

Acknowledging the Son

1 John 2:18-23

Introduction

One of the glories of Scripture is that it is so rich, and this passage is no different. Each verse, even many individual phrases, could easily have its own sermon. So, as we go through this passage, there are some things that we will not address in depth. But I do hope that we will get to the heart of what John writes here. We could phrase it as a question: do you know who Jesus Christ is?

Overview of the Text

John has finished warning Christians to not love the world because it is passing away (2:15-17). He segues right into some comments about “the last hour.” He reminds them as his children in the faith that it is the last hour, which they know because of the presence of antichrists (v. 18). These people had been a part of the church or had been sent by the apostles (“from us”), but they were not truly followers of Jesus (“of us”). Their departure from the church was in fact a blessing because it showed their true colors (v. 19). Unlike the “anti-anointed-ones”, those who are in Christ have received an anointing of the Spirit. By this anointing, they know the things which are spiritually discerned, i.e., to know Christ (v. 20; cf. 3:24, John 14:26, 1 Cor. 2:10-16, 2 Cor. 1:21-22). John doesn’t write this letter to them to teach them new things, but to remind them of the truth that they have received in the preaching of the gospel from the apostles (v. 21; cf. 1:1-4, Gal. 1:6-9). Lies don’t fit with the truth. They know the truth about Jesus and must resist the lies of the antichrists who deny that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, God incarnate (v. 22-23; cf. 4:3, 2 John 7).

The Last Hour and Antichrist

In the church broadly today, and especially in America, when we see the words “last hour” or “last days” in Scripture, we are inclined to think that the text is speaking about the final judgment. But, if we remember what Jesus prophesies in Matt. 24—a great judgment coming upon unbelieving Israel before the passing away of the generation to whom He spoke—these phrases indicate the end of the Old Covenant administration. In John’s day, this judgment is imminent. And, just as Jesus had said, there were false christs and false prophets seeking to deceive the church (Matt. 24:5, 11, 24).

According to John, someone is labeled “antichrist” because of what they say. John is not concerned with identifying a particular individual as *the* antichrist. The spirit of antichrist is those teachings that deny certain things about the person of Jesus Christ. John is keen to defend the gospel against such false teaching. The spirit of antichrist denies that Jesus is the Christ, in other words, a denial that Jesus is the Son of God in the flesh (cf. 4:2-3). It is a denial of the incarnation of the Son and of the divinity of Jesus, a rejection of what we call the two natures (*hypostatic union*) of Christ.

Theology Matters

We have in this passage a striking example about the difference between primary and secondary doctrine, and how sometimes we miss the most important things. Again, John does not seem very interested to identify who *the* antichrist is. How many of us, when reading this passage, immediately begin trying to answer that question or thinking about

various opinions on that subject? Not that such questions are unimportant or such studies are fruitless, but we quickly get distracted from the point which John makes and which is of the utmost importance. The gospel itself is at stake.

John says that to deny Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ, is to deny the Father and the Son. John had heard the Father say of Jesus, "This is My beloved Son." So, to say that this Jesus is not the Messiah promised by God, not God incarnate, is a rejection not only of the Son, but also of the Father. "No one comes to the Father except through Me." "I and My Father are one." If Jesus was merely a man, if His work on the cross was done only as a man, then we have no hope, for only the Son of God could bear the sins of the world.

John also will emphasize the other lie of antichrist: denying that Jesus Christ came in the flesh (4:3, 2 John 7). This is more particularly a denial that the Messiah would be human. If the Son of God did not take on flesh and carry the sins of the world through the crucifixion, then He cannot be the propitiation for our sins, for He does not represent us. The Messiah had to be man, and He had to be God.

John wants his audience (and us by extension) to have the joy of our salvation, the fellowship of the Triune God. God has revealed the means of having this fellowship, and it is only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, God Incarnate. If your faith is in any other person, in any other Jesus, then you deny God, and even though you may be from us, John would say, you are not of us. Jesus, as He is revealed in Scripture, is the only way to be reconciled with and enjoy the fellowship of God.

Conclusion

John wrote these things to thwart those trying to deceive the faithful (2:26). They were confronted with the need to understand rightly who Jesus is and the work that He accomplished. So what would John have them do? John wants them to listen to and remember the testimony of the apostles (cf. 1:1-4). He wants them to hear his own apostolic testimony in this letter. When confronted with some suggested doctrine, we must always return to, "What does the Bible say?" Theology matters, but not because our faith is merely a series of intellectual syllogisms. We are not saved by our theology. Yet, theology matters because, in John's words, "he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also." Theology matters in that we must submit ourselves to what Scripture says. You are saved by grace through faith alone, but it matters Who you put your faith in. If your hope for your salvation is not in Jesus Christ as He is revealed in His Word, then it is no hope at all.

So, here is one application to consider: do you know the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you know Him as He has revealed Himself in His Word? If there is any room for you to grow in that knowledge of Him, then pick up the Word and read. He is revealed there, and he who acknowledges the Son has the Father, has reconciliation with God, has salvation.