

Sermon Notes

Series on First John

First John 2:18-28

“How To Spot A Phony”

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Introduction: John just concluded a section where he made a sharp comparison between God and *the world* and showed that believers are confronted with many dangerous foes (2:15-17). Now the Apostle John alerts his readers to spiritual counterfeiters as opposed to true Christians and implies that spiritual counterfeiters, including the spirit of *antichrist* and Satan himself are more treacherous than the *world* itself. While the book of First John concentrates mainly on how to spot Christians, this section focuses on how to spot phonies (John actually returns to such a comparison also in 4:1-6; 13-15 & 5:1-21). Up to now John has not been as direct in dealing with the false teachers but now he turns to a full frontal attack and calls them, *antichrists*. Just as those who possess the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9 & 1 Peter 1:9) are called Christians, those who espouse the spirit of *antichrist* are anti-Christians. John exposes the enemies of the gospel for who they are and encourages believers to understand the dangers that believers face. To some degree, the Apostle John has been leading up to this major warning as he has warned his readers about (1) the conflict between *light* and *darkness* (1:1-2:6); (2) the conflict between *love* and *hatred* (2:7-17); & now (3) the conflict between *truth* and *lies*; true Christians and counterfeit Christians.

#1 PHONIES ARE HERE, AMONG US! 2:18-19

Verse 18: The Apostle John begins this section by addressing his readers with this term of endearment, *children* and ends this section by using this same designation (v.28). He sees the spiritual crisis facing believers and gives this prophetic warning about the *last days* and *antichrist*. Perhaps even more ominous than John's warning in the previous three verses about the influence of Satan's wicked *world* (2:15-17), is John's announcement that this *is the last hour*, a phrase he repeats twice in this verse! The New Living Bible paraphrases it with these words; *this world's last hour has come*. Does John mean the end of the world? When Jesus Christ came to earth the first time, a new age began. Most Bible teachers believe that the phrase, *the last hour*, [Greek εσχάτε, eschate] is a technical term to denote the period of time immediately preceding the return of the Lord Jesus Christ; a time before Christ breaks into human history again. But, hasn't it been *the last hour* for 20 centuries? The beloved Bible teacher, Dr. J. Vernon McGee writes, "This is the age when God is calling out a people for His name. You can say at any time during this period, "now is the acceptable time. *Today* if you will hear His voice." Why the urgency about salvation? Because, my friend, you might not be here tomorrow." [McGee, J. Vernon, Thru The Bible, Vol. 5, 1 Corinthians-Revelation, p. 776]. God's loving patience will continue until He has brought all of the redeemed, all of the elect into the body of Christ, His church (Romans 2:4; 1 Timothy 1:16; 2 Peter 3:9 & 15). We are anxiously awaiting Christ's return. Since John writes that we are living in the final period of time before Jesus returns (although John doesn't commit himself to any timetable), then the next event on God's prophetic calendar is the rapture; the taking up to heaven of believers. Following this

