

## SESSION 7

# WHEN FALSE RELIGIONS DECEIVE

### ▶ **The Point**

Truth is grounded in the reality of who Jesus Christ is.

### ▶ **The Passage**

1 John 2:18-29

### ▶ **The Bible Meets Life**

Sadly, we have a new phrase in our American lexicon: “fake news.” At one time, news publishers made large financial investments in reporters, editors, marketing, and printing presses. But today, thanks to the Internet and digital technology, virtually anybody can set up a professional looking online newsletter that rivals the websites and digital newspapers of legitimate news sources. One person can twist the facts, express his views as factual, and present it in a way that seems legitimate. Even though it looks good or sounds legitimate, it’s still fake news. But that doesn’t keep people from passing the stories along—especially when it falls in line with what they believe. The fake news continues to spread. A religious leader can sound equally convincing. His doctrine may carry an air of legitimacy and even contain elements of truth, but if it is not grounded in Scripture, it’s fake. And people will flock to such religious teaching if it appeals to what they want to believe. It doesn’t matter how many people believe it, if a religion is not grounded on the truth of God’s Word and the reality of Jesus Christ, it’s false—and dangerous.

### ▶ **The Setting**

In the latter part of the first century, a form of heresy later known as Gnosticism began to develop and influence Christian churches. Certain people within the churches began spreading false teachings, particularly related to the Person and work of Jesus Christ, and left the churches. As a result, the apostle John wrote to refute the message of these false teachers and to provide assurance of salvation for believers who trusted in Jesus Christ.

# What does the Bible say?

**Antichrist** (v. 18)—The Greek word *antichristos* can be singular or plural. It refers to those who distort the truth about Christ as well as those who oppose Christ.

## **1 John 2:18-29**

**<sup>18</sup> Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.**

**<sup>19</sup> They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.**

**<sup>20</sup> But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge.**

**<sup>21</sup> I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth.**

**<sup>22</sup> Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.**

**<sup>23</sup> No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.**

**<sup>24</sup> Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. <sup>25</sup> And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life.**

**<sup>26</sup> I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you.**

**<sup>27</sup> But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him.**

**<sup>28</sup> And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.**

**<sup>29</sup> If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.**

# GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes



**DISCUSS: Question #1** on page 117 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): **“What’s the most unusual scam you’ve seen or heard about?”** Allow time for each person to respond.

**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** In advance, send a link to a page from a satirical site like “The Babylon Bee” to your group members by email or print copies to pass around. Make the point that there’s a difference between a comical or satirical site

that advertises itself as such, and one that deceives its viewers or readers intentionally. It’s okay for believers to have a sense of humor; it’s not okay to distort the truth.

**GUIDE:** Direct group members to **“The Bible Meets Life”** on page 118 of the PSG. Emphasize the importance of cherishing the truth of who Christ is by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

**GUIDE:** Call attention to **“The Point”** on page 118 of the PSG: **“Truth is grounded in the reality of who Jesus Christ is.”**

**LEADER PACK:** In advance, make enough copies for each member of **Pack Item 12**, the “World Religions” handout, and **Pack Item 13**, the “Cults” handout. Display **Pack Item 11**, the “Truth” poster. Read the statement on the poster aloud and then distribute **Pack Item 12**, the “World Religions” handout, and **Pack Item 13**, the “Cults” handout, to better help group members understand how other world religions and cults distort the essential truth of Jesus Christ.

**PRAY:** Transition into the study by thanking God for sending His Son for us. Ask Him for wisdom as we seek to spread this essential truth to others so they may come to know Him.

