

D. Those Who Love God Must Reject False Teachers (vv. [18–29](#))

SUPPORTING IDEA: *Antichrists (those who deny that Jesus is the Christ) are in the world now. You have an anointing of the Holy Spirit and don't need to listen to their lies. Just continue to listen to what you have heard from the very beginning, and you will be all right.*

[2:18–19](#). It is **the last hour**. This is the only time this phrase occurs in the New Testament, and it is not clear what it means. A strong likelihood is that “the last hour” refers to the time between the first coming of Christ and his second coming. Some believe it means there was only a little time left before Jesus would return, in which case John would have been mistaken.

Therefore, it seems preferable to equate the “last hour” with the “last days,” in which God’s plan of salvation directly through Christ is inaugurated ([Acts 2:17](#); [Joel 2:28](#); [Mic. 4:1](#)). From these passages we learn that the end has come, but the end is not a short period of time. Rather, the end is a distinct period of time of uncertain length. The time of Adam was not the last hour. The time of Abraham was not the last hour. Nor was the time of Moses, or the time of David, or the time of Ezra the last hour. The time between Jesus’ first coming and second coming is the last hour.

The readers knew about the predicted coming of the Antichrist. John warned them about the coming of many who would display the same hostility and opposition to Jesus. Not only is the Antichrist coming, but many antichrists (people who embrace his values and agenda) are already here.

The fact that the antichrists have come proves that the **last hour** had begun. Some people in the church followed the antichrists, leaving the church. This proved that they had never been Christians. If they had been, they would not have left. Apparently, they had made a profession of faith that was not genuine.

[2:20–23](#). We have an **anointing from the Holy One**. This anointing might be either the Holy Spirit, or the Word of God, or some body of information/knowledge passed down to the elders in the church from apostles.

The first impulse is to understand the anointing to be the Holy Spirit. After all, Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit, and the Gospel of John teaches us that Jesus will send us the “Spirit of truth” ([John 14:17](#)) who “will teach you all things” ([John 14:26](#)).

The second impulse reveals some significant problems with this interpretation, however. It does not tell us how the Spirit enables us to understand all things. Is it by some inner guidance, an internal, subjective experience? This seems a little out of harmony with the context, because John has appealed all along to hard facts that they have been taught from the beginning. In addition, it would invite the false teachers to counter that their own inner, subjective experience was just as valid. Plus, this interpretation does not explain the tremendous disagreement that exists among professing Christians regarding what is true and what is not true. If the anointing is inner guidance from the Holy Spirit, would he not guide us to be a little more united in this matter?

Other Bible teachers suggest that this anointing refers to the Bible, or a body of teaching passed down to the church leaders. This has the advantage of correcting the problem in the first option, eliminating the danger of spiritual subjectivism. Plus, the Word of God can be understood to “remain in you.” It has the disadvantage that the Word of God is not usually understood to be an anointing. Perhaps it is a subtle combination of the two ideas. The anointing could be understood as God’s Word, “not as preached externally in the community, but as it is received by faith into men’s hearts and remains active, thanks to the work of the Spirit” (I. Howard Marshall, [The Epistles of John](#), [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978], p. [155](#)). If so, the antidote to false teaching is the Word of God, administered and confirmed by the work of the Holy Spirit.

No tidy answer presents itself. I prefer this latter explanation, cumbersome as it is, because of the problems created if it is understood to be the Holy Spirit. As Stephen Smalley concludes:

John is deliberately using the idea of *chrisma* [anointing, consecration] to signify *both* the Spirit and the word of God. The faithful, that is to say, are those who have (inwardly) received the gospel of truth, and made it their own *through* the activity of the Spirit (cf. [1 Thess. 1:5–6](#)); thereby they possess the antidote to heresy.... It is possible that some of the heretical and schismatic members of John’s church had appealed directly to the teaching of the Gospel on the Paraclete [[John 14:17](#); [15:26](#); [16:13](#)], as the Spirit of truth, precisely in order to support their own claims to possess the right knowledge of Jesus and his gospel. If so, John is indicating that the objective word of God’s truth cannot be detached from the interior testimony of the Holy Spirit, present in the believer (WBC 51, [107](#)).