translation of all believers from earth to heaven, then the 7 year period of Tribulation will begin when much of what is written in Revelation will be fulfilled. I personally believe that we are living in *the last hour*, the last days. Since the Apostle John lived in the 1st Century and referred to his day as *the last hour*, is there an explanation as to why Jesus hasn't returned yet? God is infinite and not limited to time as we are. While God works in human time, He is above time (read 2 Peter 3:8). Dr. Wiersbe answers this way: "*The last hour* began back in John's day and has been growing in intensity ever since. There were ungodly false teachers in John's day, and during the intervening centuries they have increased both in number and influence. *The last hour* or *the last times* are phrases that describe a kind of time, not a duration of time." [Wiersbe, Warren W., Be Real; A New Testament Study, 1 John, David C. Cook, p.85]. John is writing that Christians have always been living in *the last days*, crisis times, so Christian, be ready! There's an urgency detected in his words. The Apostle John then adds, *and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared*. The Greek aorist [Greek εκουσατε ,ekousate] looks at the many times when John's readers *heard* the teachings of the apostles, *that antichrist is coming*. In addition, the present tense *is coming* looks to the future while the singular *antichrist* points directly to an individual yet to come. The Apostle John is the only author in the Bible to use this word *antichrist* (read also 1 John 2:22; 4:3; & 2 John 7), although the concept is found elsewhere (cf. Daniel 9:24-27; 11:1-45, especially 36-45; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 & Christ's words in Matthew 24:24 & Mark 13:22 & Revelation 13 & 17). Paul's term for the *Antichrist*, is *man of lawlessness* (2 Thessalonians 2:3). John's readers would have been familiar with the Old Testament prophecies about the coming of an *Antichrist*, a world ruler who will exalt himself "against" Jesus Christ as well as claim to be the "substitute" for Christ. Believers in John's day might have been acquainted with the prophecies of Daniel and might have even known apostolic teaching concerning the coming of this world ruler who will exalt himself against Christ, such as Paul's teaching in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12 where he identifies him as *the man of lawlessness*, that is, the *Antichrist*. The word *antichrist* [αντιχριστος, anti-christos] is a compound word of the title *Christ* and the preposition *anti* which has two possible meanings: (1) "against," such as, I am against the government raising my taxes! And (2) "instead of," such as a substitute. Although both meanings are possible here, the emphasis of Scripture is on the diabolical nature of this opponent of Christ, the adversary, the one hostile to Christ. Alfred Plummer writes that "the Antichrist is a usurper, who under false pretenses assumes a position which does not belong to him, and who opposes the rightful owner. The idea of opposition is the predominate one." [Plummer, Alfred, The Epistles of S. John, Cambridge University Press, p.107]. John adds that *even now many antichrists have appeared*. This is not that world ruler who will exalt himself over Christ, but little *antichrists*, false teachers in John's day, and ours, whose teachings deny the deity of Christ (read ahead at v. 22). John's use of *many* implies a strong group. Bible teachers point out that the word *antichrist* is used to describe three things: (1) a spirit that's present in the world that opposes and/or denies Jesus Christ; (2) all false teachers who embody this spirit and (3) the person who will be the world ruler who exalts himself over Christ during the

Tribulation. The Greek perfect tense, *have appeared*, [Greek γεγονασιν, gegonasin] acknowledges that indeed these *antichrists* were present and that they were having a deleterious affect on the true church. Because there were so many *antichrists* in John's day, false teachers who were denying the deity of Christ as well as the fact that the Gnostics of his day were denying the humanity of Christ, John concludes with this evidence; *from this we know that it is the last hour*, implying from the use of the verb *know*, that everyone *knew* about the presence of these false teachers and the damage they were inflicting. The presence of these *antichrists* in John's day and ours points to the truth that time is short! The rapture will be soon! *Antichrists* are coming. While Jesus told His disciples that the time of His return was unknown (Matthew 24:36), yet He taught them to *be ready* (24:44), *be on the alert* (25:13). Jesus also taught that before His return there would be apostasy and *many false prophets will arise* (24:11-12) John's warning is up to date in view of the apostasy in Christendom today.

Verse 19: John continues to reveal how to spot a phony by stating that within Christendom, within churches, there are those who claim to be true Christians but aren't and never were. There are people within the church who call themselves Christians; are baptized, take communion together but John writes are *not really of us*—the pronoun *us* is used 5 times in this verse perhaps to emphasize the great fellowship that was enjoyed by these early Christians. Some Bible scholars believe that John's use of *us* refers to the apostolic witnesses as used in 1 John 1:5 & 4:6. If that's the case, then the phrase *not really of us* would mean that these counterfeit false teachers had gone out from among the apostles; not that they were apostles to begin with but that they were claiming that what they taught was the same as what the apostles were teaching (read also Acts 15:1 & 2 Corinthians 11:5). However, I believe that John is using *us* to refer to the church, the believers for it is used in 1 John 1:7, 8, 9, & 10. In John's day that included false teachers such as the Gnostics. The phrase *they went out* implies that *they* voluntarily withdrew but this wasn't just a matter of 'leaving a church.' No! Instead, like Judas, who voluntarily left Christ's disciples, these are those who deny the truths of the Word of God and separate themselves from God's grace and His church—*us*. Not everyone who is part of a church is a believer. These represent heretics, false teachers, counterfeit Christians. Doctrine and what a church or organization believes are so important (check out Grace Community Church's statement of faith.) One student of the Bible wisely said; many believers ought to be unbelievers more often! Later on in his epistle, the Apostle John will admonish believers; *do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God* (4:1). Paul also exhorts believers to check everything (1 Thessalonians 5:21). John Newton, the author of many hymns including "Amazing Grace," also wrote: "What think ye of Christ? Is the test to try both your state and your scheme. You cannot be right in the rest unless you think rightly of Him." That next phrase, *for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us*, proves that they never were believers. God's purpose was to prove that; notice the phrase, *so that it would be shown....* God used their departure to reveal the true nature of these departing counterfeiters—heretics. In Dr. Warren Wiersbe's little commentary, he notes: "If you will investigate the history of the false cults and

antichristian religious systems in today's world, you will find that in most cases their founders started out *in a local church!* They were “with us” but not “of us,” so they went out “from us” and started their own group.” [Wiersbe, Warren W., Be Real; A New Testament Study, 1 John, David C. Cook, p.88]. One more comment on this verse as the connective words *for if* adds significance to their departure. The construction of the Greek conditional sentence that begins with *if*, assumes a condition contrary to reality. That is, *if they had been of us*, but they weren't, *they would have remained with us*, but they didn't. Their departure proved that they were unbelievers. John now switches to assuring words of encouragement.

#2 PHONIES YOU AREN'T! YOU'RE TRUE CHRISTIANS 2:20-21

Verse 20: In contrast to those people who left—those who *went out from us* and who *were not really of us*, now John writes about the true Christians who are keeping the faith—you aren't a phony Christian! John's strong words emphasize this stark contrast between those who aren't Christians and those who are. John describes his readers and us as well with these encouraging words *but you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know*. John reveals that believers have two resources: **(1) an anointing from the Holy One?** The noun, *anointing*, stands in an emphatic position in the Greek construction. It is based on the Greek verb, χριω, chrio, which means “to anoint.” John uses *anointing* χρισμα, chrisma, not to speak of the act of *anointing*, but the result of the action. In the Septuagint Old Testament, the noun form is used of the *anointing* oil (Exodus 29:7 & 30:25) and then in Daniel 9:26 it is used metaphorically of the Messiah. Interestingly, the word occurs only here and in 1 John 2:27 (twice). The figure of *anointing* is used of the Holy Spirit in connection with Jesus' ministry in Luke 4:18 & Acts 10:38. In 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 it is used to speak of God establishing a believer in the faith. Although John doesn't identify this *anointing*, most Bible scholars believe that this is a reference to the indwelling Holy Spirit that God gives to everyone when they are saved. Some Bible teachers believe that John is referring to the Word of God as the *anointing* so that this *anointing* keeps believers from falling prey to the doctrine of counterfeit Christians. The fact that the Bible never mentions the Word of God in connection to *anointing*. Notice that John declares to believers that *you have* [Greek is εχετε, echete,] indicating a continuing possession of the Holy Spirit. How long do we have the Holy Spirit? Scripture makes it very clear that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is permanent according to John 14:16—*He may be with you forever*. John states that this *anointing* is *from the Holy One* [Greek is απο του αγιου, apo tou agiou] to emphasize the sanctity of the *One* giving the *anointing*. Perhaps verses 27-28 would reinforce the argument that this *Holy One* is Jesus Christ (definitely read also John 6:69). Doctrinally speaking, true Christians have the Holy Spirit living within as evident by the plethora of passages that speak about God's gift of the Holy Spirit to us (Luke 4:18; John 6:69; 14:17, 26; 15:26; 16:13; Acts 4:27; 10:38; Romans 5:5; 8:9, 16; 1 Corinthians 6:19; 12:13; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, et al.). The Word of God makes it clear that those who belong to Jesus Christ are *indwelt by the Spirit of God*, the Holy Spirit. But non-Christians and phony Christians or pseudo Christians, are not indwelt by the Holy Spirit. In Romans 8:9 Paul states that only Christians have the indwelling Holy Spirit. Relating all this on the

indwelling Holy Spirit to our passage, consider Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit when He was about to leave this earth in John 14:26 & 16:7-13. One of the greatest ministries of God's Holy Spirit to us is His role of teaching and illuminating the Word of God, which seems to be the reason why John makes the statement, *but you have an anointing from the Holy One*. That fact is reinforced by John's statement in verse 27 that *His anointing teaches you about all things*; the use of *teaches* implies that this is a Person. The presence of the Holy Spirit within each of us as believers enables us to perceive the truth and to distinguish it from error. Some Christians have a greater perception than others, no doubt because of sin in one's life, or satanic blindness, or influence of false teachers, or who knows what! So, when John writes that you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know...he's stating that it's possible for true believers to recognize a lie, a doctrinal error in teaching when it comes along because we have the indwelling Holy Spirit who will not only *teach us all things* (John 14:26), *guide you into all truth* (John 16:13) and *will disclose to us* (John 16:13) what we need to *know*. (2) A 2nd resource John cites in this verse is *knowledge* of the truth enabling us to differentiate truth from error. The Greek verb οἶδατε, oïdate, suggests that John is referring to innate *knowledge* rather than *knowledge* learned from study of the Word of God.

Verse 21: God given *knowledge* from the Holy Spirit is given to us to affect how we live and so John writes to affirm their true faith/*truth*. These three facts encourage us! (1) *You know the truth*, The Apostle John gives assurance yet he isn't implying that believers have anything resembling perfect knowledge; but because we have the indwelling Holy Spirit; *you have an anointing from the Holy One*, we have the ability to discern truth from error. John is writing, not to give them new *truth*, but to affirm their adherence to *the truth*; (2) a *lie* and *the truth* cannot be interchanged; (3) the *lie* and *the liar* (v.22) are cut from the same cloth as the source of *lies* is Satan. Because of the presence of many *antichrists* in John's day and ours, it's imperative that we *know* the identifying marks of these *antichrists*. In John's day as in ours, there is much doctrinal error in churches.

#3 PHONIES ARE DENIERS, 2:22-23

Verse 22: *The liar* is marked as a *denier*; specifically *denying* that Jesus is the Christ, God's Son and the Savior (read John 11:25-27). The construction of this Greek sentence, τις εστιν ο ψευστvs, tis estin o feustes, requires the identity of *the liar*. In addition, there is an article with the noun, *the liar*, further heightening the need to identify anyone *lying* about the person and work of Jesus Christ. His person and work are inseparable. Anyone characterized by this *denial* cannot escape being branded as *a liar*. If he/she is not *the liar*, then no one is! Try calling some so-called "Christians" or cultists, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Unity and Unitarians, etc. *liars*! Too many people and leaders in liberal Protestant and Catholic churches *deny* the deity of Christ. The Gnostics of John's day (who believed that all material things were sinful and therefore Jesus could not have been God's Son); Cerinthus and his followers (believed that Jesus was not fully God but that God only came on Him at His baptism and departed from Him before His crucifixion); and Docetics (believed that Jesus was not truly a man and therefore not the Savior)—all were *deniers that Jesus is the Christ*—all false teachers and therefore, *liars*. Jesus Christ is

deity; the eternal *Son of the living God*; He's prophet, Priest and King and He's coming back soon. He's the living Word of God who came in the flesh. In the remainder of verse 22, John adds that all *lies* are summed up in the one who is the prince of *liars*, Satan. Anyone who *denies the Father and the Son*, is the very embodiment of the spirit of the *Antichrist*, that one who will usurp God's throne in Jerusalem during the coming 7 year Tribulation. Any pseudo-Christian, or so-called Christian who possesses this diabolical mark, *denying* the deity of Christ is the *Antichrist*. Try calling that *denier*, that minister at such and such church, an *Antichrist* and see what happens! But phonies are *liars* of God's truth. One additional comment on this verse as the designation *the Son* occurs here for the first time in John's epistle.

