

January 22, 2006

Living in Line with the Truth

1 John 2:18-27

Third Message in the Series, "Get Real"

We live in interesting times. Theologian David Wells points out an amazing thing:

This is the first time a civilization exists that, to a significant extent, does not believe in objective right and wrong.

Everything, we're told every day, is in shades of gray. My truth and your truth may not be the same truth, but they're both *true*. So the Hindu at 7-11 has his truth and the Muslim at the mosque as his, and the Jewish family down the street has their truth and the Buddhists have their truth. Of course, there are the secular truths of courts and the university.

In October, Lynann had knee surgery. I'm glad her surgeon believed that there is one truth when it comes to repairing a knee—that he didn't think "surgery truth" was just what he felt like—that maybe he could operate on her kidneys to fix her knee!

Jesus makes a bold claim: He says that **He Himself is the truth** (John 14:3). He claims to be the Gold Standard of truth, the measuring rod of truth.

But listen carefully. Jesus then told us to make His truth known, not primarily by arguments and dazzling displays of logic, but by the authentic lives we lead. In John 13:34-35, He says,

34"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Jesus knows that most people aren't philosophers. Most people aren't skilled debaters. Most people like to see something proved by what they see, not by what somebody says or writes. And He knew that nothing is as compelling as a community of people who live lives of authentic selfless love and who engage in acts of outrageous love.

In the first century AD, from 30 AD, when Jesus was crucified and rose from the dead, until the end of the century, it's estimated that the church grew an average of 40% per decade. That's phenomenal growth. And that growth arose because they had a compelling message to share—the message of God's love demonstrated by Jesus' death—and also because they lived a compelling lifestyle. They were transparently, consistently people of love, purity and passion. That message coupled with that lifestyle drew people like magnets to Jesus and His church.

This was not without conflict. The first great conflict was over how "Jewish" faith in Jesus had to be. By about 60 AD, that issue was settled, and Gentiles even more streamed into the church.

But within a few years, new problems arose. Some new converts began applying ideas from Greek philosophy to the faith in unhealthy ways. This was the issue that John had in mind when he wrote this little letter about authentic faith. A "super-spiritual" group had left the churches in the area around Ephesus, John's home base. John hits them hard in this passage. And he also gives us some measures to see if we're living that genuine life that shows Christ to the word and that really lives out the kind of love that Jesus said would authenticate His message.

In these verses, John says that

Living in the truth means...

**... Living in persistent fellowship and
... Living in persistent faith and adoration
of Jesus the Christ**

Let's look at those.

First, **Living in the truth means living in persistent fellowship** (1 John 2:18-21)

18Dear 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. 19They 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. 20But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. 21I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth.

For a generation, the church had heard that one day, the Antichrist would come. Maybe it came as a shock when John said that not only would "an antichrist" was coming, but that "many antichrists have come."

The "many antichrists" were the leaders of the super-spiritual separatist group. He declares their faith to be phony: "they did not really belong to us." On the other hand, real believers have "an anointing from the Holy One" and already know the truth. What's that all about?

Well, the "Holy One" is probably Jesus Himself. Jesus is called the Holy One of God in the Gospel of John (6:69). The anointing,

throughout the New Testament, is the presence of the Holy Spirit. John is actually having a little fun here with wordplay. All three words, *antichrist*, *anointing* and *Christ* in Greek have the same root, the word *chrism*, to anoint.

But God's own people have a Holy Spirit anointing that keeps us glued to Jesus and to one another. John says that people like that "already know the truth." What is the truth that we already know? It's that the Holy Spirit within us draws us together in a durable fellowship based on love of Jesus and loving one another and loving the people of this world that don't know Christ.

The super-spiritual prided themselves as part of the inner circle who'd gone beyond basic teachings. John denies that there is an inner circle of truth. The anointing that he speaks us is for all of God's people. Look there in vs. 20: "But you [all, plural] have an anointing from the Holy One, and **all of you** know the truth."

If you live in God's truth, you're going to stick with God's people. The Spirit Himself draws us together to be people who authentically points to Jesus with our love.

