

SESSION 3

Sure of the Truth



QUESTION 1:

When have you believed something that turned out not to be true?

THE POINT

Truth is found in Jesus alone.

THE PASSAGE

1 John 2:18-29

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

It seems our culture has become increasingly less adept at determining what is true and what is not. In a culture of 24-hour news feed and online opinions masquerading as fact, it should be no surprise that many Americans believe ideas that are nothing more than conspiracy theories. In fact, half of Americans believe at least one conspiracy theory.¹ For example:

I 40 percent believe the FDA is withholding natural cures for cancer.²

I 27 percent believe America is hiding aliens in Area 51.

I 23 percent believe 9/11 was an inside job.

I 19 percent believe the government is using chemicals to control the population.³

Typically, conspiracy theories start with some fringe group and then are picked up by some credible source. It's hard to know what to believe with all the differing opinions that are out there. People are confused about a lot of things, which, in turn, produces doubt.

It goes without saying that the struggle for truth is real. However, there is good news. Absolute truth does exist, and it is found in Jesus Christ.

1 John 2:18-21

18 Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.

19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

20 But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.

21 I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth.

KEY WORDS: **The last time** (2:18)—That time between Jesus' first and second comings, often considered a time of intense conflict between God and Satan.

Antichrists (2:18)—Persons who oppose Christ or substitute themselves for Christ (1 John 2:18,22; 4:3; 2 John 7) .

Uction (2:20)—An action, process, or state of being of having the Holy Spirit live in a person and impacting his or her life.

Holy One (2:20)—A title referring to God as separate, distinct; this applies to all three Persons of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Spirit).

Since the coming of Jesus, believers have known they were living in the "last days." The expression *last time* is only found here in the New Testament and is synonymous with the idea of the last days. The phrase points to the imminent return of Christ and the final judgment. For believers, this is a day of joyful expectation. However, for the unbeliever, this will be a day of judgment and punishment. Every man's heart will be laid bare before the Lord. All those who trusted in Christ and persevered in righteousness will receive eternal life. But those who persisted in unbelief and acts of unrighteousness will receive eternal death.

John highlighted the reality of the last hour by telling us, "antichrist shall come." Paul described this same figure as "the man of sin" and "the son of perdition" (2 Thess. 2:3-4). In the future, this man will set himself up to oppose God. In the meantime, "there [are] many antichrists." While the last days will involve a central figure who will oppose Christ, multiple antichrists also exist, who even now are working in opposition to the kingdom of God.

Jesus taught that "there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets" with the goal of deceiving others and opposing Christ (Matt. 24:24). These are individuals who are opposed to the clear teaching of Scripture, primarily the doctrine of Christ. John reminded us of their existence so that we would not be caught off guard by them. False prophets and antichrists will arise, seeking to deceive. The presence of these false teachers is a sign of the end times.

False teaching is prevalent in our contemporary culture. For example, one highly popular pop artist is quoted as saying, "What I've discovered is that in art, as in music, there's a lot of truth—and then there's a lie. The artist is essentially creating his work to make this lie a truth, but he slides it in amongst all the others. The tiny little lie is the moment I live for, my moment."⁴ Here's a hugely popular singer whose goal is to convince her listeners to accept a lie! In the same manner, this is the moment all false teachers live for: a deception that mixes a lie with the truth.

QUESTION 2:

How does our culture reflect anti-Christian views?

How are we to identify these false teachers? We know them by their unwavering commitment to falsehood and their departure from the church. In John's day, these peddlers of deception gave evidence of their real character by leaving the church. "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that

they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." These false teachers were nothing more than wolves in sheep's clothing. As they persisted in unrighteousness, it became evident that they were never truly a part of the believing community.

We still see the same thing today. Virtually every false teacher leaves the true, Christ-led church to start his own. According to these charlatans, everyone else is getting it wrong and they are the only ones getting it right. They prey upon the weak and unsuspecting. They are like clouds without water. They cannot deliver on what they promise—and they will one day stand before God and answer for their deceptions.

Thankfully, true believers "have an unction from the Holy One, and ... know all things." This anointing is the Holy Spirit's presence and indwelling, which all believers receive at the moment of their conversion. "But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom. 8:9). The Holy Spirit is the ultimate teacher, guiding us into all the truth (John 16:13); therefore, He teaches and leads us as we study the Bible. As we rely on the Spirit of God, we are protected against error.

1 John 2:22-26

22 Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.

23 Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.

24 Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.

25 And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.

26 These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you.

John also declared that every antichrist is a "liar." The fact that they are anti—opposed to Christ—means they deny the reality of who Jesus is. The antichrist lies because he denies that Jesus is the Christ. And whoever denies the divinity of Jesus—that He is the Christ, the anointed One from God—ultimately denies the Father as well. A person cannot believe whatever he wants about God's Son, Jesus Christ, and think he can have a relationship with God the Father. To believe wrongly concerning Jesus is to believe wrongly about God. Why? Because Jesus *is* God. Indeed, He is God who came in human flesh.

The false teachers of John's day blatantly denied the truth of who Christ is. The particular falsehood being taught was called Gnosticism. Gnosticism had two primary doctrinal errors.

1. Docetism. *Docetic* is from the Greek word *dokeo*, which means "seems" or "appears." The Gnostics believed the body is evil. Therefore, God, who is Spirit, could not take on flesh. Thus, according to them, Jesus did not become a man. He did not come in the flesh; it only *appeared* that He did. They denied a real, human Jesus. This is a blatant denial of the incarnation: God becoming man.

2. Cerinthianism. Cerinthus was a contemporary of John. He **taught that Jesus had a real human body, but that He was not the Christ until the Spirit came upon Him at His baptism.** Cerinthus and his followers taught that the Spirit remained upon Jesus throughout His three years of public ministry, but the Spirit left Him before the crucifixion, since the Spirit could not be associated with suffering.

The Bible teaches that Jesus is fully God who came in human flesh (John 1:1-5,14). To deny either is defiance against God. Jesus is the eternal God who stepped out of eternity into time, clothed in human flesh, who died upon a cross, and rose from the dead.

About twenty years after John wrote this epistle, Polycarp (a disciple of John) sent a letter to the Christians in Philippi. He wrote:

"For everyone who does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is an `anti-Christ'; and whosoever does not confess the testimony of the Cross is of the devil: and whosoever perverts the oracles of the Lord for his own lusts, and says that there is neither resurrection, nor judgment,—this man is the first-born of Satan."

For believers, though, John offered encouragement. "If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father." What they had heard from the beginning was the preaching of the gospel. They were to let the truth of the gospel remain and take up residence in them. They were to hold on to it and not be moved away from it.

QUESTION 3:

What are some truths about Jesus that are difficult to grasp or believe?

1 John 2:27-29

27 But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

28 And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.

29 If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.

The proof of true salvation is not just believing the right thing. Conforming to the doctrine is not enough. Our belief should translate into right living. We are to pursue righteousness in light

of the imminent return of Christ. John mentioned the return of Christ to motivate his readers to righteous living. Our attitude toward Christ's second coming says a lot about our spiritual state.

The return of Jesus is something I often think about. I long for the second coming of Jesus. The world in which we live is growing worse every day, and I am tired of battling with my own sin nature. I'm looking for Jesus to return at any moment, and because of that, I am seeking to live my life for His glory.

John urged his readers to "abide in him." We are not to be moved away from the hope of the gospel. We are to hold to the Christ of Scripture, while living for the glory of God so that when Jesus appears, "we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming." John mentioned two of the benefits of remaining in Christ.

1. Confidence. This could also be translated *boldness*. God desires that all will be prepared to meet Him and will have solid confidence in His return.

2. Not be ashamed. Sadly, many people do not have confidence; instead they carry the weight of guilt and shame. However, God desires that His people would remain in Him and thus have no reason to be ashamed when Jesus returns.

In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, Italy was hit particularly hard by the virus. However, it was not due to a lack of testing or other action by the government in response, but rather, "People just did not take the coronavirus seriously enough to even slightly adapt their habits." One journalist stated it succinctly: "I and many other Italians just did not see the need to change our routines for a threat we could not see."⁶

QUESTION 4:

How does the Holy Spirit help us discern truth?

Because many people—including Christians—don't see the return of Christ on the horizon, they may not see a need to change

their routines or live with His return in mind. For the Christian, however, the right belief—including the belief that Christ is returning—must be consistently supported by the right ethic. We look to Christ—the Righteous One—and in response to the new birth He offers, we seek to live right in His power. "If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him." That practical righteousness is proof of genuine salvation. We can be sure of our salvation, and we can be sure of the truth—the truth that is found through a personal relationship with Jesus.

QUESTION 5:

What role does our group play in helping us remain in the truth?

ENGAGE

Describe how you can tell the difference between a lie and the truth:

A lie is known by

Truth is known by

Offer a prayer that the Holy Spirit will reveal the truth to you about something you are struggling with.

LIVE IT OUT

Truth is found in Jesus alone. Choose one of the following applications:

I Examine your life. Have you genuinely embraced the truth by trusting in Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior? If you're not sure of your relationship with God, there's help on the inside cover of this book.

I Prioritize your life. In light of Christ's imminent return, are your priorities in the right order? If not, what changes need to be made to rearrange your priorities? This week do a thorough evaluation of your priorities and be honest with yourself. Ask God to help you with these priorities.

I Invest in someone's life. Do you know someone that needs to hear the truth? Perhaps a neighbor, coworker, a classmate, or a friend? If so, then share the truth of the gospel with them this week. Take it a step further and buy them a Bible, if you believe they may not have one.



END NOTES

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