When we as believers have received this anointing, then **all of you know the truth**. This phrase strengthens the option that the anointing is the Word of God. If we have a mature knowledge of the Bible, it can be said that we know the truth. Admittedly, there is plenty of disagreement about things in the Bible, but there is also much more agreement. The truth is not available only to a select few, as the Gnostics taught, but to everyone. This is not a promise of total knowledge. Anointed believers do not know all the truth there is to know. Rather, they know the truth about the inaccurate information the false teachers were spreading. They know the truth regarding the disputed issues. They need no further insight, as the Gnostics claimed.

This reinforces the truth that truly anointed Christians already believe. The false teachers (antichrists) are liars because they deny that **Jesus is the Christ**, that is, they deny that Jesus is the divine Son of God. This denial also constitutes a denial of the Father. Their claim to be in fellowship with the Father cannot be true since they are not in fellowship with his Son. A person cannot have the Father without having the Son, nor can he or she have the Son without having the Father. To accept or reject one is to accept or reject the other.

[2:24–25](#). The false teachers have brought forth radically new teaching based on their “secret” knowledge. That is unnecessary. John’s word is nothing new but what they have heard from the beginning. He challenges us to hold fast to the tried and true Word of God delivered once and for all to the saints. If we do, we will remain, or abide (in the sense of fellowship) in the Son and in the Father. Only then can we rest in the promise of eternal life.

The issue here is not a concern about losing our salvation. We can be certain that we possess eternal life ([2:1–6](#); [5:9–13](#), [20](#)). The issue is reassurance in face of the false teaching they were receiving. False teaching brings questions about our salvation; true teaching based on God's Word from the beginning reassures us of our salvation.

[2:26–27](#). **I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray:** Apparently, the false teachers denied that the readers of John's letter were actually saved. Such false teachers can be disregarded. Believers gain reassurance and confidence of salvation through the anointing received from God. It remains in us and is sufficient to confirm us in the truth.

They **do not need anyone to teach** is not suggesting that they had no teachers, or that they knew everything and didn't need to be taught. Rather, it means that, as a congregation, they did not need anyone to teach them again the essentials of the faith that the false teachers were denying. They already had the truth (the anointing) and did not need anyone else (Gnostics, who claimed special inner knowledge) to tell them what was true.

The Bible includes two more verses ([28–29](#)) in this chapter, but most Bible teachers include these verses at the beginning of chapter [3](#).

MAIN IDEA REVIEW: *Those who claim to know God must obey him and live as Jesus lived. What's more, they must demonstrate their love of God by loving their Christian brothers and sisters. On the other hand, they must not love the world, and they must reject false teachers who deny the Son.*

Warnings Against Antichrists (2:18–27) Now and again a story appears in the news about the passing of counterfeit money. Often counterfeit bills are discovered when an unsuspecting consumer tries to use one, not realizing that the money is in fact worthless. Usually the differences between real and counterfeit currency are so subtle that none but experts can tell them apart. And yet one isn't even worth the paper it's printed on, while the other can be redeemed for its face value—whether \$10 or \$100 or \$1,000.

The warnings against antichrists in [2:18–27](#) are warnings against counterfeit teachers and the beliefs they are passing out among the unsuspecting. These teachers and their followers may have held beliefs that seemed to differ only minimally and subtly from those of the Elder and his congregations. But when examined with care against the standard of measure, they are shown to be worthless, cheap imitations of the one real thing of great value: a true and abiding faith.

By labeling these false teachers as *antichrists* the Elder makes it plain how seriously he regards their offense. If in [2:15–17](#), John spoke of opposition between God and the world, he now speaks of one way in which that opposition is manifested in a visible and concrete form, namely, in the defection from the fellowship of a number of professed believers.

The Appearance of Antichrists (2:18–19)* The Elder begins with the bold assertion that *this is the last hour*. In the New Testament only here do we find this formulation (*eschatē hōra*). Some similar phrases, however, are found elsewhere in the New Testament.

