

THE CHILDREN OF GOD

"That You May Know" - The Epistles of John, Part 3 - 1 John 2:18-3:10
Stonebrook Sunday AM, 2/10/19, Matt Heerema

Summary: John's first epistle is written to a church under attack from false teaching of those he calls "anti-Christ" - who deny that the gospel is sufficient for salvation, that you must have special spiritual knowledge, and that you don't need to be concerned about your behavior. John focuses this part of his first letter on reinforcing the teaching (the gospel) he delivered to them at the very beginning, encouraging them to remain in it and not to follow these false teachers.

REVIEW

John wrote this letter to the church for 3 reasons

We find several "I'm writing to you... ..because/that" statements that give us, in my understanding, these three purposes, when we look at his flow of thought.

1. To ground our hope for salvation in Jesus's sacrifice for our sin, and not in our own efforts (1 John 2:1-2)
2. To warn us about false teachers (antichrists) (1 John 2:26)
3. To help those who believe in Jesus test whether, and be assured that, they have eternal life (1 John 5:13)

Review Chapter 1 & 2: Walk in the light, as he is in the light. But everyone sins.

1 John 1:5-9

5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

- Walking in the light = telling the truth (not moral purity).
- Walking in the light brings fellowship with one another, because we lose the pretense and fakeness that causes us to keep distant from each other.
- Fellowship is fueled by confession

We ought to talk in the way he walked, but if we don't: Jesus

1 John 2:1-6

1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. 3 And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. 4 Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, 5 but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: 6 whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

Having just decisively declared that every single human walking the planet has sin, wrestles with sin, John draws an interesting line of tension. He says that believers in Christ should not sin, fighting any teaching out there that says "live how you want to live, it doesn't matter, grace is free to all!" - John calls this false teaching.

But he also fully recognizes the reality that everyone does sin.

So the question is: what do we do with that? The answer: look to Jesus's sacrifice as the propitiation for our sin, not to your own avoidance of sin, your own performance.

How we know we know him: if we keep the commandments

It is important to pause for a bit on this idea of "keeping his commandments". I wonder how many of us have given much thought to what, specifically, John is encouraging us to. Which commandments? The 10 commandments? The 613 commandments of the Mosaic law?

However, if we read this passage as the author (John) intended for us to, we find that fairly quickly (just a few paragraphs later) he defines the commandment for us!

1 John 3:23

And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.

The commandment hearkens back to John's Gospel account, in what we've marked out as chapter 13-17, the "upper room discourse", Jesus discussion with his disciples at the last supper.

The command has two parts:

Believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ & Love one another, just as Jesus loved us.

- He is humbling those of us who, from time to time, do a better job than others at keeping some of the commands. He's reminding us that this isn't always the case for us, and that there is remaining, indwelling sin to be dealt with. We are not as great as we think we are.
- He is encouraging those of us who struggle more, or are more prone to doubt and despair, that it is not our performance at all that is what makes God pleased with us.
- And maybe most importantly: he's giving us the fuel we need to actually obey God's command to love our brother.

Throughout his letter, John points out the tension between what we ought to be doing, (walking as Jesus walked, in sinless perfection, since we purport to believe that this is the right way to live), and how we actually live, faltering obedience, doubt, sin, occasional rebellion.

Believers are humbled by this, and acknowledge their failure.

John is pointing out that we have failed to live up to God's commands over, and over, and over. That we have sinned against him over, and over, and over, and that He has forgiven us, cancelled the debt we owe him, and loves us and embraces us as children.

Believers are comforted by this.

And he then says, love your brother this way. Forgive their sin, just as I have forgiven yours. Love them when they don't deserve it, just as I loved you when you didn't deserve it.

This is the mark of a child of God. Of a believer in Christ. The heart attitude we take toward one another.

You do know him.

Chapter 2 goes on with a remarkable few verses. John's teaching in this letter is hard. In fact if we take it seriously, it is shattering. So all throughout he weaves the Gospel of Grace.

1 John 2:12-14

I am writing to you, little children,

because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.

I am writing to you, fathers,

because you know him who is from the beginning.

I am writing to you, young men,
because you have overcome the evil one.

I write to you, children,
because you know the Father.

I write to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.

I write to you, young men,
because you are strong,
and the word of God abides in you,
and you have overcome the evil one.

This letter is intended to be very convicting. Our hearts, reacting to the teaching that friendship with the world is enmity with God, that we do not love God if we do not share with the brother or sister in need, cry out that our sins are not forgiven, that perhaps we don't know God, that we haven't in fact overcome the world!

John's reply to this: do you believe that Jesus is the Christ? The son of the living God? The one who died for your sins? Then yes you are forgiven, even when you don't feel like it. Yes you do know God, even in your doubt, yes you have overcome the evil, even though now you are failing. Because Christ is all these things for you. Your forgiveness, your conqueror, and the one through whom we know God.

And this brings us to today's passage. And don't worry, this over-long review was intentional. We needed it in order to set up a very difficult to piece together passage:

ANTICHRISTS, ANOINTING, ABIDING

1 John 2:18-27 (ESV)

18 Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. 19 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 it might become plain that they all are not of us. 20 **But you have been anointed** by the Holy One, and **you all have knowledge** [*lit. "you all know it"*]. 21 **I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it**, and because no lie is of the truth.

