his 1987 best-seller, *The Closing of the American Mind* ([Simon and Schuster], p. 25) with these words (just listen to this), “There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative.” He goes on to say (pp. 25-26), “The danger they have been taught to fear from absolutism is not error but intolerance. Relativism is necessary to openness; and this is the virtue, the only virtue, which all primary education for more than fifty years has dedicated itself to inculcating (teaching, training).”

He was right... we live in a day that has rejected the idea of absolute truth, especially in the spiritual realm. It smacks of arrogance to say that you *know* the truth and that others who do not share your view are *wrong*. You’re free to have your own spiritual opinions, as long as you don’t claim that your view is the *only* true view.

This prevailing tenant of postmodernism has now invaded the church through today’s progressive movement within the church. This growing movement downplays preaching (what could be more arrogant than for one man to stand up and say that he is proclaiming *the truth*?). And it magnifies sharing personal experiences in an accepting, non-judgmental atmosphere.

Notice how contrary this is to John’s statement in in our passage in verses 20 and 21... *“<sup>20</sup> But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. <sup>21</sup> 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.”* That sure sounds like John believed in absolute truth in the spiritual realm, and that you can know when you’re right and others are wrong! There are three implications here, which I can only touch on briefly...

### **3 Implication of the Absolute Truth of Scripture/God’s Word: (and John’s words in 1 John 2:20-21)**

(1) **Sound doctrine really matters** - Notice John says in **verse 23** of our passage, *“<sup>23</sup> Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.”* He goes on to say in v.25 that all of this concerns God’s promise to us about eternal life... notice **verse 25**, *“<sup>25</sup> And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life.”* That’s fairly important! If you deny the truth about God’s



Son as revealed in the New Testament, you do not have the Father and you do not have eternal life!

A popular sentimental, syrupy view goes, “It doesn’t matter *what* you believe as long as you’re sincere.” When you share Christ with someone who buys into this thinking, he will respond, “It’s nice that you believe that, but I have my own beliefs.” According to this view, sincerity is the main thing; truth doesn’t matter. That is utter nonsense! You can sincerely drink poison, believing that it is medicine, but it will kill you just the same. Sound doctrine really matters!

- (2) **Sound doctrine is intimately linked with a personal relationship with God** - John says that if you deny the Son, you do not *have* the Father. He goes on to talk about abiding in the Son and the Father... look on down at verse 24, “<sup>24</sup> *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.*” “Abiding” is John’s word for fellowship or a close relationship with God. His point is that if you deny cardinal truth about Jesus Christ and yet claim to know God, you are deceiving yourself.

This is not to say that a new believer must be able to give precisely correct theological statements about the trinity or the two natures of Christ in order to be truly saved. But it is to say that if someone knowingly makes heretical statements about Christ and is not open to correction, his salvation is suspect. Sound doctrine necessarily goes along with a genuine personal relationship with God.

- (3) **Sound doctrine about the person and work of Christ is absolutely vital** - Most heresies go astray with regard to the person or work of Jesus Christ. John Calvin pointed out that, “Since Christ is the sum of the gospel, heretics especially aim their arrows at Him.”

The only way that we can know the Father is through the Son (John 14:6). These false teachers were denying that Jesus is the Christ (2:22). This probably was more than a denial that Jesus was the Old Testament Messiah. The context here, which refers to Jesus as the Son of God and which closely links the Father and the Son, indicates that these false teachers denied the full deity of Jesus Christ. They denied the incarnation, that God took on human flesh in the virgin birth of Jesus. They taught that “the Christ” came upon the human Jesus at His baptism and departed at His crucifixion. John says that they denied both the Father and the Son.

The modern cults all go astray on the person and work of Jesus Christ. They deny His deity and His substitutionary death on the cross. They deny the trinity. Some of them speak in Gnostic fashion of “the Christ within us all.” By denying the Son of God, they do not have the Father. In the words of this apostle of love, they are liars, deceivers, and antichrists.

## CONCLUSION

We should be diligent to preserve the unity of the body of Christ, but not at any cost. There is no room for compromise on the core beliefs of Christian orthodoxy, especially the truths about the person of Christ and the gospel.

During World War Two, Neville Chamberlain of Britain tried to keep the peace by appeasing Adolf Hitler. After giving Poland to Hitler, Chamberlain went back to England proclaiming “peace in our times.” But Winston Churchill wisely observed, “An appeaser is one who feeds a crocodile, hoping it will eat him last.” Sure enough, Hitler later tried to eat Britain, too.

If we compromise truth to appease a heretic or to keep him in the church, it will lead to our ultimate spiritual demise.

### To avoid spiritual deception...

- (1) Be discerning of people - Especially of religious people who claim to have some new truth
- (2) Be discerning of sound doctrine -
- (3) Know your Bible well -
- (4) Study systematic theology -
- (5) Study church history -

Most errors today have been around for centuries. Next time we will study John’s antidote to heresy, to abide in the Word and in the Spirit.