

John lesson 27

1 John 4, May 3, 2012

Laurel Ann Porro

In today's lesson, John calls us, his friends to be unbelievers. How does that sit with you who call yourselves 'believers'? Many mainline denominations of Christianity use the Apostles Creed as a statement of the universal beliefs of their faith. How many of you know it well enough to say it? **Say Apostles Creed** I believe in one God the Father Almighty....

As Christians you should know and be able to confess these beliefs. But, every Christian is also called to be an unbeliever. The very same John who called us in chapter 1 to agree or have fellowship with those who declare that Jesus is the eternal life, now calls us to unbelief. John is not contradicting himself, here;

- You cannot believe truth without rejecting error.
- You cannot love righteousness unless you hate sin.
- You cannot believe the Lord Jesus Christ without rejecting other gods.

So it is perfectly logical that John would tell us not to believe every spirit. There are many false prophets, says John. Then as now, the reality is that we live in a hostile world in which falsehoods are widely accepted, and we are greatly pressured to conform to what is popular today.

The Bereans in Acts 17:11 and the Ephesians in Revelation 2:2 were commended for searching the Scriptures and testing the spirits to see if what they were being taught was true. False prophets and false teachers have been around since Satan tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden. Behind a false teacher is a demonic spirit in human form. So believers must test the spirits. Christians must test any teaching by comparing it to Scripture. We all need to scrutinize what we hear on the radio, watch on TV, read in books or see on-line. Not everyone who talks about God comes from a Biblical point of view, so John makes it clear what the criteria is in verse 2: ***Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.***

Now the word in verse 2, 'acknowledge' is more accurately written as 'confess' in the ESV. Even demons acknowledged that Jesus was the Son of the most high. They called out to Him telling Him to leave them....they recognized His deity and His humanity, but, they never *confessed* it. They did not commit themselves to Him or chose to follow Him. There are those today who say that Jesus existed in history, that He was a great teacher, even Muslims acknowledge that Jesus is a very elect and highly esteemed messenger of God, but fail to confess that He came from God and was God in the flesh.

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Why was Jesus “coming in the flesh” such an important issue then and why is it relevant to us today?

At the time of John’s writing, he was combating a church split that had taken place within his congregation with a popular group who would soon be known as the Gnostics. This verse in Revelation 2:2 was written to the church in Ephesus where John ministered for several of his later years. Lynn spoke of it two weeks ago, so I’ll just briefly remind you of it. The belief of Gnosticism had its origin in Greek thought. It taught that salvation was attained through enlightenment and that human nature was evil but the human spirit was good, much like New Age beliefs today. Since the body was evil, these false apostles believed the perfect God would not have united Himself with human nature. The problem with this teaching was that if Jesus did not have a human nature, and the ability to choose to sin or not to sin, He could not have atoned for our sin. The Lamb of God had to be a perfect human sacrifice, not a deity with super-human powers, unable to identify with our temptations and weaknesses. It was Jesus’ atoning sacrifice which brings all people who confess it into eternal life right at that point; certainly not what Satan wants. He works diligently to disguise the true nature of Christ with a false one, the spirit of antichrist, as John calls it.

So John warns all of us when he says not to believe these spirits -- until you have tested them. Don't be a sucker; don't believe anyone who comes along. And it is worth pointing out that this warning is in the midst of John's discourse about love. It is just like Satan to mask his efforts to deceive as coming from love and care for one another.

I had some firsthand experience with this type of deception as a new believer many years ago. Some well-meaning, but not very discerning, Christian friends gave me a daily devotional called the Daily Word which quoted Scripture and has a positive and uplifting message for each day. It is published by the Unity School of Christianity and by its name, I assumed that it was a Christian organization and that it was filling my mind with Godly wisdom. I prayed along their line of thinking and even sent monthly contributions to the headquarters for their works. Fortunately I was also studying the Scriptures in BSF classes and receiving solid guidance in real Truth. Eventually, I became less and less enamored with the devotional material and my spiritual GPS gave me a dissonance in my spirit. At that time, the internet was coming of age and it enabled me to check things out and look further into the organization. I discovered that Unity is not Christianity at all, but a clever deception. Their website states the following: *Unity is an open-minded, accepting spiritual community that honors all paths to God and helps people discover and live their spiritual potential and purpose. A positive alternative to negative religion, Unity seeks to apply the teachings of Jesus as well as other spiritual masters. We*

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believe that Jesus expressed his divine potential and sought to show humankind how to express ours as well.

How many of you can pick out the deception in these statements?

open-minded, all paths to God, positive alternative to negative religion, other spiritual masters, his divine potential.