22 Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. 23 No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. 24 **Let what you heard from the beginning abide**

in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. 25 And this is the promise that he made to us – eternal life.

26 I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. 27 But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. **But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him.**

ANTI CHRISTS

Who were they? What did they teach?

- Anti = “Against” or “replacing”
- Many of them currently present, not a diabolical mastermind, like in “Left Behind”
- Went out from us, because they were not of us
- Denies Jesus is the Christ, Denies the Father and the Son
- Trying to deceive you
- False teachers

It seems that these antichrists, as well as every antichrist false teacher after them had one of two predominant errors, either 1) righteousness before God is something you can obtain by becoming morally perfected in this life. Your religious and moral performance is what saves you, or 2) denial of sin in the first place, that the only “righteousness” that mattered was a “spiritual cleanliness” and that our deeds do not matter one way or another. “Go ahead and sin, because you’ll simply be forgiven.” John’s teaching in this letter can seem complicated because he is avoiding both extremes. Righteousness matters, we should avoid sin. But our purification comes through faith in Christ’s work, not ours.

When it talks about the antichrists “going out from us because they were never among us” - that can be a scary thought. I know people who have “left the faith” after a long time of seeming to be Christians. This is saying that they left because they were never part of us in the first place. How can I be sure that isn’t going to happen to me?

To answer this question, John goes into this idea of anointing, which can feel like a sharp left in the conversation. “They went out from us because they were never among us, but you have been anointed...” - what is the new idea of “anointing” John seems to bring in out of nowhere? It turns out this idea of anointing and this idea of “antichrist” are related!

ANOINTING

As I pondered this passage, it occurred to me that “anointed” is what “Messiah” means, and “Christ” is the greek word for the Hebrew “messiah”. There must be a connection! Sure enough, there is.

“To oil” - Chrisma - distinct from “Charisma” (& Christos (and anti-christos, and “Christianos”) - Anti-christos: replacement oil

- From the Holy one
- You know it
- “What you heard from the beginning”
- No need for additional teaching
- Teaches you about everything, and is true
- Teaches you to abide in Jesus
- The Gospel
- Anointing = The Word of God received by faith through the work of The Spirit of God

[Sidebar: False teachers will use this idea of an “anointing from the Lord” in terms of power our authority for ministry. But the NT never uses it this way. Perhaps this practice goes all the way back to the anti-christos John refers to. If they talk this way, it is a different anointing (“antichristos!”) They are talking about because the anointing spoken of in the scripture is something all Christians have.]

ABIDING

Appears almost 10 times in our section! Paul is telling us to “remain” in this anointing, remain in the gospel, don’t go after false teachings and false gospels of the antichrists. “Stay home.”

ADOPTION

1 John 2:28-3:10 (ESV)

28 And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have **confidence** and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. 29 If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

3 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. 3 And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

4 Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. 5 You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. 6 No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. 7 Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. 8 Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. 9 No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. 10 By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

- Our confidence, where is it? In our performance, or in Jesus's performance?
- Strong emphasis on the necessity of righteousness, and a concern for obeying God
- But "what we will be has not yet appeared"
 - Sanctification is progressive
 - Already-but-not-yet is the solution to many seemingly paradoxical sayings in the new testament
- How do we know: Love Christ, Love the Brothers
 - This is righteousness, the whole law hangs on these two things
 - Parallel to the 1st & 2nd great commandments
- John uses very black and white terminology here to thread a very difficult needle: simultaneous concern for holiness and obedience, but absolute refusal to base salvation on our performance: our hope is in our adoption as children of God. "He has called us his children, and so we are..."

APPLICATION: RIGHTEOUS BY FAITH

The apostles all taught that righteousness is by faith, and not by our religious performance. Paul taught it very clearly in Romans, among other places, and John continues on in this epistle to teach in chapters 4 and 5. These passages we just read seem to show a tension between knowing

that we are in christ if we “practice righteousness” as proof of our being children of God and putting our hope only in the fact that God *calls us* his children, if we only look at these verses, this tension can be very difficult to understand. It can be confusing, and can actually lead us to wrong conclusions. But John didn’t intend for us to break this letter up in to a seven part series. He intended it to be read in a single sitting.

And as he goes, he gets more and more clear that righteousness is by faith alone, and that the way we overcome the world is not through our religious performance or moral perfection, but by faith alone.

1 John 4:15(ESV)

15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

1 John 5:4-5 (ESV)

4 For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. 5 Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

So this is today’s application. Believe it. Believe that Jesus is the Son of God. He is who he said he is, and that he did what he said he did. Do not rely on your performance. Don’t neglect obedience to God, you are his children! We should follow him, walk as he walked! But do not despair in your failure to be perfect that you are not in fact children of God.

Don’t lie to yourself, as the antichrists did that you are already perfect. And don’t fall for the lie that you have to clean yourself up before God will accept you. Don’t fall for the twin lie that your deeds do not matter, but simply abide. Stand in the love of Christ. Stand in the power of Christ. Look to him alone.

Pray with me.

DISCUSSION:

1. What does it mean to be an “antichrist”? Talk about times you are tempted to follow after “anti-christian” teachings.
2. What does John mean when he talks about the “anointing” and that we should “abide” in it?
3. In what sense does the “anointing” “teach you about everything”?
4. How can we encourage one another to “abide in the anointing” more fully, day by day?