

Advocate for Truth

I think this title is appropriate for Mother's Day, for who but your mother knows when you're telling the truth and when you're not?

Last week I began this series of messages based on the Letters of John. You recall that John, the "beloved disciple" who was very close to Jesus, the one to whom Jesus entrusted the care of his mother Mary, was the author of the Gospel of John, the book of Revelation, and three short letters to Christians living in the area we now call "Asia Minor." His letters were written toward the end of the first century A.D. to a congregation or congregations of Christians who were troubled by the departure of some who apparently held to beliefs that went beyond what they had been taught and what Scripture revealed. Those folks called themselves Christians and used Christian terminology, but they didn't mean the same thing that the apostles knew to be true. I don't care what group it is, whenever you redefine shared core terms it is the end of unity.

John wrote his letters to encourage them to stand fast, to remain in fellowship with God, to reject false teachers and to show true Christian love to each other. He writes to clarify for believers and to confront the false gospels being taught. In this first letter John weaves together the themes of truth, obedience, and love.

Last week we considered the first chapter of the first letter in which John emphasizes that true fellowship with God is through fellowship with his Son. The conditions for this true fellowship is to walk in the light, meaning to realize our true condition as sinful creatures, confess our sins, and receive forgiveness through Jesus. If we want to have fellowship with God, we must . . . 1) Know God's truth, 2) Obey God's commandments, and 3) Love God's children. This then allows us to have genuine fellowship with other believers. These themes are repeated in chapter two.

Chapter 1 tells us that walking in the light means dealing honestly with our sin. Chapter 2 introduces us to an important concept—abiding in Christ. The Greek word [μενειν] is used 10 times in verses 6-27. It means "abide," "remain," "live" or "dwell," and speaks of a close, intimate, transparent relationship with the Father and the Son; so that you are honest before God and come to know who God really is. That kind of relationship with God and our Savior allows us to genuinely love one another.

I. Christ is our Advocate

Recall that John is writing to believers who are now questioning their faith because there are rival groups that claim a higher spirituality and disparage their beliefs. So John reassures the believers that they are to walk in

righteousness but if they do sin they have a Friend in High Places. Once we come to the profound realization that we sin, we need to know where to go for help. John reminds the believers that *“... if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One,”* 1 John 2:1. He’s our Helper, a Defense Advocate who pleads our case before the Father. The very same word used here for advocate [παρακλητον] is the word Jesus himself used when he promised the Holy Spirit: *“... I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate [παρακλητον] to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth,”* John 14:16-17.

When we sin, we have an advocate in heaven. He has made full propitiation for our sins – meaning he sacrificed all to atone for all our sins. So when we do sin Jesus admits our guilt and pleads his blood on our behalf; *“... and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world,”* 1 John 2:2. Here a reminder of Jesus’ own words: *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life,”* John 3:16.

Daily obedience to Jesus’ commands – abiding in him - is evidence that we have life in him, which is eternal life. This is where many Christians get sidetracked for perhaps we are educated beyond our level of obedience. Either we think we know the Bible so well that we just go on about our living without obeying. Or we kind of pay lip service to the Bible and Jesus, but because of our superior 21st century education we implicitly ignore his commands. Yet obedience – taking Scripture to heart and seeking to live as so described – that is what leads to a deep experience of God’s love. And obedience means living as Jesus did. This is all that John is trying to convey to the believers. It’s like he’s saying, “Hey look, I lived with Him when he walked the earth. I know him. He was a man like us. And I was with him after he rose from the dead and saw him, spoke with him, touched him, but also realized that with him I was in the presence of the living God. And since his ascension (return to heaven) I continue to know his presence through the power of the Holy Spirit. So listen to me, you’re on the right track when you obey his commands, as I have taught you. Let him abide with you on a daily basis and then you’ll realize what I have realized about him.”

The apostle John lived the history we read about, the history he taught the believers, the history of Jesus and all that he was and is and means.

When Love is Right - when we get this right, the kind of love Jesus has will be in us so that we are able to love one another. This is an essential mark of the Christian life. It is not a new command. But for believers it is a distinguishing mark of the life Jesus brought to this earth. *“Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble,”* 1 John 2:10.

When Love is Wrong – “But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them,” 1 John 2:11. Those who are not walking with Jesus will fall back into old ways that cause strife with one another. But those who love (as Jesus does) will not stumble because they are walking in the light. Again, John harkens back to his time with Jesus, who healed the blind man so that he could see the truth (John chapter 9:5), and when Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life,”* John 8:12.