“The last days” refer to the days in which God’s plan of salvation for the world is brought to fruition ([Acts 2:17](#); [Joel 2:28](#); [Mic 4:1](#)). From this perspective it can be said that “the end” has come (compare [1 Cor 10:11](#)). But the “end” is not a fleeting moment. It is rather a period that marks a new stage in God’s dealings with the world.

Other passages ([2 Tim 3:1](#); [Jas 5:3](#); [2 Pet 3:3](#)) take “the last days” as the final days of the interim period between Christ’s coming and his return. These last days are distinguished from the day of the Lord ([Acts 2:17, 20](#)), the day of judgment ([2 Pet 3:3, 7](#)) or the Second Coming and final judgment ([2 Tim 3:1](#); [4:1, 8](#)).

The Gospel of John speaks of “the last day” ([Jn 6:39–40, 44, 54](#); [11:24](#); [12:28](#)), which refers to a future day of resurrection and the final judgment. Yet the Gospel of John also emphasizes that Jesus’ mission has the effect of passing judgment in the present. Those who believe already have life, while those who do not already are judged. The “last day” seals the present verdict ([3:17–21](#); [5:25–27](#)).

John also speaks of the hour of Jesus’ death and glorification on the cross as the “hour” (see [Jn 2:4](#); [7:30](#); [8:20](#)), a decisive time and turn of events in the unfolding drama of salvation.

Against the background of these various last hours and days, where do we fit the statement that *this is the last hour*? Many take it to mean that the Elder believed that his community was at the end of those “last days,” at the final hour before the “last day” (Dodd 1946:51; Bruce 1970:64; Houlden 1973:77; Brown 1982:321). But two facts must be kept in mind here: First, in Johannine vocabulary, “hour” can refer to a decisive event or occurrence rather than to a unit of chronological time. It is instructive to note that the command that is linked with the statement *this is the last hour* is the command to abide, or to remain steadfast and faithful (compare vv. [19, 24, 27](#)). This suggests that *hour* is a decisive event, in light of which steadfastness is particularly

* **Notes: 2:18** The absence of the definite article before *last hour* does not make it indefinite, “it is a last hour” (Westcott 1966:69; Morris 1970:1266; compare Marshall 1978:148 n. 1; Smalley 1984:97).

necessary; chronological considerations may not be primary. But something has happened that demands all the vigilance and faithfulness of believers.

Second, in Johannine eschatology, the judgment and blessings expected in the last days are already taking place through Jesus. What had been expected in the future, such as final judgment, the separation of the righteous and wicked, and the granting of eternal life to the righteous, was already effected through the ministry and death of Christ. The Elder sees the realities of separation and judgment being worked out in his own situation. They do not eliminate the last judgment. Rather, judgment is already being passed in the present.

Specifically, of course, the author has in mind the secession of certain members from the church, a separation that shows that those who have left the fellowship have passed judgment upon themselves (compare [Jn 3:17–21](#)). The New Testament regularly speaks of signs that will presage the end (such as [Mk 13:4–5](#); [2 Thess 2:1–12](#); [2 Tim 3:1–5](#)). Among these telling events are false teaching, behavior unworthy of a believer and divisions in the church and among friends and family. Exactly these things characterize the situation behind this epistle and are part of the landscape that the Elder sees. These signs signal that the decisive event by which God passes judgment and grants salvation has indeed occurred.

It is then the *last hour*, and the judgment of God, expected in Jewish eschatology at the end times, is indeed manifesting itself. Judgment entails separation of evil from good, right from wrong, truth from error. Such separation is taking place already in the historical situation of the Johannine church. *They went out from us*, the writer asserts ([2:19](#)*). Here is the first explicit

* [2:19](#) Marshall (1978:151 n. 10) dismisses Bultmann's claims that the secessionists continued to regard themselves as "legitimate members" of the Johannine community; but compare Smalley 1984:102–3. The defectors may well have considered themselves as the legitimate interpreters and heirs of the tradition of the community.

The repetition of *ex hēmōn* (four times) is emphatic (Smalley 1984:102). Probably there is also a play on the meaning of the phrase, for it can suggest either (a) membership in a group ("they quit our fellowship") or (b) origin or location ("they went out *from us*") (Haas 1972:63). The author means that their physical departure manifested their lack of real belonging to the fellowship (so Smalley 1984:101: "they withdrew from us, but they did not belong to us").