Don't they sound friendly and loving? They come from the pit of hell; in fact, Unity does not believe in hell, or even sin. So who needs a Savior if you don't sin? They don't!!!

In fact, Unity sounds a lot like the beliefs of Gnostics in John's day. Its emphasis on the goodness of man has a strange appeal to those who are lacking in discernment or who follow the spirit of antichrist. The spirit of the antichrist is one of many forerunners of the final Antichrist. That Antichrist, as described in Revelation, will capture the heart and mind of the entire world for a short period of time before his true nature comes to lead the world to destruction. The final Antichrist will be the ultimate embodiment of all the antichrist spirits that have perverted Truth since the beginning. All spirits of antichrist have one thing in common and that is a denial of the atoning work of Christ on the cross for the sin of mankind. Without our sin payment taken care of, mankind is denied access to heaven and therefore will spend eternity in hell; Satan's ultimate goal. That is why he works so hard to keep us from the truth and disguises it with many other godly ideas.

Because it is easy for new Christians to be deceived, it is important early on that young Christians are grounded in the truth of the Scriptures so that they can readily recognize false doctrines and turn away from them. It's much the same way that bank tellers are trained to recognize counterfeit money, not by studying the counterfeit bills, but by closely looking at the real thing so that when a counterfeit shows up, it is quickly recognized.

So how do you know if you are caught up in some false belief system? Look for the Statement of Faith, or statement of beliefs which is a written list of the theological beliefs of a religious organization. All organizations, Christians or secular have a mission statement, which states the purposes and goals. Your child's school has a mission statement. But the Statement of Faith is not about purpose, it's about their guiding principles based on the beliefs of the leaders. Two weeks ago, Lynn showed you what all true Christian groups should state in their beliefs: A Christian Statement of Faith will state their belief regarding these essentials:

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- God: Father, Son , Spirit
- Jesus Christ
- The unregenerate (sinful) nature of man
- Born-again believers
- Eternal life
- The Scriptures

So let's examine Eastside's beliefs as stated on the web site:

- **God**

A holy (without sin), spiritual being, all knowing, everywhere present, eternally existent in three distinct personalities – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit – one God (Exodus 3:14-15, John 4:24, Matthew 28:19, John 1:1-2).

- **Jesus Christ**

Jesus became "God in the flesh." He was born through the miracle of a virgin birth, lived a sinless life, was crucified and died a physical death as atonement for our sins, and was physically resurrected from the grave. (Matthew 1:18-25, 1 Corinthians 15:3-8) He will return in bodily form as Lord of the universe, to gather his followers and judge those who have rejected him (Acts 1:9-11, Hebrews 9:27-28).

- **The Holy Spirit**

Lives within those who believe in Jesus Christ as Comforter and Advocate, and helps us become more like Jesus in thought, word, actions and character (John 16:5-15).

- **Sin**

Men and women were created in the image of God but are now separated from God by sin (Romans 5:12-21).

- **Salvation**

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Faith (belief and trust) in Jesus and his sacrifice on the cross is the only way to be reconciled with God (Acts 4:8-12). Salvation cannot be earned, it is offered through Jesus based on grace, not merit. What we couldn't do for ourselves (reconcile with God), Jesus did through his death on the cross (Ephesians 2:8-9). God lovingly offers salvation to every person; and every person has the freedom to accept or reject this gift at any time (John 3:16-18). Faith requires repentance (conforming our lifestyle to Christ's), and results in obedience. Baptism by immersion demonstrates a pledge of our willingness to live for Him (Acts 8:26-38, Romans 6:1-4).

- **The Bible**

The Bible is inspired by God and is therefore without error or contradiction, and is the sole authority for faith and practice. All our beliefs come from the Bible (2 Timothy 3:15-16, 2 Peter 3:15-16).

- **The Church**

The Church of Jesus Christ is not limited to any one institution or denomination; it consists of all who have trusted Jesus Christ for redemption of their sins. Eastside is therefore but one part of the greater Church (1 Corinthians 12:12-17).

Reading an organization's statement of faith or in our case, their main beliefs, should put you on the right track and keep you from being deceived. So, be like the Bereans and use the measuring stick of Scripture to see how an organization lines up before your join or support it.