Notes



	Goal	Issue	Key	Substance	Implications	Response
Christianity	The gospel of Jesus Christ is the foundation of the Christian faith. It is the message of God's love and grace, and the way of life that leads to eternal life.	The gospel of Jesus Christ is the foundation of the Christian faith. It is the message of God's love and grace, and the way of life that leads to eternal life.	Jesus Christ	The message of God's love and grace, and the way of life that leads to eternal life.	The message of God's love and grace, and the way of life that leads to eternal life.	The message of God's love and grace, and the way of life that leads to eternal life.
Judaism	Judaism is a monotheistic religion that follows the teachings of the Hebrew Bible. It is based on the covenant between God and the people of Israel.	Judaism is a monotheistic religion that follows the teachings of the Hebrew Bible. It is based on the covenant between God and the people of Israel.	Moses	The message of God's love and grace, and the way of life that leads to eternal life.	The message of God's love and grace, and the way of life that leads to eternal life.	The message of God's love and grace, and the way of life that leads to eternal life.
Islam	Islam is a monotheistic religion that follows the teachings of the Quran. It is based on the message of the Prophet Muhammad.	Islam is a monotheistic religion that follows the teachings of the Quran. It is based on the message of the Prophet Muhammad.	Muhammad	The message of God's love and grace, and the way of life that leads to eternal life.	The message of God's love and grace, and the way of life that leads to eternal life.	The message of God's love and grace, and the way of life that leads to eternal life.
Hinduism	Hinduism is a complex, polytheistic religion that follows the teachings of the Vedas. It is based on the concept of dharma and karma.	Hinduism is a complex, polytheistic religion that follows the teachings of the Vedas. It is based on the concept of dharma and karma.	Vedas	The message of God's love and grace, and the way of life that leads to eternal life.	The message of God's love and grace, and the way of life that leads to eternal life.	The message of God's love and grace, and the way of life that leads to eternal life.

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# STUDY THE BIBLE

## NOTES

### 1 John 2:18-20

*<sup>18</sup> Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. <sup>19</sup> They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. <sup>20</sup> But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge.*

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud 1 John 2:18-20 on page 119 of the PSG.

**GUIDE:** Use the Commentary on the next page of this Leader Guide to help group members understand John’s teaching on the antichrist.

**SUMMARIZE:** Highlight the main points from page 119 of the PSG. In the last days also comes the “antichrist.” Sometimes John was referring to one person, and sometimes he referred to many.

- ▶ **One person.** Sometimes the word refers to one individual. Daniel called him “the prince who is to come” (Dan. 9:26). Paul called him “the lawless one” (2 Thess. 2:9). John referred to him as the “beast” (Rev. 13:1). Whether the antichrist is alive now or not, we do not know, so there is little benefit to trying to identify him.
- ▶ **Multiple persons.** The world also has “many antichrists”—those who live by the false idea that Jesus is not the Christ. Anyone who opposes Christ and biblical teaching about who He is can be called an antichrist. In verse 18, John mentioned “antichrist” but his focus was on the group of people who had risen up to tear apart the church with their false teachings.

**DISCUSS: Question #2** on page 119 of the PSG: **“What are some specific teachings that make a false religion false?”**

**TRANSITION:** In the next verses, we see that not only will a false religion have nothing to do with the fellowship of the church, but it will also deny Jesus is the Christ.

**ALTERNATE QUESTION:**

***Why is fellowship so important for a Christian?***

## 1 John 2:18-20 Commentary

**[Verse 18]** Writing most likely from Ephesus toward the end of the first century, the apostle John was concerned about a group of false teachers who were disrupting churches, probably in Asia Minor. These false teachings were apparently causing concerns for many who had come to know Christ. Writing like a spiritual father, John addressed his readers as his **children**. John emphasized this was the **last hour**, referring to the unspecified amount of time between the first coming of Jesus and His return. In referencing the *last hour*, John was not emphasizing the length of time, but rather the characteristics of this period of time, by which believers would know it was in fact the *last hour*.

A distinctive of this time period is the presence of **antichrists**. The apostle may have previously warned his audience of the coming of the end-times figure known as the **antichrist**. The word can be either singular or plural and is used of a specific person or of a group of people. It is likely synonymous with the false messiahs and false prophets Jesus warned against (see Matt. 24:24), as well as the “man of lawlessness” Paul warned about. (See 2 Thess. 2:3.) While the word *antichrist* suggests one who is against or opposed to Christ, John may have used the word in this case to point out those who were working to replace the true Christ.

**[Verse 19]** John’s use of **they** refers to the false teachers who had once been involved in the church or churches to whom John was writing. In leaving the churches, these false teachers had shown that they were not true believers in Jesus Christ.

John used the terms **they** and **us** multiple times to contrast those who departed the faith (false teachers) with those who remained in it (true believers). True believers are those who continue in their faith and remain in the community of believers. This truth is also known as the perseverance of the saints. It is not so much about the believer’s efforts to remain in the faith (although the believer must be active in his or her faith; see Jas. 2:20-26), but rather is an emphasis on God’s work of protecting true believers and bringing to completion the “good work” He began in them (Phil. 1:6).

