

That You May Know

Week 48: November 26-December 2 — *1 John 2-5; 2 John*

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Helpful Resources

The Dangers of Gnosticism (p.67)

Making Sense of It All

- The Big Picture

In the first-century, John and the other Apostles dealt with a dangerous belief system called Gnosticism (read the article entitled, “The Dangers of Gnosticism” for more details). The word *gnosis* (pronounced no-sis) means knowledge or to know. Gnostics (noss-ticks) proclaimed to have special knowledge regarding Christ and Christianity. Therefore, in their minds, their false doctrine or beliefs were superior to those of Paul, Peter, James, and John. Thus, Christians in the early churches were often confused about what to believe, and they were conflicted about what to do.

As a result of Gnostic subversion, the purpose of John’s three letters was to help true believers in Christ untangle the confusion, clarify true Christian doctrine, and affirm their salvation. His theme, or leading idea, could be summarized in *1 John 5:13*, “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.” John used the word *know* 32 times in his first letter. Though he did not refer to Gnosticism specifically, John’s readers clearly understood his message.

In this review, we will reconsider how John addressed the issue of Gnostic teaching by affirming true beliefs and true believers. Along the way, we will find that his encouragements and challenges are still helpful for us today.

- True Beliefs
 1. **The Humanity of Jesus** (*1 Jn. 1:1-4*): Since Gnostics claimed that Jesus was not fully human (since the physical world is flawed or evil), John shared his firsthand eyewitness testimony of Jesus’ humanity. He saw, heard, and touched Jesus, who was a man like us, except without sin. Since He was conceived by the Spirit, He did not inherit man’s sin.
 2. **Jesus Is the Christ** (*1 Jn. 2:18-24*): Gnostic beliefs denied Jesus’ identity, that He was the Messiah, the Son of God, and the only way to be saved. “This is the antichrist,” John wrote, “the one who denies the Father and the Son.”
 3. **Humans Are Sinful** (*1 Jn. 1:5-10*): Gnostics believed that people are basically good, but they are trapped in sinful bodies and a fallen world. However, the truth is that human hearts are rotten with sin. To claim that we have no sin is to call God a liar.
 4. **Our Salvation Is Complete** (*1 Jn. 2:25-28*): Gnostics told Christians that their salvation was incomplete. They needed more knowledge or teaching to be completely saved. This is a lie, of course, for Christ has done everything for our salvation. We need nothing more.

- True Believers

1. **True believers desire to obey God's Word** (*1 Jn. 2:3-6; 3:10; 5:1-3*): Just as children who love their parents seek to obey them, so we, who are children of God, will seek to obey Him whom we love. True believers will abandon their will and ways for His.
2. **True believers will have a genuine love for others** (*1 Jn. 2:7-11; 3:11-24; 4:7-21; 2 Jn. 1:5, 6*): How can believers who have the Spirit of God (who is love) harbor hate for others? True believers can't contain God's love but will share it with all people.
3. **True believers will not love the world** (*1 Jn. 2:15-17; 5:4, 5*): The world does not refer to people but to the views and values of this present age. This fallen world appeals to our sinful nature, but true believers will overcome and resist those temptations.
4. **True believers do not practice sin** (*1 Jn. 1:5-2:2; 3:1-10*): Christians are not perfect. They still sin. But there will not be patterns of sin in their lives. True believers are aware of their sin. They grow more sensitive to it, and they strive to overcome it.
5. **True believers discern truth from error** (*1 Jn. 4:1-6*): Just as Paul challenged Christians "to take every thought captive according to Christ" (*Col. 2:8*), so did John write, "Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God."

- Final Warnings

In his first two letters, John warned his readers of the dangers of false gospels.

"Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh (i.e., Gnostics). This is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves... Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. The one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him..." *2 John 1:7-10*

"We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." *1 John 5:20*

The Bottom Line

Those who know the Truth (Christ) will live out the truth, which includes discerning the enemy's lies.

Questions to Consider

1. Evaluate your life in light of John's tests for true believers. How are you doing?
2. Why is our world (or the things in it) so easy to love? How do we combat those desires?
3. What does it mean to practice sin? Why is practicing sin antithetical to Christianity?
4. Can you think of any other "tests" to determine a true and false believer? What are they?
5. Is false teaching (like Gnosticism) simply a thing of the past? Explain.
6. There are con-artists (including spiritual con-artists) all around us. How can you best protect yourself, your loved ones, and your church from false doctrine?
7. If we are to love all people, what does that look like when dealing with false teachers?