

“Truth with a Capital ‘T’” (1 John 2:18-27)

[Hand on the Bible] “I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God.” There is no higher object to swear by than by God Himself or His Word. Therefore, in a court of law a Bible would be held up, and the individual testifying would place their hand upon the Word and promise to speak the truth.

As important as testifying truthfully in a court of law is, testifying accurately about Jesus Christ and His Word is even more critical. However, today many people are suppressing the truth and lying about Jesus Christ and His Word. As a result, they have no firm foundation and are on very dangerous footing. The great English writer, G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936), once said, “When people abandon the truth, they don’t believe in nothing, they believe in *anything*.” This is particularly true in the spiritual realm. When we see what is happening in today’s world, we know Chesterton is absolutely right. He hits the nail on the head. One of the real dangers facing the church in our day is not unbelief, but wrong belief. It is not irreligion, but heresy. It is not the doubter, but the deceiver.¹ Therefore, we must be armed with truth to counteract the deceptive world views that are being propagated today.

In our series through 1 John, we have learned to value the importance of experiencing fellowship with God and man. In our last section, John encouraged us with our position in Christ (2:12-14) and warned us against the devil’s enticements to worldliness (2:15-17). Now, John continues his warning by alerting us to the deception that characterizes the present age. In 1 John 2:18-27, John will say, “*When we know what’s true we can discern what’s false.*”

1. Expect the expected (2:18-19). In 2:18 John writes, “**Children,² it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour.**” John must have loved to scare people. If he was here today, he would probably turn the lights off in our church, light a candle, and whisper in a frightening voice, “Children, it is the last hour and antichrists are here” (complete with a sinister laugh). “The last hour”³ does not refer to a 60 minute period. Rather, it refers to the period that Jesus entered our world and extends all the way to His second coming at the end of the age.⁴ So “the last hour” has been in effect for over 2,000 years. But this should not cause us to become “soft” and complacent. Instead, we should recognize that the end may break upon us, so we must be ready at all times.

John informs us that we can know we are in the last hour because many antichrists have sprung up.⁵ This also reminds us that the antichrist (capital “A”) is not far away. Now the term antichrist simply means “against Christ” and describes anyone who opposes Jesus Christ and what He stands for.⁶ The Antichrist will be a demon-possessed, world ruler who will exalt himself against God and claim to be God (Dan 11:36-45; 2 Thess 2:3-5). This person will embody, all in one person, every hostility toward Christ that’s ever been expressed in all of the world’s history.⁷ Throughout history, there’ve been many people who’ve been precursors to this final antichrist figure who’s yet to come: the Roman Emperor Nero, Joseph Stalin, Adolf Hitler, in our own time, Saddam Hussein...yet none of these people proved to be the final, coming antichrist. Now this is not an invitation for us to speculate on who this coming figure might be, because the “last hour” could last another 1,000 years if God wants it to. Throughout 2,000 years of church history, Christians have found it difficult to resist the temptation to speculate on who this antichrist is.⁸ Some time ago, I ran across a claim that Barney was the antichrist. It was suggested that if you took the words “Dancing Purple Dinosaur” and added up the numerical value of the numbers, it added up to 666. I think the claim was a joke, but knowing some Christians, maybe not. All John is saying here is that the appearance of men and women who oppose Jesus Christ is a precursor of the coming antichrist, that’s all.

In 2:19, John writes that these antichrists **“went out from us [the apostolic circle, cf. 1:1-5; 4:6],⁹ but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained¹⁰ with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.”** These false teachers had gone out from among the apostles, not that they were apostles themselves, claiming that their message was what the apostles endorsed (cf. Acts 15:1; 2 Cor 11:5). However, apparently they never believed in Christ as their Savior (cf. Gal 2:4, “false brethren secretly brought in”). Or, it is possible that these false teachers were genuine believers, with an uninformed faith in Jesus.¹¹ When John writes that these false teachers were “not really of us,” he could be saying they did not have apostolic fellowship.

