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Believers False and True

1 John 2.18-23

Series: Blessed Assurance (Communion Series)

The Village Church

September 1, 2024

I. The Parasite Problem

- A. Human beings have parasites
 - 1. Sometimes, those parasites can be especially destructive
- B. A parasite is an organism which lives on or inside another organism
 - 1. And feeds on that organism, gaining its nutrients in the process
 - a. At the expense of the host
- C. Some parasites are especially destructive
 - 1. We think of organisms like tapeworms which can cause everything from digestive discomfort, to more serious damage to muscles, the nervous system, the eye and even the brain
- D. Other parasites are less severe
 - 1. Like the fungus that causes discoloration and thickening in toenails
 - a. Which is mostly a cosmetic issue
- E. Still other parasites seem to have little observable effect
 - 1. And destructive effects diminish the overall flourishing of the host
 - a. And that over a long period of time
- F. The church has its parasite problem, too
 - 1. Foreign agents that reside within the church
 - a. Profiting by their association with the church
 - b. Feeding on its spiritual nutrients
 - 2. And yet, not actually being genuine church constituents
- G. Sometimes church parasites can be especially destructive
 - 1. Like when moral failure or abuse destroys lives and relationships
 - a. Ruining trust
 - b. And resulting in disastrous consequences for the local body
- H. Sometimes, however, it's difficult to tell the parasite from the normal, functioning church member
 - 1. It's only when they leave that you discover that they are not actually spiritual brothers or sisters
 - 2. That seems to be the case in our text this morning
- I. We're in 1 John for our communion series
 - 1. And the series is entitled **Blessed Assurance**
 - 2. Blessed assurance – the purpose of 1 John is give assurance of salvation to true believers within the church
 - 3. **1 John 5:13** (ESV) —

- a. 13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.
- J. Text
- 1. **1 John 2:18–23** (ESV) —
 - a. 18 Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come.
 - b. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.
 - c. 19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us.
 - d. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.
 - e. 20 But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge.
 - f. 21 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.
 - g. 22 Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?
 - h. This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.
 - i. 23 No one who denies the Son has the Father.
 - j. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.
 - 2. “They went out from us, but they were not of us;
 - a. For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us.
 - b. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.”
 - 3. These are those who were within the church
 - a. Who, by all indications, were fully functioning church members
 - b. But who left the church
 - c. And upon leaving, it became clear that they were never really part of the body of Christ
 - d. Parasites – alien organisms, feeding off the spiritual nutrients of the true body of Christ

II. **Tests of Assurance**

- A. In our study of 1 John we have seen how John seeks to establish assurance in believers
 - 1. The last thing John wanted to do was to give us a false sense of assurance
 - a. Simply telling them what they wanted to hear
 - b. Giving us a spiritual bromide – warm, fuzzy comments
 - c. Filling us full of comfort food when true spiritual nutrients are truly what the Great Physician has ordered
 - 2. We learned that there are four kinds of people in the world
 - a. Those who are genuine believers, and are assured of their salvation
 - b. Those who are unbelievers, and know they are not believers
 - c. These are those who have accurate appraisals of their true spiritual conditions
 - 3. But the other kinds of people include

- a. And those who are believers, but who are not sure they are saved
- b. Those who are unbelievers, but who believe they are saved
- 4. This latter category is the most dangerous
 - a. For they have a false sense of security; a false sense of assurance
 - b. And they can carry that misplaced confidence right into an eternity of separation from God and His grace
- 5. But John's desire – and the only healthy state – is for true believers to have a legitimate sense of assurance of salvation
 - a. "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life."
- B. Now the way John establishes such true, genuine assurance in believers is through a series of tests
 - 1. The first test is the test of righteousness
 - 2. **1 John 2:3–6** (ESV) —
 - a. 3 And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.
 - b. 4 Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him,
 - c. 5 but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected.
 - d. By this we may know that we are in him:
 - e. 6 whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.
 - 3. The second test is the test of love
 - 4. **1 John 2:9–11** (ESV) —
 - a. 9 Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness.
 - b. 10 Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling.
 - c. 11 But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.
- C. Neither of these tests are tests of perfection
 - 1. But they are tests in which there is evidence of genuine transformation
 - a. From selfishness and a mind set on the flesh (cf Romans!) to a wholehearted following after Christ and His righteousness
 - b. And from hatred (or disdain, or neglect, or arrogance, or whatever sets one above others) to genuine care for and affection for brothers and sisters and our neighbors
 - 2. In our text this morning we have a third test
 - a. And it is, as we shall see, a doctrinal test
 - b. Yes, that's right – right beliefs about doctrine is a critical feature of genuine assurance
 - c. And we will find out which doctrine, exactly, is critical to our assurance of salvation

