

The Epistle of First John

Lesson Six

A Discerning Life (1 John 2:18-4:6)

Part One (The Last Hour – 1 John 2:18-29)

Introduction:

- I. John addressed a new concern – the impact of false teachers and their teaching.
 - A. John identified the reasons for writing this letter.
 - 1. A joyful life (1 Jn 1:4).
 - 2. A pure life (1 Jn 2:1).
 - 3. A discerning life (1 Jn 2:26).

Discussion:

- I. All Christians must live a discerning life – ability to know truth from error.
 - A. Truth about the person, nature, and character of Jesus Christ had been perverted.
 - 1. False doctrine denied the deity of Jesus.
 - a. Denied Jesus was the Son of God who became flesh and dwelled among us.
 - b. Denied Jesus died, was buried, and was bodily resurrected from the dead before ascending back to heaven to sit at the right hand of God.
 - c. Denied Jesus was the propitiation for our sins.
 - B. Discernment is necessary because "antichrists" had gone out into the world.
 - 1. The term "antichrist" pertains to a false doctrine about the person, nature, and character of Jesus Christ, as well as to those who teach this false narrative.
 - C. It is now "the last hour" (1 Jn 2:18a).
 - 1. What is "the last hour?"
 - a. Not the second coming of Christ.
 - b. Not the so-called "70 AD Doctrine."

2. Reference to the current crisis – previous peace and unity would be a thing of the past.
 - a. "A fracture had occurred in the fellowship of God's people which separated those who saw Jesus in radically different ways. Some also tended to live in a grossly unacceptable fashion morally because they saw piety and righteousness in such distinct ways. The schismatics rejected the apostolic testimony and the inherent authority of such men as John, and thus made it impossible for there to be a common ground from which to permit any sort of doctrinal unity."
3. John's evidence that it is "the last hour" was the appearance of many "antichrists" (1 Jn 2:18).
 - a. The term simply means "against Christ," "opposed to Christ," or "not Christ."
 - b. At times John uses this term to speak of a movement or a philosophy that opposes the truth concerning the person, nature, and character of Jesus Christ.
4. John identified this movement or philosophy as "the Antichrist" (the KJV and NKJV capitalize "Antichrist" because it's used as a noun – a proper name) (1 Jn 2:18; 4:3).
5. John also uses the term to describe the false teachers who are the promoters of the false narrative about the person, nature, and character of Jesus Christ.
6. John identified them as "antichrists," "antichrist," "the antichrist" or "an antichrist" (1 Jn 2:18; 2:22; 2 Jn 7).
7. These were former members of the church (1 Jn 2:19).
 - a. "They went out from us, but they were not of us."
 - (1). They abandoned and deliberately forsook the fellowship they had previously enjoyed with fellow believers.
 - (2). They left to begin their own religious sect.
 - b. Therefore, they were no longer "of us" – meaning, they were not of the same persuasion or belief about the deity of Jesus Christ as the rest of us.

8. This is why John said if they had truly been "of us" – believed the same as we believe about the divine nature and character of Jesus – they would have continued with us.
- II. In verses 20 through 29 John reveals three distinctive marks of a true believer.
- A. All true believers have "an anointing from the Holy One" (1 Jn 2:20, 27).
 1. Greek word for "anointing" is "chrisma" which is a form of the word "Christ" or "Christos" – meaning, "the anointed One."
 - a. In the Old Testament there were only three offices where individuals were "anointed" – prophets, priests, kings.
 - b. In the New Testament the only ones "anointed" or consecrated or commissioned to do the Lord's work in this manner were apostles and prophets.
 2. What kind of an "anointing" was John speaking about? Three possible interpretations here.
 - a. Christians who received a miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit that enabled them to know and understand the truth about the issues that divided them.
 - b. Special spiritual gift given to Christians through the laying on of the hands of the apostles that allowed Christians to discern truth from error.
 - c. Divinely inspired preaching and teaching of God's holy apostles and prophets that all Christians have received through the written word.
 3. Which is it?
 - a. Cannot be an outpouring of the Holy Spirit to impart spiritual gifts to all believers because not all believers received spiritual gifts (such as the gift of special knowledge, understanding and insight).
 - b. Cannot be a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit given through the hands of the apostles because not everyone received spiritual gifts in New Testament times.
 - (1). Jesus promised this special understanding and insight to the apostles only (Jn 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:13).