Regardless, there will be many from within the church who will fail to persevere. It is important to recognize that Christian perseverance is normal but not inevitable. There are many Christians in the Bible who failed to persevere. Jesus and the biblical writers predict that there will be many more in the future that will fall away from the faith. Fortunately, our salvation is not based upon our perseverance; it is based upon God’s preservation. But don’t let that keep you from persevering. The rewards are great for the one that perseveres. Sadly, the loss is also great to the one who fails to persevere!

The antichrists that left the apostolic circle and invaded the church are against Christ when they refuse to submit to the apostles and the church. The church is called “the body of Christ” and “the bride of Christ,” therefore it is crucial that we not mess with this entity.¹² Whether a false teacher is a Christian or not, the end result is brutal: divine discipline for the believer; eternal punishment for the unbeliever.

When I was pastoring in Corvallis, OR, the *Jesus Seminar* took hold of Oregon State University. The leader of this movement was an OSU religion teacher. While I was living in Corvallis, I watched an interview with this man in which he claimed to have been an evangelical. He explained that he grew up in a Christian church and believed the Bible as the literal Word of God. But then he went off to a liberal seminary and discovered that the Bible was full of errors—one of them being that Jesus was not the literal and resurrected Son of God.

Now, I do not claim to know for certain where this man will spend eternity. If I had to guess, I would suggest that he never understood or believed the simple gospel message and is therefore eternally lost. If perchance he did indeed trust in Christ, then I would expect God to chasten him severely in this life and in the next. My job is not to determine the eternal destiny of false teachers; my job is to keep us from falling prey to them. We must expect false teachers to raise up. We also need to be aware of their teachings and counteract them. We then need to expound cardinal truth: Jesus is the Christ!

But before we move on, we must understand this: The greatest threat to the church today is not from the secular world; it is from *within the church!* (2 Cor 11:13-15; 2 Tim 4:2-4) While many of us have been concerned about political parties and liberal media, our primary concern should be with the church. Where do cults come from? The church! Where do cults get their followers? The church!

False teachers like Jim Jones and Joseph Smith left Christian fellowships in order to establish cults. What makes men like this so dangerous is they have knowledge of the feelings of Christians; they know the lingo and can play on our emotions. So they are among the most dangerous. They will say, “I used to feel the way you do and have the same beliefs you do. I understand exactly how you feel in your infancy, but now I’ve moved on to something more profound. I’ve advanced; I’m now on the cutting edge.” Precisely because they can identify with some of the things that you and I care about, they are more able to deceive.

If you don’t believe that cults are effective at deceiving Christians just check the rolls of the Mormons and the Jehovah’s Witnesses. I myself know men and women who are genuine believers who have been deceived into adopting false teaching. No one is immune from this threat. That’s why the writers of Scripture attack it in 24 of the 27 New Testament books.

[If we are to reject false teaching, we must expect the expected. John also goes on to tell us to...]

2. Keep the faith (2:20-23). John warned his readers of the danger to their intimate fellowship with God that the teaching of those who denied that Jesus is the Christ posed. If they rejected the Son, they could not expect an intimate relationship with the Father. In 2:20 John writes, **“But you¹³ have an anointing¹⁴ from the Holy One, and you all know.”**¹⁵ In contrast to the antichrists (2:19), faithful believers were “keeping the faith.” John even says that they have an “anointing.” If I had a dollar for every time I have heard this word used, I would be a rich man. If you turn on Christian television you will hear that so and so has “an anointing” or is “anointed.” The term has been abused.

I have a confession to share with you. I have always had a bit of an addiction to Christian TV. Unfortunately, I don’t watch it for any real spiritual benefit. Rather, I am fascinated by the entertainment. It’s like watching an episode of *The Gong Show*. Lori gets very angry every time I watch it because we believe that much of the preaching is heretical. Well, if you watch TBN or Daystar for any length of time, you will see an “anointed” preacher carrying a handheld mic, using a hanky to wipe his brow, running around whacking people on the forehead. This is how the “anointing” is distributed. Now it’s unlikely that I will ever use a sweat cloth or handheld mic, but I’ll be glad to whack you on the forehead if you’d like. ☺ Every time I watch “Christian” television, Lori wants to whack me upside the head. She doesn’t want our children hearing false teaching and she believes that much of it is blasphemous. I tend to agree.

Anyway, the word for anointing (*chrisma*) is used only here in the New Testament. It speaks of a special enablement which comes from the Holy Spirit to discern spiritual truth from error (John 14:26; 16:13).¹⁶ The moment a person believes in Christ he or she is given this “anointing.”¹⁷ This is why John can say, “you all know.”¹⁸ Contextually, John is saying that believers know everything they need to know to counteract false teachers.¹⁹ The reason being: we have a built-in Bible teacher—an “anointing.”

John continues his argument in 2:21: **“I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth.”** John has great confidence in his readers. He tells them that they “know” the truth. The word for “knowledge” (*oida*) here almost always refers to “direct insight” into spiritual or divine truth, although this truth may not yet have been experienced.²⁰ This truth is the result of the teaching and convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit. John’s entire point is: you cannot discern error unless you first know the truth.

In 2:22-23 John writes, **“Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.”** It is important to note that John does not say that such a person is “a liar.” He calls such a person “*the* liar.” He does this because to misunderstand the identity of Jesus is the arch lie!²¹ The antichrists lie because they deny that Jesus is the Christ, God’s Son, and our Savior (cf. John 11:25-27). This would have been the position of Jews who rejected Jesus as the Messiah and other false teachers to whom John alluded elsewhere.²² These false teachers all claimed to have the truth from God.²³ However, John pointed out that since the Son and the Father are one, a person cannot deny the Son without denying the Father as well (cf. Matt 10:32-33; Mark 8:38; John 12:44-45; 14:10-11).²⁴

Let me be very clear: A person cannot worship God while denying Jesus’ full deity and full humanity. There is no relationship with God that bypasses Christ. If you don’t have the Son, forget the Father. The true God is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. If you don’t have Jesus you don’t have the Father, no matter how committed you are to God.²⁵ The truth about Christ is the test of all religions.²⁶ We cannot get to God unless we go through Jesus. Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6). Everything in your Christian life must be measured by your fellowship with Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is a nonnegotiable.

Of course, in today's day and age many people will say I am preaching Christian hate, not love. They will argue, "We need tolerance and love." Wait a minute. I believe we should love all unbelievers. But I also believe in loving God's children. And I love my physical children. If I say to them, "Stay away from drug dealers," does that mean I hate drug dealers? No. It means I love my children. Drug dealers can destroy their lives. And peddlers of false doctrine can destroy Christian lives.

This means that there comes a time when we must sacrifice unity for the sake of the truth. Sometimes right belief is more important than cohesion and oneness. Unity is not the ultimate virtue in the Christian faith. John here is a coconspirator in the splitting of his church because he has stood firm in the truth. Certainly he mourned for these people, but he did not regret his decision.²⁷ Likewise, we must stand strong when it comes to cardinal truths about Jesus.

[If we are to reject false teaching, we must expect the expected and keep the faith. Lastly, we must...]

3. Learn the Word (2:24-27). In 2:24-25 John writes, "As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning [i.e., the teaching of the apostles, especially their teaching on the core issue of the gospel]. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. This is the promise²⁸ which He Himself [Jesus Christ] made to us: eternal life." Three times in 2:24 John mentions the term "abide." John now calls his readers to abide in the true doctrine of Jesus Christ to enable them to abide in fellowship with God. Such faithfulness enables us to continue to abide in fellowship with God. Again, abiding refers to remaining or continuing in intimate fellowship with God.

A great analogy is marriage. If you are married, everything that you needed in marriage you were given at the wedding ceremony. You promised that you would share the rest of your life with your spouse, for better or worse, till death do you part. The initial commitment was all that was required. Then you were called to remain or to continue in these vows. Our problem in marriage is that we stop abiding. We stop dwelling in intimacy with each other. We stop honoring our vows—in sickness and in health. In the same way, abiding in Christ requires perseverance and commitment.

In 2:25, John speaks of the "eternal life," which results from an abiding relationship with Jesus. Eternal life is not speaking of deliverance from hell; rather, it refers to the very life of God, experienced on earth (cf. 1 Tim 6:12). Eternal life is not restricted to the there and then; it is something we can enjoy in the here and now. It happens on day one, when the Holy Spirit comes to live within us.

In 2:26-27, John concludes his attack on false teachers with a warning and a word of encouragement for his readers.²⁹ In 2:26 he writes, "**These things [2:18-25]³⁰ I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.**" John acknowledges that it is possible for believers to be deceived by false teaching. If it were not possible, John and the other biblical writers would not have spent so much time warning us. John does not want us to be led astray. He wants us to walk in truth. There are several ways that we can accomplish this:

1. **Recognize God's sovereignty in divisions.** While divisions within Christendom create obvious problems, God causes some good to come out of them by using these divisions to clarify doctrinal differences and deviations from the truth.
2. **Prioritize the top three most compromised beliefs:** (1) The gospel; (2) the authority of Scripture; and (3) the doctrine of sin. The devil's primary work is to attack God's Word; and these are the doctrines that the cults and world religions focus upon. This is how you can judge the validity of other world views.

3. ***Build a strong eschatological base.*** Eschatology simply means “the study of last things.” This is why I taught through the book of Revelation so early in my tenure. So much false teaching centers on Eschatology. If we don’t have a biblical understanding of the future we may fall prey to false teaching.
4. ***Balance the extremes in Pneumatology*** (i.e., the study of the Holy Spirit). Some Christians are charismatic; some are not. However, we must all be balanced. The role of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Jesus, not to attract attention to Himself.
5. ***Share fellowship with the right individuals.*** Many of us hang out with people who claim to be Christians who are terrible influences on our lives. We must seek to learn the Word so that we can hold our own with anyone at anytime.

In 2:27, John closes this passage with these parting words: **“As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.”** In this one verse, John uses the word “you” eight times. This is very unusual. John is making his point with great emphasis! He wants his readers to understand that they possess the Holy Spirit, and He is more than able to help them keep the course in the midst of false teaching. Again, the “anointing” is the discernment of the Holy Spirit (cf. 2:20). The readers had within them the Holy Spirit, whose ministry it is to guide believers into all truth and to teach them what God has revealed. Consequently, they were not dependent upon other human teachers, especially the false teachers.

From this verse, some Christians have concluded that we should not listen to any human teacher. That is not what John said. He wanted his readers to remember that the Holy Spirit was *the* teacher, the ultimate source of illumination. He did not rule out secondary teachers through whom the Holy Spirit works in teaching. If that had been his view, he would not have written this epistle in which he taught his readers. His point was that we should not look to other human beings as the ultimate source of our learning, an attitude the false teachers were encouraging.³¹ Of course the Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to teach us (John 16:14-15). John was not saying we can discard our Bibles. Since immature believers need human teachers (Heb 5:12), though they are not completely dependent on them, John’s readers appear to have been mature in the faith.³² God has given human teachers as a gift to His church (Eph 4:11; 1 Cor 12:28; cf. Rom 12:7). John’s point is that we do not need to look to human teachers as our *ultimate source* of learning.

But you may be saying, “I’m not sure I can understand the Scriptures. I don’t know Hebrew and Greek. I’ve never been to Bible college or seminary.” John wants us to ask the Holy Spirit to teach us. He wants each one of us to understand the Bible. He doesn’t want us to be dependent upon any one person. God wants us to understand the Scriptures even more than we want to understand them. It’s not about IQ. What you need is humility and a love for Jesus. This accomplishes more than any seminary degree or IQ. The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead will give you the power to interpret God’s Word. We can’t follow teachers; we must follow God’s Word. As much as I want you to benefit from my teaching, I don’t ever want you to be dependent upon my teaching. That would result in laziness. Instead, I want you to be dependent upon the Holy Spirit. So...