- d. And which doctrinal error is an actual heresy, and disqualifying for inclusion in the body of Christ

III. Key Definitions

A. But first we encounter some terms that need to be identified and defined

B. Antichrist

1. The first is “antichrist”
2. 1 John 2:18 (ESV) —
 - a. 18 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.
3. 1 John 2:22 (ESV) —
 - a. 22 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.
4. The idea of the antichrist generates a great deal of speculation on the part of believers
 - a. And has always seemed to generate such speculation throughout church history
5. History of replete with examples of larger than life evil figures of great power
 - a. From emperors like Nero
 - b. To more recent wicked personages like Hitler or Stalin
 - c. To even some of our more contemporary political players as political opponents try to demonize those with whom they disagree
6. But it is interesting that the term “antichrist” is only found in scripture five times
 - a. And the only author who uses the term is John
 - b. We find it three times in our text this morning
 - c. And again in Chapter 4 and once in John’s second epistle
7. But when John uses the term, he seems to assume that his readers audience is very familiar with the concept
 - a. “... and as you have heard that antichrist is coming...”
8. It is likely that, while John alone uses the term “antichrist” he is echoing the broader concept relating to a being of superior political power and intellectual influence who, acting as a force of wickedness and evil in the world, opposes God and God’s law and God’s people
 - a. A concept that originated in the OT
 - b. In Daniel 7, for example, there is a vision of four great beasts in which a “little horn” destroys three other horns
 - c. Which seems to indicate, in the context of an apocalyptic vision like that, a powerful ruler who destroys other powerful rulers.
 - d. Historically, this seems to have been fulfilled in Antiochus Epiphanes, the Greek ruler who profaned the temple in 168 B.C.
9. However, Antiochus may have simply been the prototype
 - a. For Jesus prophesied a future figure

10. **Mark 13:22** (ESV) —
 - a. 22 For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect.
11. And Paul also warned of “the man of lawlessness
12. **2 Thessalonians 2:3–4** (ESV) —
 - a. 3 Let no one deceive you in any way.
 - b. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,
 - c. 4 who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.
13. The basic idea is that toward the end of the age, a powerful figure, with extraordinary oratorical abilities, political power, and even superior intelligence would wreak havoc on the people of God
14. That doesn’t mean, by the way, that this being would appear to be demonstrably evil
 - a. He may, in fact, present as an entirely attractive alternative to Jesus Christ
 - b. “Antichrist” could mean either “opposed to Christ” or a “substitute for Christ”
 - c. We know, for instance, that Satan presents as an angel of light
15. So the fundamental issue, on what basis do we identify this “antichrist”
16. But in fact, John is not so much interested in having the church identify “the antichrist”
 - a. He’s actually using the concept of the “antichrist” to help identify others
 - b. Others who are not *the* “antichrist”
 - c. But others who echo the basic character of the “antichrist”
17. **“... and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come.”**
 - a. In other words – there are others – presumably in the church – who possess the characteristics of the antichrist in some measure
18. So rather than conjecture about who “the antichrist” is
 - a. We would be better off learning what are the chief features of the beliefs and character of those in the church who function as, well, spiritual parasites

C. **The Last Hour**

1. The second key term that needs to be identified is the term “the last hour”
2. **1 John 2:18** (ESV) —
 - a. 18 Children, it is the last hour,
 - b. and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come.
 - c. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.
3. This brings up the issue of the end times

- a. Christians are always exclaiming, with all the dysfunction happening in the world today, we must be in the end times
- 4. True enough!
 - a. But truth be told, we have been in the end times, or the last hour, ever since the first coming of Christ!
- 5. John says, “It is the last hour”
 - a. And based on the presence and existence of many antichrists, he says “... we know that it is the last hour.”
- 6. This truth is echoed elsewhere in the NT
 - a. **Acts 2:17** (ESV) — 17 “ ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams...
 - b. Peter indicates that Pentecost, and the coming of the Holy Spirit on the church, is a prophetic fulfillment of the last days
 - c. **Hebrews 1:1–2** (ESV) — 1 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.
- 7. So the Bible says we’ve been in the last days, in the last hour – ever since the first coming of Christ
 - a. The presence of these “antichrists” in this age is not a new phenomenon
 - b. We have been in this age – these last days – for centuries!