II. The Is World Passing Away

Here’s the second major point John makes in the second chapter of his letter. If you love the ways of this world you will be disappointed and you’re on the slippery slope to oblivion. *“For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever,”* 1 John 2:16-17.

That seems simple to understand: God is eternal, earthly life is not, so hitch your wagon to the Eternal One. Sounds easy. But is it not easy because we live in a world that constantly attempts to seduce us spiritually – to pull us back into our fallen human nature. The world is an organized system that leaves God out – all you have to do to know this is carefully watch and listen to movies, TV shows, pop culture, and much of the media. They all assume that there is no God. The world attacks believers three ways: 1) evil desires, which play out in the lust of the flesh; that is seeking gratification and fulfillment in pleasure; 2) covetousness, which is the lust of the eyes and wanting to have more and more, comparing what we have to what others with more, have. “How much is enough? just a little bit more than what you have;” 3) self-exaltation, which is pride, a seeking after fame and privilege, an entitlement attitude. In my first parish a retired Methodist pastor assisted me on occasion. His brother was a pastor in an A. G. Church and from him he learned the “three G’s” that tempt pastors – gold, glitter, and girls.

Spiritual counterfeits are all around us—and even among us. John calls them “antichrists.” They are as prevalent in the 21st century as they were in the first. Watch and listen carefully, they are the temptations and the teachers that may use religious language, even “Jesus language,” but in reality are only speaking in earthly terms, telling us that our passions and desires are sacred. False teachers separate us from the truth we know in Christ Jesus. So take a positive approach to the challenges of the world. *“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh,”* Galatians 5:16. It doesn’t say, “stop giving in to the desires of the flesh in order to walk in the Spirit.” Rather, St. Paul tells us to live our life by the direction and enabling grace of the Holy

Spirit, so we won't be so interested in gratifying the desires of the flesh. Paul is saying the same thing as John who urges us to abide in Christ. It is foolish to be too attached to the world for *the world is passing away along with its desires*.

III. Realize Christ's Promise

"And this is what he promised us—eternal life," 1 John 2:25. Our best hope to realize this promise of Christ is to be deeply grounded in the truth of God. There are two sources for knowing the truth: Internal – the anointing of the Holy Spirit; External - the teaching of the Apostles.

The witness of the Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth. When Jesus ascended into heaven he sent the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth to guard and guide his disciples. We know this, yet understanding the work of the Holy Spirit can sometimes be a tricky thing. Over the centuries many Christians have felt strongly about many different things and were convinced it was the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The self-styled prophet Montanus (circa AD 135-170; believed that the Paraclete spoke through him) and his followers are one example. They called themselves the "spiritual" people. Another example is the prophets of Munster (Germany) during the Reformation. From 1534-1535 a group of Anabaptists controlled the city of Muntser. John of Leiden emerged as the religious and political leader, justifying his authority and actions by the receipt of visions from heaven. His authority grew, he proclaimed himself to be the successor of King David, and held absolute power in the new "Zion". He legalized polygamy and himself took sixteen wives.

These are two of the more egregious examples and there are more. In our own time we have various Christian individuals or groups claiming they have a new revelation of the Spirit that leads them to embrace their new understandings or lifestyles. Time will tell, if it is the Holy Spirit or simply another expression of sinful, human passions and desires.

John has already emphasized the need to *"...let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning"* (vs. 24) meaning the apostolic witness – the witness from those who have seen with their own eyes, heard with their own ears, touched with their own hands the living Word, Jesus. The apostles were with Jesus when he walked this earth and they were with him after his resurrection. Their witness is what is recorded in Scripture, and that is why Scripture is so important to us. All our Christian experience must be measured against Scripture. John Wesley once said, "It is dangerous to depart from Scripture ... most of the controversies which have disturbed the Church have arisen from people's wanting to be wise above what is written, not contented with what God has plainly revealed."

Realize Who You Are

Abide in Him. John uses this term a lot, but for good reason. John wants believers to experience what he has experienced: a close, living relationship with Jesus Christ. Live with him, daily. Do you want to be caught in your old sin-filled human nature that you will *“shrink away from Him in shame at His coming?”* Who wants to be left out when Jesus returns? The other apostles teach the same thing. *“Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul,”* 1 Peter 2:11. St. Paul says it this way: *“Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry,”* Colossians 3:5. He means consider yourselves dead to sin and alive with Christ in you, so that your very nature is transformed into his likeness. We must abide in Christ so we will be glad to see him.

Further more, *“If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him,”* 1 John 2:29. There ought to be a family resemblance that links us with God.

“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is,” 1 John 3:2.