

## The Third Test

1 John 2:18-23

In this short letter, John is presenting us with three tests of true Christianity, true faith. Perhaps, “evidence” is a better word than “test.” Three solid evidences of true Christian faith. Or we could identify them as three genuine demonstrations of sincere faith. These are the things that show forth who are Christians and who are not. Who are the children of God and who are not. Who are the believers and who are the unbelievers.

The first test was a moral test, a test of obedience. The test of life. Your faith, your true faith, is shown to be true by the testimony of your life. Specifically, obedience.

1 John 2:3 “Now br 4 He who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.”

To be clear, it is not that your obedience is what earns your salvation. It is not that your obedience atones for any of your sins. Because Jesus does both of those things, completely. But your obedience demonstrates your love and devotion to the God of your salvation. “By this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.”

The second test was relational, or social. A test of relationships. A bit more accurately, a test of love for one another.

1 John 2:9 “He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. 10 He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. 11 But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.”

Or, as Jesus puts it so plainly,

John 13:34 “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

A test of obedience. A test of love. And thirdly, and I think it should be third even in terms of the priority John gives it, is a test of what you believe. A test of doctrine, if I can put it that way. But saying it that way, I’m not talking about secondary doctrine, but the very fundamental truth that must define who we are as Christians. And that most fundamental and essential of all doctrines is that which defines who Jesus is and what he came to earth to accomplish.

And so in our text this morning, with the warning of the danger of false doctrine, our starting point is to emphasize that,

### **I. FALSE DOCTRINE CENTERS ON A DENIAL OF JESUS CHRIST.**

v.22a

v.23

John declares what is important in terms of doctrine. He defines the doctrine necessary to be a true believer. You cannot deny Jesus. To put that positively, you must believe that Jesus is the Christ. Christ is the Greek form of the Old Testament word “messiah,” and Messiah is the divine messenger God promised to send to his people Israel.

Those who don’t believe Jesus is the Christ are called liars! And they are dangerous because of their deception.

Mark 13:21 “Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the

Christ!' or, 'Look, He is there!' do not believe it. 22 For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 23 But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand.”

Be on your guard against liars. Specifically,

**A. False teaching seeks to deny Christ’s deity and unique authority.**

They deny the simple truth that Jesus is God. They deny what John writes at the very beginning of his gospel.

John 1:1 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. 4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.”

Liars deny something else.

John 1:14 “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

That’s the Messiah, the Christ. God in the flesh. Let me put that in positive words, the very things false teachers will reject.

Heb. 1:1 “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; 3 who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

Col. 1:15 “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn

over all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. 18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.”

Col. 2:9 “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.”

False teaching seeks to deny Christ’s deity and unique authority, and that is the focal point of John’s test here of true faith, true religion. It centers on Jesus. So when it comes to a profession of faith that is sufficient to be the hope and ground of salvation, we read,

Rom. 10:9 “...that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

This really is a matter of life and death. Eternal life and death. Spiritual life and death.

Jesus is not simply a good example, well worthy imitating but not equal with God. He is much more than that. Much more than just a martyr. Or a good teacher. He is not a creature, that is, a created being. He is eternal in his deity.

Nor do we become little gods, like Jesus. We remain creatures, and Jesus is God. Jesus is Lord. Jesus is the Christ. And John makes obvious the reason why that is so important.

## **B. False teaching separates people from God the Father.**

If you deny Jesus the son, you deny the Father. If you deny Jesus, you cannot lay claim to faith in the true God. You cannot have God, God the father, without God the Son.

v.22-23

1 John 4:15 “Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 16 And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.”

So if you don't believe in Jesus as he is revealed in the Bible, then you are not a Christian. But John's focus is upon the positive. This third test is not intended to be a condemnation to his readers, but to be an encouragement to them. Such true faith in Jesus is what unites you to God the Father. Such true faith in Jesus is what gives to you the hope and assurance of eternal life. Such true faith in Jesus gives you the confidence of your relationship to God as his son or his daughter.

John 1:12 “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

John then says something startling. Perhaps isn't surprising for us any longer, but it certainly was an unexpected dilemma for the early church, even as it can still be today.

## **II. FALSE TEACHING BEGINS WITHIN THE CHURCH.**

It comes from inside the church. Satan's most successful attacks upon the church of Jesus Christ come from within. Sometimes the church is attacked from without, in the form of persecution, but that usually strengthens true believers, and strengthens the church. But attacks from within are more

dangerous and much more deadly. The Bible repeatedly warns us against the dangers of false teaching, because,

## **A. The church faces a constant attack from false teachers.**

v.19

In other words, they used to be a part of us.

Acts 20:29 “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. 31 Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.”

2 Pet. 2:1 “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. 2 And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.”

And because the false teachers are in the church, it is the responsibility of the elders to resist and refute them.

Titus 1:9 “...holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.”

People today typically want only what is practical, not this focus on doctrine. Or, on the other extreme, many people today get all wrapped in the minutia of what is labeled doctrine. Sometimes nothing more than trivia, often inconsequential in terms of the big picture of what really matters. What you believe about Jesus, what you think about Jesus is what matters. And

that is where the attack so often comes from within the church. When the focus shifts to arguments about matters of secondary importance, or even tertiary importance, third level, then this danger becomes all the more prevalent.