- Bring your Bible to church. Make sure your wife brings her Bible to church. Help your children bring their Bible to church. My goal is to help you “learn the Word.” I want you to check what I preach with the Word (Acts 17:11).
- Pray for divine guidance and wisdom when you study the Bible. Whenever I study or preach, I like to say, “I believe in the Holy Spirit.” This reminds me of the power source and the Person who lives within me.

The March, 2006, issue of *Reader's Digest* features a cover story on ten money scams to beware of. It seems that the Internet and other modern technologies have opened many doors of opportunity for con-artists who are after our money. To avoid being ripped off we must stay alert. It's traumatic when thieves steal our identity and our money, but there is something far more traumatic and tragic, namely, when spiritual con-artists deceive the unsuspecting. The stakes are much higher than someone's life savings.

If you are a Christian, don't be deceived or you will be disciplined by God and severely rebuked at the judgment seat of Christ. Furthermore, you will be held responsible for leading people astray. If you are an unbeliever, the eternal destiny of your soul is at risk! To avoid spiritual deception, we must develop biblical discernment and be vigilant at all times. *May we know what's true so that we can discern what's false.*"

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Scripture Reading

1 John 2:18-27

Matthew 7:1-5

Matthew 24:5, 24

John 14:26

Acts 20:30

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Titus 1:9

Study Questions

1. John warns us that “antichrists” are popping up all over the place (2:18-19). This reality could lead Christians to become paranoid. What is the difference (if any) between being discerning and being distrustful? Is it wrong to be distrustful of someone? Why or why not? How can I develop discernment without becoming skeptical of everyone and everything?
2. Do I know the Bible well enough to recognize false doctrine when I hear it? Read Romans 16:17 and 1 Timothy 4:16. Do I consistently test what I hear by the Bible? Read Acts 17:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:20-22; 1 John 4:1; and Revelation 2:2-3. What plan will I write up to ensure that I am more biblically literate and prepared to guard myself against false teachers?
3. Since there are so many views of different doctrines, how can I know that I am right? How can I hold to a biblically correct view without becoming arrogant? How do I determine which doctrines are core doctrines worth dividing over, and which are more peripheral (i.e., non-essential)? The Bible commands us not to judge others (Matthew 7:1). How does this square with “refuting those who contradict” (Titus 1:9)?
4. John and the biblical writers emphasize the importance of persevering in our faith. How important is perseverance to me? Do I reflect on my personal perseverance? Read Proverbs 24:10; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 1 Timothy 1:18-20; 2 Timothy 4:6-8; and James 1:12. Am I currently standing strong in my faith? Read 1 Corinthians 16:13; Ephesians 6:14; and 2 Thessalonians 2:15. What one area is keeping me from being wholly devoted to Christ? How can I develop greater “staying power?” Who can I call upon to help me in this pursuit?
5. John informs us that the Holy Spirit is our *ultimate* teacher (2:20, 27). Do I honestly believe that I am capable of understanding the Scriptures for myself (2:27; 1 Cor 2:6-16; 2 Cor 2:15-18; John 16:13)? Will I begin to strive to read God’s Word and study to show myself approved (2 Timothy 2:15; 3:17)? How will I go about this? Do I have a plan or a goal? Who will I share this with?

Notes

¹ Sam Gordon, *Living in the Light*: 1.2.3 John (Greenville, SC: Trans World Radio, 2001), 85.

² John probably used a different Greek word translated “children” (*paidia*, also in 2:12) because it implies a child who learns. His readers needed to learn what he now revealed.

³ Technically, the Greek phrase *eschate hora* (“last hour”) is without an article in front of it. It can reasonably be translated “the last hour,” but it can also reasonably be translated “a last hour,” and in this case the latter is better. John is referring to an era of time not a specific period of time.

⁴ The term “last hour” occurs only here in the NT. However, the biblical authors also use expressions like “last days” and “last times” to describe this same period (see Joel 2:28; Mic 4:1; Acts 2:17; 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 3:1; Heb 1:2; 2 Pet 3:3; Jude 17-18).

⁵ From other references to “antichrists” in this letter it is evident that when the writer uses this term he means the heterodox ex-members of his own community: those who, in one way or another, were denying the true identity of Jesus, and the fact of God’s saving activity mediated to the world through him. Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*: WBC (Waco: Word, 1984), 101.

⁶ The antichrists are those who oppose Jesus Christ and His teachings, not just people who profess to be the Messiah. John R. W. Stott, *The Epistles of John*: TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 104-105.

⁷ Jesus will destroy the Antichrist when He returns at the second coming (2 Thess 2:9, Rev. 19:20).

⁸ Just since 1945 the list of people that Christians have claimed were the antichrist includes Pope Pious XII, John F. Kennedy, Henry Kissinger, Anwar Sadat, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, Pat Robertson, King Juan Carlos of Spain, Rev. Sun Myung Moon, and Mikhail Gorbachev. See Richard Kyle, *The Last Days Are Here Again* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 131-32.

⁹ The term “us” (*humon*) probably does not refer to the Christian community at large. If these revisionists had left the churches, they would not have been a problem for John’s readers. The *physical* separation of these men from the apostles and the faithful eventually illustrated their *doctrinal* separation from them.

¹⁰ The verb *meno* (“remain/abide”) occurs 112 times in the NT (66 times by John, 23 times in this letter).

¹¹ Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 103. Cf. Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistles of John: Walking in the Light of God’s Love* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 109-110.

¹² In 1 Cor 3:17, Paul writes, “If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.”

¹³ In the Greek text, the word “you” (*humeis*) is emphatic.

¹⁴ The false teachers may have been using the word “anointing” as a technical term for being initiated into their special gnosis, or knowledge. Stott, *The Epistles of John* *The Epistles of John*, 107.

¹⁵ There is a play on words here in Greek. If the secessionists represent the antichrist (*antichristos*), now we learn that John’s Christians bear an anointing (*chrisma*) that can aid and protect them. *Antichristos* and *chrisma* originate from the same Greek verb, *chrio*, “to anoint.” Gary M. Burge, *The Letters of John: NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 128.

¹⁶ This seems preferable to the idea that the Word of God is the anointing. See C. H. Dodd, *The Johanne Epistles*: Moffatt New Testament Commentary series (New York: Harper and Row, 1946), 63. Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 155, proposed a similar view, namely, that the Word applied by the Spirit constitutes the anointing, which Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 106-7, followed.

¹⁷ See Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 12:13; cf. Luke 4:18; John 6:69; 14:17, 26; 15:26; 16:13; Acts 10:38; 2 Cor 1:21-22; cf. Luke 4:18; Acts 4:27; 10:38.

¹⁸ The NKJV and KJV render this “you know all things,” but this can be a bit confusing since only God knows all things.

¹⁹ Naturally, some Christians have more perception than others due to God-given ability, satanic blindness, the influence of human teachers, sin in the life, etc.

²⁰ This is the second use of *oida* (the first was in 2:11), a word that John now uses 14 more times in the rest of the letter. It does not refer to experiential knowledge as does *ginosko* (2:3-4, 12-14).

²¹ Michael Eaton, *1.2.3 John: Focus on the Bible* (Scotland: Christian Focus, 1996), 80.

²² Among these were the Gnostics who believed that anything material was sinful and therefore Jesus could not have been God’s Son. Docetists taught that Jesus was not truly a man and therefore not our Savior. Followers of Cerinthus believed that Jesus was not fully God but that God only came upon Him at His baptism and departed from Him before His crucifixion. Glenn W. Barker, “1 John,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981 [2001]), Electronic Ed.; Raymond Brown, *The Epistles of John*: Anchor Bible (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1982), 112.

²³ These false teachers were denying that Jesus is the Christ. This probably was more than a denial that Jesus was the Old Testament Messiah. The context here, which refers to Jesus as the Son of God and which closely links the Father and the Son, indicates that these false teachers denied the full deity of Jesus Christ. They denied the incarnation that God took on human flesh in the virgin birth of Jesus. They taught that “the Christ” came upon the human Jesus at His baptism and departed at His crucifixion. John says that they denied both the Father and the Son. The modern cults all go astray on the person and work of Jesus Christ. They deny His deity and His substitutionary death on the cross. They deny the trinity. Some of them speak in Gnostic fashion of “the Christ within us all.” By denying the Son of God, they do not have the Father. In the words of this apostle of love, they are liars, deceivers, and antichrists.