So after introducing the distinction between the two spirits, John now shows the clear line between those who are from God and from the world. In verse 4, John commends his dear children for overcoming the dispute in his flock which had perhaps already split his congregation. John uses this title, "little children," to indicate the trust -- the childlike trust of one who believes the Word of God. He says, *You are from God* and have overcome them. Most people today belong to a Christ-denying world. They talk the world's language the world eats it up. And you are not of the world, so you are not enamored by the lifestyles of celebrities, sports figures, or corrupt political leaders.....I hope! Jesus clearly stated in Matthew 7:14 that small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only a few find it. Even though you may have family or friends who have been enticed into looking to the world for affirmation, you have not been won over; not because you are so spiritually superior, but because of the reality

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of verse 4: *the One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.* It was the greatness of God that kept them straight, and what will keep us straight today.

Verse 5: They are from the world

When we opened 1 John a few weeks ago, I reminded you of the humanistic ideas that dominate the public schools and our government which cause many to go astray. As children of God, we know that the world has been deceived by forces of evil that have brought down nations before us, and will bring down our own one day. Forced abortion, religious discrimination and persecution, mockery of our Savior, disregard for the aged or the disabled, forced acceptance of homosexual lifestyles, systematic removal of religion from public life, and people who promote these travesties, as John reminded his flock, they are from the world, speak the viewpoint of the world and the world listens to them. They say what the world wants to hear; and find an easy and quick popularity. They are clever at solving the problems of our nation despite the astounding failure to resolve any of it. ; *(I was listening to John Philips on KFI talking about the secret service men in who were caught in the prostitution scandal saying that those guys are under so much pressure that they should all have all the prostitutes, booze and drugs they want at taxpayer expense when they are on their time off....that's how the world thinks!)*

But the truth of the world's problem, as we saw when I spoke to you three weeks ago, is that most of the world's leaders do not acknowledge man's sin nature. For it is only when we deal with sin, that the problems can be overcome.

Verse 6: We are from God

John and his disciples were a group of second and third generation leaders who had been authorized by the church to declare the full message of Christianity. *Whoever is from God listens to us, and whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.*

You, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, have had a heart transplant....the Holy Spirit has given you a new nature, so that you now desire to listen to Godly teaching, to search the Word of God, not to find ways that will justify and rationalize your sins, but to be warned, reminded, convicted, and finally to flee from sin. The world is not interested in finding out about their sin or in helping mankind resolve his sin problem and they will not listen to sound teaching. Do you have family members like that? I have and it's useless to argue with them because their belief

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system is not compatible with mine. You will become like those to whom you listen, make sure that you are listening to the ones who come from God.

John's reminders verse 7, 11 and 12 to love one another is the direct result of recognizing the Spirit of Truth. There is nothing new about the command to love.

What is new is why we must love differently than the world. Most people in the world are kind and loving to people they like, are polite to those who they meet or know a little, and ignore most strangers or people they don't like, or if they are real creeps, they are nasty to those they don't like. Some people are easy to love, our spouses, siblings, our kids or grandkids, some in-laws, friends who are there for you, people in our small groups....sometimes. But for the most part, loving others both in and out of the church can be very messy.

God has called us to a different standard as those who know the love of God. Our love of others takes no notice of what they are like, or what they do, or how they dress, or how they look or their background, It sees one thing only, and that is, Here is another person, a fellow sojourner on this earth, created by God, with all the longings, the heartaches, the problems, the aspirations, the hopes, dreams, and frustrations of life like me. Here is another one, struggling as I am to find their place in this world. How can I help that person? If that person knows Jesus, then we have immediate common ground and I can begin there. If not, then I am compelled by love to share the truth of the Gospel in word or deed or both.

There are people in our lives are difficult to love; you may be one of those people to someone else. We must love them anyway....you say you cannot do that? You are right, you cannot.....without the love of God and the strength of the Holy Spirit, who overlooks everyone's flaws and sees each one as God does: worth dying for. The argument is clear, is it not? It is no good claiming that we know God if the love of God is not found in our lives each day. If we cannot treat people objectively and see the enemy rather than the person at work through the irritating qualities that offend us, if we cannot see through their issue to see that they are in need of love; if we reject people because they might be an inconvenience, then it is no good saying we belong to Him. John's argument is, if the life of God is present in us, then the love of God will be there too. Indeed, our love for one another is part of God's missionary strategy. John reminds us again in verse 16: God is love!

We've heard this so much that we take it for granted that God loves us and that His nature is love. But do you realize that no belief system other than Christianity states that God is love? God is creator, He is provider, He is healer, He is rock, refuge, He is powerful, He is just, He is

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holy, perhaps even faithful, but the only way we know that He is love is by having God send His Son to die as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Only through Christ's death on the cross, do we understand Him as love. No other belief system, or other religion even comes close.