There are several difficulties in the Greek translated by the statement *their going showed that none of them belonged to us* (*hina phanerōthōsin hoti ouk eisin pantes ex hēmōn*). (1) The NIV supplies *their going* for the *hina* clause; one could supply *touto egeneto* ("this happened") or *exēlthan* ("they went out"), which leaves the statement more ambiguous. (2) For ease of translation, the NIV uses a past tense (*showed*) for the subjunctive verb. But the Greek construction may well indicate that the departure occurred *in order to* reveal the true character of the dissidents. Dodd (1946:52), Houlden (1973:78) and Smalley (1984:104) suggest that the purpose clause points ultimately to God's providence in this matter (compare [Jn 6:44–45](#); [17:12](#)); the defection already indicated God's judgment. (3) The subject of the *hoti* clause is ambiguous. It may refer to the dissidents, in which case it means "all are not of us" (RSV) or *none of them belongs to us* (NIV). It may refer to the congregation, in which case it means "not all [church] members belong to us" (NEB). Since verse [18](#) introduces the problem of *antichrists* who have not *remained with us* (v. [19](#)), it is more likely that the reference is to those who have obviously left the fellowship, not to some who may still be lurking within it.

mention of the secessionists who departed from the fellowship of the church. Until this point, the readers have inferred their existence from various statements, and John's polemic against them has been indirect only. Now, however, it is clear that there are some who have left the church. When this epistle was written, the initial rupture in the community lay in the past, but it seems that the threat of further defection is still real. Perhaps some who are still faithful to the Elder are being pressured to abandon him and join the secessionists (see v. [26](#)). But, on the whole, John is looking back and interpreting the split as evidence of the nearness of the last hour, and of the outworking of the judgment expected at that time.

In light of the reality of judgment and of the present possibility of receiving the great blessings of God promised to believers, the call to remain steadfast is always urgent. For John, the question of the time of the last judgment is of secondary importance. For regardless of when the final judgment is to come, God's judgment is now being put into effect when people acknowledge or deny Jesus as Messiah and Son of God. How much more important to recognize God's work in Christ as bringing eternal life and judgment *now* than to be able to decode timetables about when the last judgment will break! To date no apocalyptic speculation has proved itself correct. But the epistle's message that the great judgment, the "sifting" of the church (Barclay), occurs as one responds to Jesus, has eternal relevance. There is the heart of John's warning, *this is the last hour*.

John refers to these secessionists as *antichrists*. This term is found in the New Testament only in the Johannine epistles ([1 Jn 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 Jn 7](#)). It may well have been coined by the Johannine community or perhaps by the Elder himself. The antichrist opposes Christ, but not so much by open aggression and hostility as with deceit and falsehood. The antichrist usurps the rightful role of the Messiah, the Christ, and deceives his followers (Houlden 1973:77; Marshall 1978:150; Smalley 1984:99; Stott 1988:109). The antichrist is, in short, a counterfeit Christ. Apparently the community is familiar with the expectation that such a figure will appear and that this appearance will mark the "last days." What is distinctive here is that the term is used in the plural, and so in a way this differs from the expectation of the readers. Evidently not merely one figure embodying great evil, but *many* individuals who manifest that ultimate error have appeared on the scene (see [Mk 13:22; Mt 24:3, 5, 11](#); compare [Rev 16:13; 19:20; 20:10; 2 Thess 2:1–12](#)).

The *antichrists* of 1 John are those who deceive others through false teaching about the person of Christ and the nature of the Christian life ([2:22–23; 4:2](#)). There are genuine theological disagreements between these false teachers and the author, and he will soon deal with the issues. But it is not only disagreement about formulations of doctrine that stimulates John to write. It is impossible not to sense his distress and anger over the actual departure of these people as well. The breaking of fellowship is in itself judged quite severely, and seems to have taken a greater toll on the church than have the actual reasons for it (Barker 1981:324). This sin is as bad as, if not worse than, the actual doctrinal error, because in leaving the fellowship these secessionists have disregarded the cardinal and foundational command of Jesus to "love each other." In fact, the author's ultimate judgment on the heretics is due as much to their secession as to their doctrinal aberrations (Houlden 1973:78). We see here the community's commitment to unity, as they believed Jesus taught, commanded and died for ([Jn 10:16; 11:52; 17:21](#)). We also sense their horror of professed disciples who fall away and deny the Lord, such as Judas ([Jn 6:66–71; 13:18–30](#)) and, very nearly, Peter ([Jn 13:36–38](#)).