²⁴ Some readers have understood the first part of 1 John 2:23 to mean that it is impossible for a true Christian, one who “has the Father,” ever to deny the Son. This interpretation seems inconsistent with other Scripture (2 Tim 2:12) as well as human experience. Genuine Christians have denied Christ, to avoid martyrdom, for example. In the context John wrote about an abiding relationship with God, not just a saving relationship. So another explanation is that John meant that whoever denies the Son does not have the Father abiding in him. In this view, one who denies the Son does not have an abiding relationship with the Father. This describes all unbelievers and those believers who are not abiding in God. A third explanation is that John was describing what is typical: typically those having the Father do not deny the Son, though there may be a few exceptions. However the broad “whoever” in this verse seems to imply that what John wrote is true of all. I prefer view two. See also Dr. Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on 1 John* (<http://www.sonlight.com/constable/notes/pdf/1john.pdf>, 2006), 28.

²⁵ The second part of 1 John 2:23 is the positive corollary to the first part. Confessing the Son is the opposite of denying Him. Confessing the Son results in the Father abiding in the confessor. Confessing the Son involves a public profession of faith in Him, not just exercising saving faith in Him (cf. Rom 10:9-10; 2 Cor 4:13).

²⁶ Let’s apply this lie detector test on Islam. What does Islam say about Jesus Christ? Is He the Son of God or not?

WHO IS JESUS CHRIST?

ISLAM	CHRISTIANITY
Not the Son of God; just a man	The Son of God; equal to the Father
Did not exist in any form before earth	Has existed from eternity past
Did not die on the cross	Died in our place on the cross
Did not rise from the grave	Rose from the grave

What does this passage say about any religious system that denies that Jesus Christ is the Son of God? Two things: 1) It is a lie; 2) it is from the Antichrist. That’s another way of saying it is from the devil.

²⁷ Burge, *The Letters of John*, 141.

²⁸ This is the only time John used the word “promise” (*epangelia*) in all his writings.

²⁹ Barker, “1 John,” Electronic Ed.

³⁰ The phrase “these things” (*tauta egrapsa*) refers to what John has just written in 2:18-25. This phrase is used throughout the book to refer to the immediately preceding context (cf. 1:4; 2:1; 5:13).

³¹ The false teachers appear to have claimed that God had inspired them, but He had not. John was warning his readers about false teachers who claimed revelation beyond what Jesus Christ and the apostles had taught. We need simply to abide in God and to respond to the Holy Spirit’s ministry to us (cf. John 15:4-7). John’s original readers were doing well in their walk with God. John began this section of his epistle (2:12-27) by affirming their healthful spiritual condition (2:12-14). He then warned them of their spiritual adversaries (2:15-27): the allurements of the world (2:15-17) and the enticements of false teachers (2:18-27).

³² There is a parallel between what John urged his readers to do in this section of his epistle and what Moses commanded the Israelites to do. In both cases the holiness of God demanded that those who came into the closest and most intimate contact with God, in the Tabernacle and in the church, be holy. Moses advocated renouncing sin, obeying God, rejecting worldliness, and keeping the faith in the “Covenant Code” (Exodus 20-23; 25-31), the “Priestly Code” (Exodus 35-Leviticus 16), and the “Holiness Code” (Lev 17:10-25:55). John similarly urged his readers to renounce sin (1:8-2:2), to obey God (2:3-11), to reject worldliness (2:12-17), and to keep the faith (2:18-27). In both cases the prophet’s concern was that those believers under their care would be holy as God is holy (Lev 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7; 1 Pet 1:15-16). Holiness is imperative for God’s people to “know,” “see,” and “have fellowship with” a holy God (cf. Heb 12:10-14). Constable, *Notes on 1 John*, 29-30.