Verse 23: In the previous verse, John mentioned the *denial that Jesus is the Christ* and in this verse *whoever denies the Son*. Other passages that connect *Christ* and *the Son* are 1 John 2:1, 5; John 20:31 & Matthew 16:16. The *denial of the Son* also means that such a person has no personal relationship with the heavenly Father—no child to parent relationship with Him. John intensifies his identification of such *deniers* and writes that over against the *denials* of non-Christians is the *confession* of the believer. In the Greek Bible, *the one who confesses*, ὁ ὁμολογῶν, literally, “the one confessing,” indicates that this *confession* is an activity of an individual and not a group thing. Here's what one person said about this: “Both denying Christ and confessing Christ deal with giving personal testimony to one's faith in Him; they do not determine salvation. Thus denying Christ cannot result in the loss of eternal salvation nor can confessing Him obtain it.” *Confessing* that Jesus Christ is God and Savior involves more than saying ‘I'm a Christian.’ In Mark's account where Jesus was teaching in the synagogue and there was a man possessed by demons in the audience, Mark records an unbeliever's *confession* who *confessed* that Jesus is the Son of God and the holy God as well (Mark 1:21-28). Unbelievers and even demon possessed people can *confess* truth. God is not looking for individuals to merely intellectually believe in Jesus Christ as God. A *confession* is a personal witness from one's heart and daily lives of what Jesus Christ has done. The importance of one's personal *confession* in belief and in life, forms the basis of John's closing appeal in chapter 2, so that we continue to remain in Him and in the faith.

In the closing verses of this chapter, John makes it clear that unbelievers, phonies, don't have a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

#4 PHONIES DON'T ABIDE, 2:24-28

Verse 24: Note that John begins this verse with the words, *as for you*. The personal pronoun *you* is in an emphatic position in order to call attention to John's direct and personal appeal to believers. Six times in these 5 verses the Apostle John uses the word *abide* [Greek is μένω, meno], meaning “to remain, to stay, as John exhorts believers to *abide* in the true doctrines of Jesus Christ in order to remain in fellowship with Him. *Abiding* is the intimacy of fellowship that believers have with the Savior as we walk in obedience to Him and His Word. I believe the biblical concept of *abiding* is the same as an intimate knowledge of Jesus Christ. This is the same sense in which Jesus uses the word *abide* in His Upper Room Discourse in John 13:1-17:26 (especially note 14:26-15:10). The

Apostle John expresses the result of *abiding*. What *you heard from the beginning* (notice repeated) refers to Jesus' teaching, that is, the Word of God. *From the beginning* looks back to the time when John's readers first *heard* the message of the gospel. The Greek verb [ἤκουσατε, ekousate] *heard*, is an aorist tense pointing to when they first believed and including what they are still *hearing*. The picture is that of continuity—still *abiding* in the message that they had *heard*. They have rejected and continue to reject the message of the false teachers. Paul writes about those who don't want *sound doctrine* any longer and seek something more sensational, newer and more experiential (read 2 Timothy 3:1, 7; 4:3 & Acts 17:21). When God's Word *abides* in us, we can resist false teachings, teachers and the sensational stuff. Many people, from so many churches, have fallen prey to the cults, liberal denominations and even to Islam. John's challenge to us is to *abide* in His Word, daily. Study it! Memorize it! Know it! Get our roots down deep into His Word. Hiebert comments on the phrase, *if what you heard from the beginning*; specifically the *if*—the conditional sentence. “In expressing the result of this abiding John deliberately restated the concept of abiding in his conditional statement....The use of the third class conditional sentence, *if what you heard from the beginning*, leaves open the matter of their fulfillment of the condition; it challenges them to make sure the condition is fulfilled. The effective indwelling of God's Word involves their cooperation” (emphasis mine.) [Hiebert, D. Edmond, An Introduction to the New Testament, Moody Press, p.209]. The result of *abiding* in God's truth assures believers of a continual *abiding in the Son and in the Father*. In the last phrase of the verse, John uses a future tense, *will abide* to emphasize the reality of continuing *abiding*, fellowship and intimacy with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 25 introduces a further result of *abiding* in Him and His Word; God's *promise of eternal life* (read John 3:14-15; 4:14; 5:24; 6:40 & 1 John 5:13). Our *eternal life* is never in question for God Himself has *promised* that He will guarantee our salvation. It's not a matter of what we do but what He does for us. I have absolute confidence in the security of my salvation because of the *promise* of God. Unbelievers, phonies don't have any *eternal* security. How secure is a believer's salvation, *eternal life*? The doctrine of *eternal* security rests on a proper concept of what God does when He saves a person: (1) John 13:1—*He loved them to the end*; (2) John 10:28-30—*I give eternal life to them and they will never perish*; (3) Jude 24—*He will present us blameless in His presence*; (4) Hebrew 7:25—*He always lives to make intercession*; (5) 1 Corinthians 12:13—*we were all baptized into one body*; (6) Ephesians 4:30—*you were sealed for the day of redemption*; (7) Romans 8:31-39—*nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God*. The Word of God guarantees that nothing...nothing...including ourselves can separate us from Christ.

Verse 26: *These things I have written to you* could refer to what John has written in this epistle or to the immediate section, verses 18-25. The Apostle John has used a number of adjectives to describe these phonies, false teachers; *antichrist*; *not of us*; *liar*; *one who denies* and here, *those who are trying to deceive you*. The present participle [Greek των πλανωντων] identifies these false teachers as a group that's characterized by their continuing efforts to *deceive*. Inherent in John's words is a “hallelujah” that they had not succeeded in *deceiving* John's readers. Believers need to be reminded that Satan is the

main *deceiver* and by his own nature *he is a liar and the father of lies* (read John 8:44). Satan's purpose is to *deceive* Christians (2 Corinthians 11:1-4; 13-15).

Verse 27: The *anointing* is the Holy Spirit (cf. v.20) whose ministry is *to teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you* (read John 14:26). Some have used this verse to say that believers should not listen to nor read what human teachers say and write. But if that were John's intent, then why did he write? The Holy Spirit *teaches* us *all things*.

Verse 28: John closes this section by stating that phonies/unbelievers/fake Christians are not living in anticipation of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. What *confidence* and hope and motivation for *abiding in Him*. The real motivation for living for Jesus is eschatological in character—Jesus is coming back to rapture true Christians and to take us to be with Him forever. The real reason for wanting to live for Jesus, to *abide in Him*, to have intimate fellowship with Christ, is that Jesus is going to *appear* soon in the sky, in rapture to take us to be with Him. This is the first time John uses *appear* (note 3:2); and this word implies that Jesus Christ will be made visible to all (Colossians 3:4; 1 Peter 5:4 & 1 John 3:2). The book of Revelation has much to say about future events including Christ's coming. And when He comes, will we *have confidence* [Greek is παρρησιαν, *parresian*], that boldness of life and lips that results from a clear conscience before God. John's reminding us that we won't be embarrassed/*shame* when we stand before the God of the universe (read Mark 8:38). Believers will stand before the bema seat of Christ, the judgment seat of Christ, to receive rewards or loss of rewards (2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10 & 1 Corinthians 4:5). God desires that we live pleasing to Him and obey Him so that when *He appears we may have confidence and not* be frightened when we see Jesus.

Song:

It will be worth it all, when we see Jesus.

Life's trials will seem so small, when we see Christ.

One glimpse of His dear face, all sorrows will erase,

So bravely run the race till we see Christ!

This is the only place that the Apostle John uses the compound Greek noun παρουσία, *parousia*, composed of παρά, *para* meaning “alongside of or close” and a form of the verb εἰμι, *eimi*, which literally means “a being alongside of” someone. The noun means *coming* or “arrival.

Note: It is my prayer that these printed notes will encourage serious Bible students to do further study on this passage. If you find any typos, errors or have any questions, please contact me. Thank you. Pastor John A. Eastman