IV. **The Great Contrast**

- A. John, then, lays out this test by establishing a great contrast
 - 1. And a contrast between people who, at least at one point, were in the church together
 - a. And the people he contrasts are easy to identify
 - b. They are either “they” or “you” and “us”
- B. **1 John 2:19–21** (ESV) —
 - 1. 19 **They** went out from **us**, but **they** were not of **us**;
 - 2. for if **they** had been of **us**, **they** would have continued with **us**.
 - 3. But **they** went out, that it might become plain that **they** all are not of **us**.
 - 4. 20 But **you** have been anointed by the Holy One,
 - 5. and **you** all have knowledge.
 - 6. 21 I write to **you**, not because **you** do not know the truth,
 - 7. but because **you** know it, and because no lie is of the truth.
- C. **They**
 - 1. “They” used to be in the church
 - 2. “They” did not continue in the church
 - 3. “They” went out from the church
 - 4. So, John concludes, “they” were never of the church, of “us”

5. And the fact that “they” left the church made it plain that “they” were not of the church
 6. “They” then never were truly of the church, of “us”
- D. **You**
1. “You” or “us” are those who are truly, spiritually, united to Jesus Christ
 - a. And as such, are genuine members of the body of Christ
 2. Here’s what it says about these genuine believers
 3. **“You” have been anointed by the Holy One**
 - a. The idea of being anointed by the Holy One is one that we have encountered in our study of Romans 8
 - b. It means that the Holy Spirit has anointed those who are genuine believers
 4. **Romans 8:9** (ESV) —
 - a. 9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you.
 - b. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.
 5. So “you” have the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ dwelling in “you” as a true, genuine believer
 - a. In fact, the presence of the Spirit of Christ in you is, as we saw last week, the definitive determination of who is a genuine believer
 6. The word “anointed” is related to the title given to Jesus
 - a. Jesus is the Christ
 - b. Christ is “the anointed one”
 7. “You have been anointed by the Holy One”
 - a. **Anointed = chrisma (Gk)**
 - b. You are designated as a little Christ
 - c. You, as we saw in Romans, are identified with Christ
 8. Second, “you” have knowledge
 9. **1 John 2:20–21** (ESV) —
 - a. 20 But you have been anointed by the Holy One,
 - b. and you all have knowledge.
 - c. 21 I write to you, not because you do not know the truth,
 - d. but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth.
 10. True believers know something
 - a. In fact, all true believers know something
 - b. We’ll see what that something is in a moment – the one doctrine that characterizes all true Christians
- E. Before we get there, there are two doctrines about the church that are in evidence in this passage
1. Two classic doctrines of the church
- F. First – **The Perseverance of the Saints**
1. True believers will persevere in the faith
 2. **1 John 2:19** (ESV) —
 - a. 19 They went out from us, but they were not of us;

- b. for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us.
 - c. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.
 - 3. So, continuing in the church, in faith is in fact true of genuine believers
 - a. Not to continue in the faith means that one was never, in fact, a genuine believer
 - 4. So believers persevere in the faith
 - 5. Now, it's not because believers conjure this perseverance up by themselves
 - a. It's not that we pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps and in an act of the human will make ourselves persevere
 - 6. **Philippians 1:6** (ESV) —
 - a. 6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.
 - 7. God started it – He will finish it!
 - a. But the good news is – you will continue in the faith
 - 8. **Philippians 2:12–13** (ESV) —
 - a. 12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence,
 - b. work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,
 - c. 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.
 - 9. God works in you – for you to will and to work for His good pleasure
 - a. So the true believer will continue in the faith, and in the church
 - b. Because God works in you to bring it to completion
 - c. That doesn't mean you do nothing
 - d. It just means that the Spirit of God who indwells you is at work transforming you into the image of Jesus Christ
 - e. That's why you persevere
 - 10. Perseverance of the saints can also be understood as the preservation of the saints
- G. The other doctrine is **the nature of the church**
 - 1. The visible church is made up of both true believers and false professors
 - a. “Professors” – not meaning university professors like I was once
 - b. “Professors” – meaning those who profess faith in Jesus
 - c. False professors – those who profess faith, but who are not genuine believers
 - 2. Remember Jesus' parable of the wheat and the weeds (**Matthew 13.24-30**)
 - 3. The kingdom of heaven was made up from a man who sowed good seed in the field
 - a. But the enemy came and sowed weeds while the man was asleep
 - b. The servants came and wanted to pull up the weeds
 - c. But Jesus forbade them from doing that
 - d. Lest in rooting up the weeds, they would also root out some of the wheat