It is probably difficult for Christians today who are accustomed to a church with a multitude of denominations to take seriously the problem of schism or defection. But too often new congregations and denominations are formed as the result of disagreements or disputes, with at least one faction convinced that it alone understands and correctly interprets the will of God in matters of doctrine and polity. And the urge to reform the church thus becomes the practice of splitting the church. Although the sixteenth-century Reformers may be invoked as exemplars of the crusade for truth and the purity of the church, seldom is it remembered that they strove also to preserve the unity of the church by working toward agreements with each other and with the Roman Catholic church. Although their efforts often failed, like John they cherished the unity of the church and deplored its divisions.

In this light, we do well to remember the words of the Gospel of John, where Jesus said, “I have other sheep that are not of this flock [sheep pen]. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd” (10:16). Because the work of Jesus unites us, we must take care lest our own work divides us from others who name the name of Christ. At the least, our efforts to live in fellowship and work side by side with other Christians will prevent us from thinking that we alone comprise the one true flock for which the Good Shepherd laid down his life.

The Anointing of “the Holy One” (2:20–21)* Having made it clear to his readers that those who left the community have revealed that they never really belonged there, the Elder now turns

* **2:20** *Anointing* may refer either to the *substance* (such as oil) with which one is anointed (Bultmann 1973:37; Marshall 1978:153, Smalley 1984:105) or to the *act* of anointing (Brown 1982:342–43). If it refers to the act of being anointed, it may be taken *literally*, with reference to a ritual action of anointing, or *figuratively*, in that it compares an act such as baptism to anointing, or else refers more generally to a divine gift of some sort. Despite the denials of Brown (1982:341), it is likely that the secessionists would have claimed an *anointing* as well. This is why the claim must be tested by external evidence (such as action and belief).

That *the Holy One* refers to God is argued by Dodd (1946:53), Houlden (1973:79) and Stott (1988:111); that it refers to Jesus is accepted by Schnackenburg (1963:153), Haas (1972:64), Bultmann (1973:37), Marshall (1978:155), Barker (1981:325), Brown (1982:348) and Smalley (1984:108); that it means the Spirit is asserted by Grayston (1984:87), Kysar (1986:61), Morris (1970:1266) and Smith (1991:72). Grayston (1984:87) perceptively notes that because the secessionists deny that Jesus is the *Christ* (v. 22), it is unlikely that Jesus can also be the *Holy One* who grants the anointing. The ultimate appeal must be to the one who inspires confession of Jesus as the Christ, and this happens by the Spirit of God (compare 4:1–6).

There is a textual variant at the end of verse 20. Some manuscripts read “you know all things” (*oidate panta*) while others read “you all know” (*pantes oidate*), leaving the object to be supplied (NIV *the truth*, from v. 21). *Pantes* has better textual support. The stress falls on what all, not a few, know.

2:21 *Hoti* here should perhaps be “that” (not *because* as in the NIV) in each instance. The Elder is not citing reasons why he is writing, but reminding his readers that they do indeed know the truth and that they therefore ought to recognize that no lie is from the truth (so also Brown 1982:350; Bultmann Walls, David, and Max Anders. *I & II Peter, I, II & III John, Jude*. Vol. 11. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999. Print. Holman New Testament Commentary. Page 7. Exported from [Logos Bible Software](#), 11:36 AM March 28, 2019.

to assure his readers of their firm standing in God's care and in the Christian community. However, the statement with which he offers such assurance remains ambiguous to us. *You have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth* raises several questions for the modern reader. What is the nature of this anointing? Who is the Holy One? And what is the truth that is known by all? What is clear is that John appeals to a teaching or power that comes from beyond the believer. By this anointing believers may discern the truth.

But what does the Elder have in mind when he speaks of such an anointing? In light of the parallels to statements about the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, in the Gospel of John, it may be that the anointing spoken of here is the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of truth guides believers into the knowledge of the truth and teaches them "all things" ([Jn 14:17, 26](#); [15:26](#); [16:13](#)). The Spirit remains or abides (*menein*) in believers. The Spirit testifies about Jesus ([15:26](#); [16:13–15](#)), even as believers now also do. In short, the anointing of which believers may be confident is the presence and guidance of the Spirit of Truth.

The identification of the anointing as the Spirit who enables the discernment of truth does not tell us *how* the Spirit enables such discernment. Is the Elder speaking of an internal, private, subjective experience of the Spirit's leading? In view of his regular appeals to what has been taught and heard and believed "from the beginning," sudden appeal to an inner guiding light seems unlikely. It would, after all, open the doors for the Elder's opponents to enter the same claim. More likely, it is the teaching itself, the content or message, and its continuity with the word of earliest times that John takes as evidence of the Spirit's continued abiding with and anointing of the community. The guiding work of the Spirit cannot be separated from the content and shape of the message itself. When claims to have the Spirit's inspiration result in teachings or practices that either contradict or seem far more informed on certain points than Scripture itself, it is a clear sign that it is not the inspiration of God's Spirit that is at work.

There is some ambiguity about the identity of *the Holy One*, for it is unclear whether the reference is to the Father, Son or Spirit. In the Gospel of John, Peter confesses that Jesus is the "Holy One of God," and Jesus is the one who sends the Paraclete from the Father ([15:26](#)). And yet the Gospel also states that God sends the Spirit ([14:16, 26](#)), and in 1 John this is more clearly the case ([3:24](#); [4:1, 13](#); compare [5:8–9](#)). Finally, the Gospel does speak of the Spirit as "the Holy Spirit" ([14:26](#)). In short, one could argue that *the Holy One* refers to Father, Son or Spirit and find support for that decision in the Johannine literature.

We get some help by noticing the play on words in the present passage: the words *antichrist*, *anointing* and *Christ* all have the same root (*christos*, *chrisma*). A true anointing (*chrisma*) enables a true confession of Christ (*Christos*); but those who are not anointed by the Spirit of God are, in fact, antichrists (*antichristoi*). "Christians"—"anointed ones"—are to test the "spirits," that they may know which Spirit is "from God" ([4:2–3](#)). God the Father gives the Spirit who inspires true understanding and confession of Jesus the Son. Thus God is the final court of appeal. It would be crucial for the Johannine Christians to be able to claim the ultimate source of the Spirit with which they had been anointed and which continues to guard the truth of their confession. Their Spirit does not come from the evil one and is not a source of error; the Spirit they know comes from God and guards the truth. It is also worth noting in passing the trinitarian

1973:38; Culpepper 1985:48; Marshall 1978:156 n. 30; Schnackenburg 1963:154 n. 6; Smalley 1984:110).

tendencies of John's statements about the way in which the work of God, the Son and the Spirit are in reality one inseparable work of salvation.

The *anointing*, the guiding of the Spirit, insures that *all of you know the truth*. That anointing is not limited to a few or to the elite: it belongs to all. By *all*, of course, the author means all within the sphere of his church and readership. What they know the elder calls *the truth*. He is not saying that all believers know all the truth there is to know, but rather that his community is acquainted with the truth that their opponents deny. They know the truth about the disputed issues, and they do not need further teaching or some additional insight into the person of Jesus Christ, such as the false teachers may have claimed to possess and to offer (compare [2:27](#)). What the false teachers espouse is in reality a great lie.

The Great Lie (2:22–23)* The truth that the community confesses and that the liar, the antichrist, denies, is that *Jesus is the Christ*. Stated in these terms, it might appear that the Elder's rebukes are directed against Jewish opponents who did not see in Jesus the hoped-for Messiah. Yet that is probably too simple. To begin with, it does not adequately explain how such people could ever have been part of a Christian fellowship at all. For it seems that those who had left the church had appeared at one point to be true believers. But it is very difficult to decide exactly what the dissidents were advocating and what the author feels compelled to defend against them. Broadly speaking, the liar is anyone who claims knowledge of God apart from the revelation in Jesus Christ (Culpepper 1985:58). More specifically, the liars are the defectors from the community. But what exactly are they denying?

Here we must take into account other statements from the epistle. The affirmation that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" ([4:2](#); [2 Jn 7](#)), and that he is the one who came by water and blood ([5:6](#)) suggest that the mere identification of Jesus as the "Messiah," while important, is not the ultimate issue. Moreover, we can view these statements almost as slogans, as pithy summaries of emphases found elsewhere in the Gospel and epistles. As a human being who "lived among us" ([Jn 1:14](#); [1 Jn 1:2](#)) and who died to atone for sins ([1 Jn 1:7](#); [2:1–2](#)), Jesus mediates salvation and eternal life, and is therefore the way to knowledge of and fellowship with God ([Jn 14:6](#); [17:3](#); [1 Jn 1:7](#)).

All these truths have at their heart the affirmation that Jesus makes God known and so mediates the way to knowing God. The use of the title "Christ" or "Messiah" fits into this category of "mediation" as well. On the one hand, the Messiah was, by definition, to be God's chosen and anointed delegate in ruling the kingdom. To follow the Messiah was to obey God's chosen one, and so to obey God. Thus the term "Christ" or "Messiah," when applied to Jesus, does say something about his identity; and what it says is that he is God's accredited agent in establishing the reign or kingdom of God (Houlden 1973:80). The dissidents may not have disagreed with this statement; they may not even have denied that Jesus is the Messiah. But the Elder asserts that in their actions they effectively do deny his function in mediating knowledge of God and eternal life ([2:25](#)). That is what their secession from the community reveals.

* **2:22** The NIV's translation *It is the man who denies ...* renders a Greek participle that may be translated "It is the one who denies..." referring to *the evil one*, the chief liar ([3:8–15](#); see [Jn 8:44](#): the devil is a liar and the "father of lies"); compare Kysar (1986:62).

On the confession that Jesus is the Messiah, note [John 9:22](#), where people are apparently expelled from the synagogue on the basis of this confession; see also [16:2](#).

“Messiah” is thus the author’s shorthand summary for his understanding of Jesus. It entails far more than the confession of Jesus as an expected figure of Jewish eschatology. The “more” that Messiah connotes for John is made clear in the bold assertion that to deny the Son is in fact to deny the Father (2:23). We move from language of God and Messiah to the familial terminology of Father and Son, which stresses the intimate relationship that exists between them. Typical of 1 John, this assertion is made negatively, *denies the Son*, with an eye toward those who went out, and positively, *acknowledges the Son*, with an eye toward the faithful community. Those in the faithful community not only know God, they *[have] the Father*; that is, they have God as Father. If Jesus is the unique Son, those who acknowledge that Son are children of God (3:1–2; Kysar 1986:63).

In this context, “denying” and “acknowledging” have two aspects: a cognitive dimension, the dimension of true understanding, as well as the matter of discipleship or following Jesus. For to deny Jesus is to deny the true and accepted understanding of him, such as has been *heard from the beginning* (v. 24). But, second, denial of Jesus is also a “failure of allegiance” to him (Houlden 1973:80). Those who left the fellowship of believers have in fact failed in their allegiance to Jesus himself.

The positive “acknowledging Jesus” entails holding a true understanding of him and his atoning and intercessory work (1:7–10; 2:1–2). John lays out how we must understand Jesus and what he has done. Having understood the how of Jesus’ mediating work, we also acknowledge Jesus in commitment and loyalty to him. Thus to acknowledge Jesus is to accept his command to love (2:7–11) and to walk in his example of single-minded obedience to God (2:6, 15–17). That is, “acknowledging Jesus” means recognizing both *that* he mediates salvation and *how* he mediates salvation. These truths are so integrally interrelated that the author speaks of them simply as *the truth* (2:21). And it is especially at the point of the way in which Jesus mediates salvation, *how* salvation comes to us, that John and the schismatics disagree, as the Elder’s earlier words about the necessity of accepting the atoning work of Jesus (1:7–2:2) have already made clear.

Here then is a reminder to the church that the message it dare not sacrifice is the “stumbling block of the cross,” to borrow a phrase from Paul. Any version of the Christian message that abandons the twin truths of human sin and divine salvation through the cross of Jesus would fall outside of John’s rubric of *the truth*. The very real danger facing John’s church and the church today is to water down and ignore the realities of human sinfulness and God’s demand. And this happens in many ways. It happens when the gospel is turned into a panacea for the problems, big and small, that we all face, and the sum and substance of the gospel becomes a promise for a better life defined on our terms. It happens when we preach only what God generously gives to us and not what God also expects of us. It can happen when human beings label as acceptable what the Scriptures label as intolerable: injustice, unkindness, intolerance, immorality, hatred, greed, selfishness and so on. And it happens when alternative ways to knowing God—whether in other religions or movements, such as the New Age movement—are condoned as acceptable ways of salvation.

Exhortations to Faithfulness (2:24–27)* The author reminds his readers that what he is now telling them is in fact what the church has *heard from the beginning*. He warns them against

* 2:26 The NIV helpfully renders the participle *ton planōntōn* with conative force, thus translating *trying to lead you astray*. The author is issuing a warning, not stating a fact.

those who are trying to lead them astray from that well-founded teaching which *remains in you*. Their steadfastness depends on remembering the Spirit-inspired teaching about Jesus that they have heard and accepted all along. For it is the Spirit who remains with the faithful and who reminds them of what they have heard *from the beginning*. But clearly John expects that the Spirit works and speaks through individuals who proclaim and teach. This is exactly why the false teachers are such a threat, why he will later warn his readers to “test the Spirits” (4:1–6), and why he continually points to the role of the eyewitnesses and their successors in passing on the truth they have received. While ultimately the Spirit “will teach you all things” (Jn 14:26), the Spirit does so through human beings. Thus, when the Elder writes *you do not need anyone to teach you*, he does not mean that they have never needed any teachers—for he himself was and continues to be their teacher! But they do not now suddenly need new teaching about Jesus, such as the secessionists are offering.

What constitutes a different gospel from the one that they *heard from the beginning* was exactly the source of debate. It is unlikely that the dissidents would say or even agree that they had changed the proclamation. The Elder therefore appeals to his readers’ ability to discern, with the aid of the community and by the guidance of the Spirit, whether or not the message they are now hearing conforms to the “Word of life” that they heard initially. The importance of an informed Christian community and the thoughtful understanding of the word of the gospel are foundational to the epistle’s appeals and crucial for the health of the church today. John further appeals to his readers to *remain in him*, presumably to remain in God as revealed in the Son. To *remain* implies the maintenance of a stable and vital—but not static!—fellowship with God. In the words of one author, abiding suggests “utter and dependable permanence” (Houlden 1973:82). In this way, we will receive “what he promised us” (v. 25), eternal life.

Here now the first long section of 1 John, which I have called “Walking in the Light: The Fundamental Pattern,” comes to a close. In it the author has laid out his view of the life of discipleship as a pilgrimage in which we strive to live within and by the light of God’s love, truth and righteousness. Now the imagery shifts somewhat as the Elder introduces and develops the idea that we are the “children of God.” The fundamental pattern of what is expected of Christian disciples does not change. But by emphasizing that we are actually bound to God by an intimate relationship—not just as master and disciple, but as parent and child—we gain another angle on understanding the meaning of the life of faith.

Thompson, Marianne Meye. *1–3 John*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992. Print. The IVP New Testament Commentary Series.

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2:27 It is reading too much into the assertion *you do not need anyone to teach you* to take it as evidence of a democratic community structure that lacked officially appointed human teachers (Brown 1982:106–8, 375–76). But even if the statement here is regarded as a “remarkable exaggeration,” the author surely means no more than that the community does not need anyone to teach to them again the essentials of the faith that the dissidents dispute (Kysar 1986:65–66).

Walls, David, and Max Anders. *I & II Peter, I, II & III John, Jude*. Vol. 11. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999. Print. Holman New Testament Commentary.

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