So many attacks come from within the church, on so many levels. And Satan is the author of them all. Attacks that bring about false teaching about Jesus, a denial of his deity and his unique authority as the Son of God. And John is as clear as he can be.

### **B. False teachers demonstrate that they are not true believers.**

v.19

There is something very encouraging and something very frightening in that verse. The encouraging thing is that the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. In other words, true Christians will not fall away, because will protect and preserve them. So when Paul writes to the Philippians, he says,

Phil. 1:3 "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, 5 for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ."

But the scary thing is that there are some who appear to be Christians, who will yet fall away. Some who profess to be Christians and are in the church, are not actually believers. And that is very unsettling. Yet people do fall away from their faith. People do reject Christianity after having accepted Christ. And while that is very hard to come to terms with on a personal level, the overall explanation isn't too difficult. This verse says very clearly, they were never really Christians to begin with.

Same understanding

Heb. 6:4 "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame."

It is possible to get a taste of the Christian experience and the Christian lifestyle, and then give it up. But that is just our perspective. The truth is that such people were never really Christians in the first place. So John says of such people,

v.19

Next week we'll look at some of these same verses, focusing on verse 20-21 and then v.24-27, so that we can gain a real assurance of our own faith, as that is John's purpose here. The encouragement for true believers is that God will enable us to resist and reject this false teaching.

v.20

Again, these three tests are intended to be the evidences by which true believers are made known. But I want to bring out one final emphasis in our text today.

v.18

The point is that,

### **III. FALSE TEACHING IS THE EVIDENCE OF THE LAST DAYS.**

Even the last hour. John expected Jesus to return soon. And the reason for that expectation was the rise of false teachers.

So we need to ask, was John mistaken about when Jesus would return? I don't think so. Jesus is returning soon, true for

John and true for us today. Obviously, we don't know the exact time and date. We only know it is soon. And God does tell us what the last days will be like.

1 Tim. 4:1 "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons."

Matt. 24:3 "Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" 4 And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. 5 For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. 6 And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. 7 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. 8 All these are the beginning of sorrows."

Matt. 24:24 "For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 25 See, I have told you beforehand."

False teaching is the evidence of the last days, the definition of the last days, and that phrase actually refers to the whole of the present age. So we are in the last days, and have been in the last days since Jesus came to live on earth as a man. Therefore, the point is that,

**A. False teachers have already arrived.**

And John mentions the antichrist.

v.18

Now who is he? That is certainly a loaded question. But

before we go there, note John's emphasis. "Many antichrists have come." They are already here!

1 John 4:1 "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, 3 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."

2 John 7 "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."

So rather than getting hung up on identifying the singular antichrist, the sober reality is that many antichrists are already here. Many teachers already here who deny Jesus, the fullness of what the Bible reveals about him. False teachers are already here, and when it comes to false teachers with reference to Jesus, they together are all identified as anti-Christ. If you are not for Christ, then you are against Christ, anti-Christ.

Antichrists lead people astray, away from Christ, and ultimately to eternal damnation. So we must remain alert and on guard. Let me emphasize that I am not talking about other denominations of Christianity. I am not condemning to hell or declaring apostate other denominations of Christians, just because we might differ with them on some point of doctrine or two. But I am saying this: you have to believe in Jesus to get to heaven. You have to believe that Jesus Christ is exactly who he said he was, equal with God his father and eternally God. He is fully God and fully man, one person with both a human nature and divine nature. He is God, he became man, and lived and

died for our sins and was raised from the dead and now sits at the right hand of his father in heaven. Such faith is the only religion by which we can obtain eternal life. As John writes near the end of this letter,

1John 5:11 “And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. 13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.”

So don't be deceived or unsettled by false teachers who have already arrived. But also be aware,

**B. One final false teacher shall be coming soon.**  
v.18

John is the only Bible writer to use the word “antichrist,” though several others use the same idea.

2 Thes. 2:3 “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, 4 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. 5 Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? 6 And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. 7 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. 8 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. 9 The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, 10 and with all

unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.”

So who is he? I won't waste the time needed to speculate, but rather emphasize two things about this great antichrist. First, he will come with a focus on denying Jesus, as I've stressed throughout this sermon. And second, he will be quickly conquered and defeated by Jesus when Jesus returns at the end of this age. So there isn't a long, protracted period of great success for this Antichrist.

Again, 2 Thessalonians 2, when “the lawless one will be revealed,” Paul immediately adds, “whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.” So the Lamb wins. The Messiah wins. The see of the woman defeats and destroys the seed of the serpent. That is our hope and our confidence.

So John's words are an encouragement for us.  
v.26

And even more so,  
v.28

So the third test is a test of what you believe about Jesus. And the encouragement of this whole letter, the encouragement of this third test is simple and straightforward,

1 John 5:13 “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.”

It really is this simple.

1 John 5:2 “He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”