- e. So He told them to let them both grow together, and at harvest time the wheat and the weeds would be separated
- 4. So the church is made up of true believers and also false believers

V. **The Doctrine We Must Get Right**

- A. So what is this doctrine that we must get right
 - 1. The doctrine that is the final test of true believers
 - a. That assures believers, along with the test of righteousness and the test of love, that we truly belong to Christ?
- B. **1 John 2:21–23** (ESV) —
 - 1. 21 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.
 - 2. 22 Who is the liar but **he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?**
 - 3. This is the antichrist, **he who denies the Father and the Son.**
 - 4. 23 No one who denies the Son has the Father.
 - 5. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.
- C. Every true believer believes that Jesus Christ is the incarnate Son of God
 - 1. To deny that Jesus Christ is the Son of the Father is the arch-heresy
 - a. The doctrine that disqualifies everyone who calls himself or herself a Christian
 - 2. You can say, “Lord, Lord, ... did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?”
 - a. And yet Jesus will declare, “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.” (**Matthew 7.21-23**)
- D. This heresy has shown up in many forms over the course of church history
 - 1. At the time John was writing his epistle, **gnosticism** was growing in influence
 - 2. And the type of gnosticism that was popular at the time asserted that the divine Christ appeared at the time of the man Jesus’ baptism and then left him before the crucifixion
 - a. So it denied that Jesus is the God-man, the incarnate Son of God
 - 3. Historically, this heresy has afflicted the church
 - a. Arianism denied the Jesus was divine
 - b. Marcionism taught that Jesus was a mere phantom
 - c. Others viewed Jesus as a mode of God, that God was sometimes a Father, sometimes a Spirit, and sometimes the man Jesus
 - d. Which, sadly, is a form of the heresy found in the book and movie *The Shack*
 - 4. Other modern forms of gnosticism are prevalent even today
 - a. Modern biblical criticism seeks to separate the humanity of Jesus with the “myth” of divinity
 - b. Other cults deny the biblical doctrine of Christ as the incarnate Son of God, and of the Triune nature of God
 - 5. But true believers do not deny that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Father

- a. In fact, true believers affirm that central truth
- b. And that to deny the Father and the Son is the spirit of the antichrist
- c. And those many antichrists that follow suit and deny that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Father, are the parasites in the church

VI. Conclusion

- A. There is hope, however, for even parasites
 - 1. For remember – you, believer, were once worse than a parasite
 - a. (Ephesians 2.1-3) You were dead in your trespasses and sins
 - b. In which you once walked, following the prince of the power of the air,
 - c. The spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience –
 - d. Among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh,
 - e. Carrying out the desires of the body and the mind,
 - f. And were by nature children of wrath,
 - g. Like the rest of mankind.
- B. What happened?
 - 1. (Ephesians 2.4-5) But God,
 - a. Being rich in mercy,
 - b. Because of the great love with which he loved us,
 - c. Even when we were [parasites] dead in our trespasses,
 - d. Made us alive together with Christ –
 - e. By grace you have been saved.
- C. Dear friends,
 - 1. Don't leave like those John refers to who left
 - 2. No! Stay!
 - a. And cast yourselves on the mercy of Jesus Christ
 - b. Jesus Christ – the incarnate Son of the Father
 - c. The God-man
 - 3. Jesus Christ – there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved
 - 4. Call on Him while He may be found!
 - a. For all who call on the Lord will be saved!
- D. And know, that when you receive the elements of our Savior's death
 - 1. You are genuinely trusting in the life, death and resurrection of the eternally begotten Son of the Father