**[Verse 20]** John first noted his readers had an anointing from **the Holy One**, most likely referring to Jesus Christ. The Greek word for **anointed** (*chrisma*) is used in only two verses in the New Testament (once here and twice in 1 John 2:27, “anointing”). Many commentators think John’s use of the word *chrisma* refers to guidance from the Holy Spirit, who comes to dwell in every believer at the moment of salvation. (See Rom. 8.) One difficulty with equating this anointing with the Spirit’s guidance is the subjective nature of what people claim the Spirit says to them. In the first century there were many who said they had heard from God but proclaimed and practiced unscriptural ideas.

While some commentators think the anointing refers to the Word of God, which is objective truth, the reference doesn’t seem to fit this context. Perhaps the best understanding is to see it as the Holy Spirit working in conjunction with Scripture, with God’s Spirit always teaching believers based on the truth of God’s Word and never contrary to it.<sup>8</sup> John emphasized that the believers had **knowledge**.



## 1 John 2:21-25 Commentary

[Verse 21] John told his audience he was writing to them because they knew the **truth**, the truth being that Jesus is the Christ. John was confident that the believers, because of the anointing they had received, knew this truth and recognized **no lie is of the truth**.

Those who believe in Jesus (who is “the truth,” John 14:6) and have received the “Spirit of truth” (v. 17) will be guided by the Spirit “into all the truth” (16:13). Because they possessed the Holy Spirit, these believers in Christ had no need for the supposed special revelation of the false teachers.

[Verses 22-23] The greatest lie the false teachers promoted was their denial that Jesus is the Christ. The false teachers denied Jesus’ humanity. Anyone who promoted such false teachings was not only a **liar** but also an **antichrist**. “Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God” (1 John 4:2), while those who deny the truth of Jesus’ incarnation are not from God, speaking instead by “the spirit of the antichrist” (v. 3).

The criteria for holding to the truth was and still is an acknowledgment that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully human. John emphasized that anyone who confesses the Son has the Father as well. Anyone who **denies** the truth about the Son of God likewise denies His Father. A person can’t know one without knowing the other, since the Son and the Father “are one” (John 10:30).

[Verse 24] The best defense against error is a thorough knowledge and practice of the truth. John knew what his readers had **heard from the beginning**, which probably refers to the gospel message as originally preached and taught by John and the other apostles of Jesus. John challenged the believers to stick with the original message they had received and allow it to **abide** in them. The Greek word for **abide** means to dwell, stay, or remain.

A believer’s fellowship with God is directly related to his or her fellowship with God’s Word. If the believers maintain an ongoing communion with God’s Word, then they will remain in both the Father and the Son; that is, they would experience ongoing communion with them. “In addition, there is a connection between the abiding of the message in them and the abiding of the anointing. (See 1 John 2:20.) Both are continuous following their reception by the believer. The two work together as the Christian stays in communion with both the Father and the Son.”<sup>9</sup>

[Verse 25] God’s promise is that everyone who believes in Jesus has eternal life. (See John 3:15-16.) To recognize who Jesus is (the incarnate Son of God) and trust in what He has done (paid the penalty for sins that we owed) goes beyond mere head knowledge—it points to a personal experience with Jesus. Eternal life has both a future aspect (eternal life with God after we die) as well as a present dimension (throughout our lives in this world), which is the ongoing communion John emphasized in 1 John 2:24.





# STUDY THE BIBLE

## NOTES

### 1 John 2:26-29

***<sup>26</sup> I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. <sup>27</sup> But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him. <sup>28</sup> And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. <sup>29</sup> If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.***

**ALTERNATE QUESTION:**

***In what ways has Jesus affirmed His identity to you through the years?***

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud 1 John 2:26-29 on page 123 of the PSG.