- c. It is the benefits believers receiving from the "anointing" of holy apostles and prophets who revealed God's truth through their divinely inspired writing and teaching.
 - (1). Because of this we know all things (1 Jn 2:21).
- 4. John labeled those who deny the deity of Jesus Christ as a liar (1 Jn 2:22-23).
 - a. He's not speaking of those who are still unsure about the claims of Jesus and the apostles.
 - b. He's speaking about those who are prejudiced in their thinking and willfully blinded by their own stubbornness that they refuse to consider any evidence that would prove them wrong.
- B. A true believer is one in whom the truth "abides" and who, therefore, "abides" or "remains" in "the Son and in the Father" (1 Jn 2:24).
 - 1. True believers remain committed to that which they heard "from the beginning" – from the beginning of their walk in Jesus Christ (1 Jn 2:7; 3:11; 2 Jn 5-6).
 - a. Rather than "transgress" or "going onward" or "beyond" the doctrine of Christ (2 Jn 9), John encourages his readers to "continue" in the Son, and in the Father.
 - b. The implication is only those who continue to believe and teach sound doctrine are the only ones who can continue to enjoy fellowship with Jesus Christ and God the Father.
 - 2. Those who remain steadfast and uncompromising in their defense of the truth not only abide in the Son and in the Father, they have a guaranteed promise of eternal life (1 Jn 2:25).
 - 3. Therefore, the apostle urged his readers to live "a discerning life" because there are those trying to deceive them (1 Jn 2:26).
 - 4. To avoid being deceived by false teachers, John reminded his readers of something they already possessed – the "anointing" (1 Jn 2:27).
 - a. The benefits believers receiving from the "anointing" of holy apostles and prophets who revealed God's truth through their divinely inspired writing and teaching.

5. If we "abide in Him" we will have "confidence" and "not be ashamed" when Jesus returns to judge the world in righteousness (1 Jn 2:28).
- C. A true believer practices righteousness (1 Jn 2:29).
1. This is the "new birth" of which Jesus spoke, and of which John frequently mentioned in his writings (cf. Jn 1:13; 3:6, 8; also 1 Jn 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18).
 2. Instead of saying, "everyone who is born of Him practices righteousness," John says, "everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him."
 - a. The apostle is simply saying that a righteous life is the evidence that one has been born of God.
 - b. Anyone can claim to have had a conversion experience.
 - c. But the proof of that conversion is seen in the kind of life they live.
 - d. Righteousness is the evidence that one has truly been "born again."
 3. Therefore, John set the record straight by making it clear that the way we live our lives is proof of whether we have truly been converted.
 - a. To John, "talk is cheap," but "actions speak louder than mere words."
 - b. Something we must all consider when taking a personal inventory of our own lives.

The Summary:

- I. John wrote this letter to encourage his readers to live "a joyful life" (1 Jn 1:4), "a pure life" (1 Jn 2:1), and "a discerning life" (1 Jn 2:26).
 - A. The reason for discernment – the ability to know truth from error – was because "antichrists" are in the world (1 Jn 2:18-19).
 1. Therefore, it was "the last hour."
 - a. It was the end of relative peace and harmony within the body of Christ, and the beginning of the spread of apostasy that would trouble the church to this day.
 2. These false teachers and their false doctrines had gone into the world "from" among the Lord's disciple but were no longer "of" the disciples.
 3. They were "antichrist" – their teaching was against and contrary to the truth about the person, nature, and character of Jesus Christ.

4. What does John call "he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?"

5. What is to "abide in" all faithful believers?

6. In whom are all faithful believers to "abide?"

7. How can we have "confidence and not be ashamed before Him (Jesus) at His coming?"

8. How does John describe all who are "born of Him?"