Second,

Living in the truth means...living in persistent faith and adoration of Jesus the Christ (1 John 2:22-28)

One of the features of the "super-spiritual" group that John deals with here was the tendency to split the man Jesus from the divine Christ. One version of this was to say that Christ only temporarily inhabited the man Jesus; that it really wasn't the *Christ* who died on the cross; it was just Jesus of Nazareth. After all, how could a divine Christ die?

After all these years, it's amazing how persistent some of these errors are. You can find the same nonsense in the writings of Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of the Christian Science cult, or in New Age writings or taught even by Hindu leaders.

John, the apostle who speaks so much about love, drew a line in the sand on this. He boldly calls such false teachings lies. Look at 1 John 2:22-23:

*22Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist--he denies the Father and the Son.
23No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.*

If you split Jesus from "the Christ", you've blown up the bridge that God built from Himself to lost humanity. You've turned "Christ" into a kind of Casper the Friendly Ghost, a nice spirit being, but hardly the Savior, the Lamb of God, who laid down His life for us on the cross.

John knows that while our faith is authenticated in selfless deeds of love, what I've been calling Acts of Outrageous Love, that there has to be a core of common faith in the Lordship of Jesus Christ. If you try to split the two, you're rearranging the very heart of our faith. And he calls a person who does that an "antichrist"—some peddling a made-up Christ, a "substitute Christ" instead of the real one. Those are fighting words.

Living in the truth means that we live a life of persistent adoration of the real Jesus Christ—the Son of God, the Lamb of God, the One who died for us on the cross and who rose up from the dead. When we dilute or downplay Christ

as the center of this life, we turn our backs on His glory and our lives lose their compass. Jesus Christ is the center, and there is no substitute. The church is not the center. Politics is not the center. Race is not the center. All these things bow before Jesus in the heart of a authentic follower of His.

And they keep on keeping on. I want you to notice how often **persistence** is mentioned in verses 24-28:

*24See 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.*

25And this is what he promised us--even eternal life.

*26I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. 27As for you, the anointing you received from him **remains** in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit--just as it has taught you, **remain** in him.*

"Time will tell," we say. Yes, it will. John says that we're to watch carefully that the gospel message of Jesus remains in us—that's evidence that we are united to God the Son and God the Father. The anointing of the Spirit remains with us as well, and alerts us to the real and away from the counterfeits.

When we were in Hawaii last summer, we got into a conversation with a waiter at an Italian restaurant. (Sounds weird, huh, an Italian restaurant in Hawaii? The strangest restaurant combination I ever saw was a kosher Chinese restaurant in Haifa, Israel.) It seems that somebody in Maui was printing phony fifties in his basement. And they were pretty good

fifties at that. The guy had just been caught a few weeks before we got there.

Now what's the difference between the genuine and the fake? Was it just that one was printed at a government mint and the other was printed in a closet? Is it just the quality of the bill? No, it's not just *where* it was printed or even the *quality* of the printing; it's the ultimate source. One is "legal tender"; the other is not. One is in line with the truth; the other is a lie.

Matt Cooper said something in a staff meeting a few weeks ago that worth repeating: *The world is watching us and it hopes that we fail.* There's somebody who wants to catch you as a counterfeit. The world is watching you and it's hoping that it will catch you in some moral compromise: hoping to catch you swearing or sexually compromised or in a bad temper. Why do people hope that we fail? So that they can dismiss your faith in Jesus as irrelevant. That's why the way we live has to be so compellingly genuine: in order to give the unbelieving world a reason to believe.

Did these early Christians leave an impression? John probably wrote this letter around 90 AD. Just 23 years later, a Roman governor named Pliny wrote Emperor Trajan asking for advice on what to do with Christians. Pliny described what he knew about Christian worship. He wrote,

They are in the habit of meeting on a fixed day before daylight [now that's what I call an early service!] and they sing a hymn to Christ as God. They also bind themselves by oath not to commit any crime but to abstain from theft and adultery, and to keep their words and pay their debts...they would then depart and reassemble in the evening for a common meal...

These were people who were “remaining” in their faith, as John urges us here. There is the ring of the authentic here. Remember, people are watching. The way you live, your authenticity, may well be the way they will decide whether or not this faith is real. Be real; get real. The world really is watching. What they saw 2000 years ago changed the world. What they see in you today can change your world, and theirs, forever.

End
Prayer