He loved us when we were unlovable. He did not reject us when we ignored Him, or criticized Him when He did not provide what we wanted, when we wanted it. He gave Himself for us, the only wise God; so that we might live forever in heaven with Him. If that does not blow your mind, then you just don't get it. So, John tells us in verse 16, so we know and rely on the love that God has for us.

It is not a feeling of love that we rely on, but rather the reality of God's love as expressed through Jesus' death and resurrection. God's love is known to His children not by how looks or how it feels. For even in His harshest moments, even in judgment and wrath, when it feels painful, God loves us. In fact, often that which appears to be a withdrawal of His love is actually the most intense manifestation of it. For it is in our weakness, in our desperation, that we cling to Him more fervently and find that He is there, often through the kindness of others or the peace that passes understanding, or the realization of how His Word has spoken to our very need.

I need patience, so I receive instead a barrage of daily irritations that I must overcome with prayer. You need to get several things accomplished in order to feel good about reaching the goal, but instead you are sidelined with an injury. God knows what you need. No, God has not withdrawn His love, but has a greater purpose. Without a clear understanding of how God loves us even when His love feels distant, we would each become completely discouraged. But when we behold the manner of love lavished on us, then we are then free to love others in ways that the world does not understand.

Today, there is a mighty reconciliation going on in Rwanda where hundreds of the Tutsi survivors of the 1994 civil war in Rwanda have taken advantage of the opportunity to reconcile with and forgive those who murdered their families and friends. Many of the murderers are attempting to make restitution to the families that only twelve years ago, they destroyed. If this kind of love can go on today by the grace of God, then we too can reach out in love to those who have hurt us.

So then in verse 19, we are reminded that *we love because He first loved us*. God gave us the love transplant first, which empowers us to love fellow believers, neighbors and strangers and.....even our enemies, as Jesus commanded. God's indwelling presence in us

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becomes visible only as we manifest it to those who are unlovable in our eyes. Think of one who is difficult for you to love. When they hurt you or say offensive things, you must choose forgive them, for they know not what they do. When they seek to harm you, you forgive and do not retaliate. If they constantly provoke you, you endure it and do not lash out. If you say, I cannot do that, you must ask for others to pray that you can by the grace of God.

Psalm 136 says, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, His love endures forever. For 26 verses, the history of the early world..... His love endures..... Endures....duro...hard work. It's difficult to endure something. God is love, but His love endures. For God to love unlovable people, Israelites, sinners, skeptics, you and me, may not be easy, but His love endures....and so must ours even when it's difficult...especially when the going gets tough.

It is only in our love for others, a sacrificial love that we will be able to face judgment day without fear of punishment, for our faith in Christ will be proven by how we have loved. In Matthew 25, Jesus told us what it would be like when the Son of Man comes in His heavenly glory. He will separate the sheep from the goats based on what they did for the least of these. What are you doing for the least of these....the hungry, the thirsty, the unclothed, the imprisoned? The ones who are not easy to love.....most of us here in this room don't even know anyone like that, and I would ask you, why not? Have we so insulated ourselves from the ones that God loves that we don't even know how to help the needy? Is our love limited to our friends and family in time of need?

Our brother may just be someone standing on that busy traffic island asking for a handout; he might be Jesus in disguise as the least of these. To ignore him might be the chance I was given to reach out with the love of God. Jesus said to give to everyone who asks, so perhaps I can give a granola bar, a sandwich, a bottle of water, or buy some scrip and keep a gift card handy for those in need. Or I can offer a prayer, or a minute of my time, anything other than ignore another person created in the image of God, even if that type of love makes me uncomfortable.

To limit our love for others to those in our circle of friends, those who share the same viewpoints that we share is to limit God's love. Even the wicked to that, especially at Christmas time! We are called to a radical understanding of love based on the truth that Jesus Christ came in the flesh as the Savior of the world, died for us when we were completely unworthy, and now calls us to love as He did. I cannot be fearful of reaching out in love to those outside my comfort zone and expect to hear, "Well done" on judgment day. If we want confidence on the Day of Judgment, then we must not shirk our responsibility in reaching out in love for others as long as we are able.

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We have been challenged in this lesson to be unbelievers of the world's truth and so understand that Jesus Christ did indeed come in the flesh.

And that in doing so, He paid the price for our sins out of His great love for us.

His love, which endures forever, does not always feel like love, but we can rely on it because of what Christ has done for us.

And as a result, we are compelled to love others in radical ways.

For it is only when we understand His great love for us, that love that we can reach out with His love to others, and in doing so, we will reap the harvest if only we do not give up.