**DISCUSS: Question #4** on page 122 of the PSG: **“What disciplines have helped you remain in Jesus?”**

**RECAP:** Some people approach the Bible like the person who just dips a tea bag into hot water over and over. We must remain in His Word and in His Spirit. As false teachings arise, we can rely on the Spirit of God to show us what is right and to help us overcome so that we may help others do likewise. **DISCUSS: Question #5** on page 123 of the PSG: **“How does knowing Jesus is coming back encourage yet challenge you in your walk with Christ?”**

**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance,** plan a “field trip” to a nearby religious gathering place that represents a cult or other religion. Ask the leader (or his or her representative) to give an overview of their beliefs and allow that individual to ask questions of the group, as well as fielding questions from the group. Be sure to show respect even when opposing views are presented. Invite group members to a nearby restaurant or teahouse where you can debrief the experience. Be sure to reinforce the truth of the gospel.

**GUIDE:** Refer back to **“The Point”** for this session: **“Truth is grounded in the reality of who Jesus Christ is.”**



## 1 John 2:26-29 Commentary

[Verse 26] The best way to recognize and avoid being led astray by false teachings is to remain in Christ, staying engaged with His Word, and relying on His Holy Spirit. John emphasized these truths (**these things**) because he knew false teachers were trying to **deceive** his spiritual children.

[Verse 27] John again mentioned **the anointing** his readers had received, which (as noted in the commentary on v. 20) most likely refers to the Holy Spirit working in conjunction with the Holy Scripture God provides to teach believers the truth and guide them in obeying that truth. John was certain this anointing remained in his readers and that God's anointing **teaches** them about **everything**. As the "Spirit of truth" (John 14:17), one of the Holy Spirit's roles is to "guide" believers "into all the truth" (16:13). Because the Holy Spirit teaches believers truth, they have no need for and are to reject any additional revelation in regards to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The anointing teaches believers that they are to **abide in him** (Jesus). "To abide or dwell in Jesus is only possible when there is an intimate relationship with the Father through the Son (see 1 John 2:22-24), a reality possible only for those who have a proper understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ, whose ethics are shaped by that understanding (cf. John 8:31), and who have received the anointing that is an assurance of their remaining in the truth."<sup>10</sup>

[Verse 28] Again addressing his readers fondly as **little children**, John repeated that believers must **abide in** Jesus. One day Jesus is coming again to gather His followers to Himself. (See Matt. 24:31.) The assurance and the shame mentioned in this verse could relate to the "day of judgment" (1 John 4:17) in which believers' works will be reviewed to determine their rewards. (See 1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:9-10.) This should be motivation and encouragement for us to maintain a constant, growing communion with Him, knowing and following His Word, so we will have **confidence** and not be ashamed when Christ returns.

[Verse 29] In writing **if you know**, John was not casting doubt on his readers' faith. Instead, he was encouraging self-examination: Did they know that He is **righteous**? The Greek word John used for **know** (*oida*) emphasizes certainty—knowing something intuitively and without a doubt—that certainty comes from the Holy Spirit. While the pronouns in this verse could refer either to Jesus or to the Father, there is really no difference in meaning since the Father and the Son are one. Both are equally righteous—they always do what is right and just.

If we are certain of God's righteousness then we will know that everyone who does what is right has been born of Him. The Greek term for **may be sure** (*ginosko*) points to knowledge gained from personal experience. Since we know God is the standard for righteousness, we will know that His children (who have the same nature) will seek to be like Him, doing what is right. Those **born of him** will behave like Him—righteously. John's words were a reminder that belief impacts behavior and behavior gives evidence of belief.



5 minutes

# LIVE IT OUT

**GUIDE:** Direct group members to page 124 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the following applications:



Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

- ▶ **Pray.** Ask the Lord to reveal to you any lies you may have believed. Ask that His Spirit would make it clear when the enemy tries to get you to believe things that aren't true.
- ▶ **Study together.** Immerse yourself in the study of God's Word. Surround yourself with other Christians in group Bible study. Encourage one another as you grow deeper in your knowledge of the truth.
- ▶ **Research.** If a certain cult or religion is prominent in your area, do some research and learn where they differ from the truth of the gospel. A good place to start for information is at [4truth.net](http://4truth.net).

## Wrap It Up

**TRANSITION:** Read or restate the final paragraph from page 124 of the PSG:

There are many ways to be led astray these days. There really always have been. But the Truth remains the same—and His name is Jesus.

**PRAY:** Conclude by praising God for being the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Thank Him for helping us to see the truth and act on it. Ask Him for wisdom to know how to share His truth with others.



Free additional ideas for your group are available at [BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra](http://BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra)