

SESSION 4 – WEEK OF 7 FEB 2021

TEMPTATIONS AND DECEPTIONS WILL COME; HOW CAN WE OVERCOME?

SCRIPTURE: 1 JOHN 2:12-2:27

Theme:

Last week we looked at obedience as both a requirement and evidence of living in Christ and being in the light. We have considered what it means to truly know God, to live in the light, and to live (or walk) in Christ. We have discussed how our conduct is evidence of whether or not we are living in the light, particularly whether we are obeying the commands of Christ, as this has consequences. This week we will explore how living in the light requires and also provides a means for us to overcome temptations and deceptions – perhaps revealing a key aspect on how we can overcome both temptation and deception?

Key Verse:

“As for you, see 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. And this is what he promised us— eternal life.” (1John 2:24–25)

Read 1 John 2:12-2:27

Core Questions for Discussion

(If your group meets fortnightly, combine Core Questions of two sessions and choose one Further Question from either session.)

1. Why would John want to give a word of encouragement at this point in his letter (vv. 12-14)?

- Verses 9-11 would seem to be very harsh, perhaps it is at this point that John felt it necessary to encourage the readers with certain truths.
- These verses also lead to the next significant issue of walking in the light and living in Christ.
- These verses also set out a foundation for the identity of the readers or their position in Christ: that

John Wesley's Notes on the First Epistle of John

John Wesley in his Notes on the Bible suggested that verse 12 was intended to set a foundation for all believers, whom the Apostle addressed as “little children” – that their sins are forgiven.

What do you think?

To read more of John Wesley's Notes on the Bible: <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/john-wesleys-notes-on-the-bible/notes-on-the-first-epistle-of-st-john/>

their sins are forgiven on account of the name of Christ (v. 12).

2. What are the two reasons we are told not to love the world (vv. 15-17)? The three worldly desires of verse 16 point us to the problem of the enemy within. How does this emphasis help us to understand the true nature of worldliness?

- The first reason is that where there is love for the world, there cannot be love for the Father (v.15) In this verse, love for the world and love for the Father are mutually exclusive and they cannot exist together.
- John explains that love for the world is to have the sinful attitudes: “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” and these are not from God (v. 16).
- These three worldly desires are things of the world and are in opposition to God. To love the world, therefore, is to love the enemy of God.
- The second reason is that “[t]he world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.” (v. 17)
- Collins (online) dictionary explains lust in these terms: “A lust for something is a very strong and eager desire to have it.” The worldliness described by John in these terms would be the very strong and eager desire to have and boast in the things of this world – a sinful attitude towards satisfying the craving for and prideful boasting of the things of this world.
- These things of the world in themselves may not be evil, but it is our lust over it or our strong and eager desire to have, and our pride for our life.
- Verse 15 highlights “a pull between the two kingdoms” (Rev Benjamin Fong):
 - a. To live in the light is to do the works of the light rather than the works of darkness, characterised in v.16 as the world.
 - b. A tension between love for the world vs love for God. The world in this case represents all things in opposition to who God is, which is different from the world in the sense that God loves the world – the key issue lies thus in “values” and not in the people.

“Everything in the world”. What does this refer to?

The three worldly desires that are identified by John echo that which led to the fall of man in Genesis 3:6. Yet these temptations arise from worldly principles and desires which are not from our Father in heaven.

“Translating this as ‘sex, money, and power’ may not miss the mark by much. Still, it would be wrong to see here a simple combination of those things as such. Rather, it is a matter of what a person wills and desires, what one wants and trusts.”

-D. Moody Smith, First, Second, and Third John, Interpretation Bible Commentary (John Knox Press, 1991), p.66.

“It is not enough to say that sexual immorality is wrong, or that pride is wrong, or that we must not covet material possessions. While all that is true, they are only symptoms of the much deeper problem of ‘the world’s’ alienation from God. [...] the attraction to human autonomy is a rejection of and, therefore, a failure to love God. [...] When John commands us not to love the world or the things in the world, he is speaking of one’s most basic life orientation. If our lives are not directed toward God in our every decision of each day, then even our most passionate efforts and causes amount to polishing brass on the Titanic.”

-Karen Jobes, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2014), pp.115-116

- We need to recognise this pull of two kingdoms and learn to distinguish the worldly voice from God's values and voice.
 - a. Anchor our lives in our basic confession: Jesus is the Messiah, and the world denies that (v.22);
 - b. Remain in Christ - hold fast to what we first heard (v.24);
 - c. Remain in the fundamental definition of the Christian faith that defines the Christian community, and how we respond to the world, such as our creeds or the Great Thanksgiving
 - d. Yet we remain committed to living out this radical claim in the world, but not of it.

3. According to verse 18-23, how can we overcome potential deceptions and distortions?

- Perhaps as a context for this question, the use of the word "antichrist" is the simple joining of two words "anti" and "Christ". "Anti" means against, therefore "antichrist" means those who are against Christ. (Refer to the box for more information).

- From this passage we can see that these false teachers were denying the truth that Jesus was the Christ or Messiah and His divinity (v. 22). We can also see that these people were from within the church, at least for some time, before they left. The suggestion here is that they were trying to destroy the church from within by pretending to be Christians.

- There are several elements that form the means to defend against false teachings in these verses:

a. Being in community: It may be suggested from verse 19 that the defence "is built upon the principle that genuine believers persevere in the faith and in their association with other believers".¹ The unity of the Body of Christ in Christ.

b. Genuine, saving faith: The belief and identity we share as believers in Jesus as the Son of God, His life, death and resurrection.

- The Holy Spirit is a critical element in entering us into truth and providing the means to defend against false teaching. We can understand verse 20, in two ways: that we

Who is the "antichrist"?

"... many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist."
(2 John 1:7)

- denies that Jesus is the Christ
- may be a reference to docetic beliefs; denying that Jesus came as a human being

John Wesley noted that:
"Ye have heard that antichrist cometh — Under the term antichrist, or the spirit of antichrist, he includes all false teachers and enemies to the truth; yea, whatever doctrines or men are contrary to Christ." Wesley's Explanatory Notes on 1 John 2 verse 18
<<https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/wen/1-john-2.html>)here >

¹ Donald Burdick, *The Letters of John the Apostle* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), p. 195.

have received the anointing of the Holy Spirit; or that we have been anointed with the Holy Spirit by the Holy One – God. In either instance, it is clear that the Holy Spirit is an essential element in our means to enter into truth and defend against false teachings. Our understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit is entirely consistent with teachings in other parts of the Bible, for example in 1 Cor 2:12-16 the Holy Spirit is given us to help in understanding, and grants even the mind of Christ.

4. What does John say believers need to “remain in” (vv. 24-27)?

- In contrast with the antichrists, we have “an anointing from the Holy One” and, thus, “know the truth”.

- a. Make it a discipline to keep firm to the truth as contained in Scripture and summarised in the creedal tenets of the Christian faith - “see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you”.
- b. Have a disciplined approach to cling to the truth, such as reciting our creeds
- c. Knowing the truth is derived from their “anointing from the Holy One”, it is a work of the Holy Spirit.

- John says the believers need to remain in the truth of what they had heard in the beginning – the truths taught to them by the apostles. For us, as believers, the Gospel that we heard brought us to Christ that led us to receiving saving faith. This is in contrast to us searching for new teaching. It should also remind us of what Paul told Timothy: “But as for

you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of” (2 Tim 3:14).

- Perhaps it does not mean we should not pursue fresh understandings or deeper insights into Scripture, but suggests that we should not neglect the fundamental truths of our faith in Christ and what He has done for us.

- It might even be suggested that what is called for is a continuous affirmation and deepening of those fundamental truths of God’s Word that assures us of God’s promise to us: eternal life through Jesus Christ His Son.

- The second aspect of “remain in” is abiding in Christ – remaining in Christ or walking in Christ or living as Christ lived. Our journey should be one where we are engaging

Clinging to the truth

Forming a discipline of reciting truths, as set out in our creeds may be a useful means to cling on to the truth, such as the Apostle’s Creed which is recited at Baptism:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth:

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of the Father, and will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic* church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.

*catholic = universal

For more creeds recognised in the Methodist church:

< <https://methodist.org.sg/our-church?id=8> >

and affirming in the truths about Christ, His passion, His death and resurrection. It is, therefore, the mark of all genuine believers, not just a select few, that we remain in Christ and His Word – in the perseverance of living in faith.

- Rev Wendy Watson in her sermons on Vision Sunday encouraged us to practice our own Festival of Booths: give thanks daily, especially at meal times; and use the study guides to discuss the sermon and Scriptures with friends and family.

- We can strive to remain in a relationship with Jesus - our lamp in our homes - through prayer, spending time with Jesus, sharing about Jesus.

5. Do you recognise the pull between “two kingdoms” - the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light?
 - a. What are some temptations and deceptions that you face (kingdom of darkness)? How can you overcome them?
 - b. What actions or attitudes would you find helpful, in practical terms, to remain in Christ (remain in the kingdom of light)?

Further Questions for Discussion

(Optional question for discussion if time permits. Do allocate adequate time for prayer and fellowship.)

6. *If You Have Time ...*

- a. What does John suggest is the source of our victory over the evil one (vv. 13-14)?
 - The source of victory over the evil one is knowing God, receiving forgiveness by the name of Jesus and having the Word of God live in us.
 - We have “an anointing from the Holy One” and the Holy One anoints us to “know the truth”.
- b. How can that truth help us overcome the evil one’s tactics and schemes?
 - We can overcome the evil one if we have the truth of this in us and we cling on to the truth. The truth of what Christ has done to atone for our sins, the forgiveness of our sins by His name, and our day-by-day practice to know Him, to walk in the light, to obey and to live in Christ.
 - To cling on also to our assurance of eternal life.

- To be strong, this has to be a daily practice – up to this session - to confess our sins and receive His forgiveness, to obey, to love our brothers and sisters.

A simple prayer

Whenever we might feel anxious or border on darkness, we can simply call out to our Lord and affirm Him and His presence in our lives. We could try to remember this by regularly saying:

“Jesus You are my Light and my Saviour.”

or

“Jesus be my Light right now.”

Suggestions for Prayer

1. We could pray for:

- a. **Ourselves:** If you have identified temptations or deceptions in areas of your life, perhaps offer them to God and seek to affirm that you have the foundation and tools needed to overcome: your faith in Christ, the forgiveness of your sins, the anointing of the Holy Spirit, the fellowship of the saints (your small group community), the ever-presence of our Saviour and God.
You might also offer in prayer a certainty of steps that you would like to take to remain in Christ on a daily basis.
Perhaps surrendering certain aspects of worldliness that has crept into your life.
- b. **Others:** Would you take this opportunity to pray for someone who might be encouraged by your words; and wisdom from the Holy Spirit to share what you might have learned from this session and previous sessions.
Perhaps you know of someone who has been deceived by false teachings. Would you offer them to our Lord; and seek opportunity to gently guide them back to the truth?