

1 John 2:7-29 **Reminders**

First John is different than the other letters of the New Testament. Most of Paul's letters were written in response to problems, so they contain much in the way of correction. Those letters are full of specific orders and many dire warnings.

Even the letters of Paul not written that way, such as Romans and Philippians, are pointed and doctrinal. Peter's letters are nearly the same. So, if we stay between the pages of Romans through 2 Peter, we could get a very harsh and pointed, almost argumentative picture of Christianity.

The gospels and Acts are drastically different. They are history. They tell the story of the life of the Son of God. The gospels are heartwarming, wonderful, and thought-provoking.

That's quite a contrast. How are we to reconcile the argumentative letters with the historical gospels? 1 John bridges the gap.

Some people have overlooked 1 John and tried to apply the argumentative style of Paul's letters to Jesus, making Jesus into nothing more than a Pharisee with a heart. But that wasn't Jesus. Others have refused to make Jesus a Pharisee, but have swung too far the other way and all but ignore the pointed messages of the letters, reducing Jesus to a bringer of idealistic but impractical platitudes that have no real application.

1 John reconciles Jesus and the letters. John brings the impossibly positive Jesus into perspective with the discouragingly negative and fault-finding letters. John wrote to ordinary Christians who were muddling along as best they knew, trying to be like Jesus. They had no specific heinous heresies to combat. They were not perfect, but were trying to be. Their letter is true edification, building up. He encouraged them to press on to an impossible goal. He reassured them that, when they failed, they were forgiven because they confessed their sins, picked themselves up, and got back to walking as Jesus walked.

John introduced the second part of his letter like this:

[1 Jn 2:3-8 And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard. On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.]

John is about to give them several reminders to live as Jesus lived. But before he begins, he reassures them that what he is about to say is not a new set of rules, the fine print of their contract with God that they had neglected to read before they signed up. No, this is just a restatement of "an old commandment which you have had from the beginning," (v7), which you have had since the beginning of your Christian life. It is only "new" in the sense that, as God was completing the revelation of the gospel, the darkness, their unanswered questions, were melting away in the light of revealed truth.

John's message in this letter is so simple so as to be easily overlooked. People have tried to find a lot more here than John wrote.

He began the letter with reasons why he wrote:

1. John wrote so that we may have fellowship. Not because we have hammered out a compromise, not because God-ordained leaders have the authority to set the pattern and the rules, but rather, we will have fellowship if we all strive to be like Jesus. In so doing, we will come to have so much in common that we cannot help but to get along.
2. John wrote so that our joy may be complete. Sharing the gospel is what makes life on earth complete.
3. John wrote so that we may not sin, to remind everyone of the obvious. Sin is never excusable, but it is always forgivable if we will acknowledge that it was wrong and that there was no excuse.

With that introduction, John proceeds to his reminders that will help his audience to stay on the pathway of God, walking as Jesus walked. His reminders are so simple that we could easily dismiss them as too simple, and try to find something more complicated. But, God is not complicated. Only people are complicated.

John will remind us that (1) we already know the truth, (2) loving each other is the foundation of the law of God, and (3) deceivers are many, but we may still have confidence.

John's first reminder is scattered throughout the chapter"

[I Jn 2:12-14 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

20-21 But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know. 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.

24 As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.

27 And 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.]

John is reassuring and building up his audience by telling them that they already know the truth. There is no need to doubt.

In every age, the natural humility of Christians has made them susceptible to deception. False teachers have done well in the church over the last 1900 years if they have been able to speak smoothly and confidently. One of the best ploys of a false teacher is to tell everyone that they could not understand God or the Scriptures without his help. Whether out of humility or laziness, Christians have invited such false teachers to control eternal life. But, John brands anyone who claims to possess the keys to understanding God as a false teacher. In John's day, they were called Gnostics, the Knowing Ones. There are some amusing stories of how John dealt with such people.

In our time, the place of the Gnostic has been taken by the clergyman (priest, reverend, or evangelist), who claims that, without him, you could not understand the will of God.

But John says that you don't even need the apostle, John, because (v27) "the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you, but His anointing teaches you all things."

But what is this anointing? Since the term refers to the anointing with oil that was common in those days, and since the anointing with the Holy Spirit was commonly referred to as "the anointing," it seems most likely that John is referring to the Spirit we receive when we are baptized. Like Jeremiah 31:33-34 (quoted in Hebrews 8:10-11), "For this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after these days, says the Lord. I will put my laws into their minds, and I will write them upon their hearts, and I will be their God and they will be my people. And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen, and everyone his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest of them."

And what is it that is within us and makes it so no one need teach us? Some have gone of the deep end and have begun to trust a still, small voice within themselves. But if you have a voice in your head that tells you things, it is time to seek the services of competent psychiatrist. Many others have been taught to believe that God speaks to them privately. But that is not what John said. In this same chapter, a few verses back, John told us what is within us that teaches us of God, inverse 5 and 7 and 14: whoever keeps His Word, the old commandment is the Word which you have heard, and the Word of God abides in you.

This is not to downplay the role of the Holy Spirit in every Christian, but John's reassurance begins not with a voice inside you, but with the Word of God. God promises that, if you will have His Word residing in you, if His Word is so much a part of your thinking that it comes to mind in every situation, then He promises to give you the wisdom to use it. We are responsible for the knowledge (which God promises we can understand). God is responsible for the wisdom to use that knowledge.

The Holy Spirit, the anointing within us, allows us to use the Word. The Word is the toolbox of the Christian workman. But God gives the skill. A skilled craftsman is useless without his tools.

But, to what level of knowledge does John refer? How well do we need to know the Word in order to qualify as those in whom the Word of God abides? That is hard to put a number on because everyone is different. So, I offer this comparison. What do you know the most about? Your business? Your hobby? The words to popular songs? Or the Word of God? Everyone is different, but every Christian should know the Word better than any other subject. That is what it means for the Word of God to abide in us. John reminds us that, if the Word of God abides in us, we have no need to be taught of God.

John's second reminder, simple and direct, is to love your brother, not the world.

[I Jn 2:9-11 The one who says he is in the light and {yet} hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who 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.

15-17 Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away, and {also} its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever.]

I have combined the thoughts, "love your brother" and "don't love the world," under one heading because I believe John intended them to be counterpoints, a contrast.

This reminder from John seems too simple. To be right with God, to walk as Jesus walked, put the interests of your brother in Christ ahead of your own. It's one of those things you read and say, "Well, of course. Everyone knows that."

The question is, how do I do that? That is why John put this here. It is an encouraging reminder of the utterly obvious. But somehow we have difficulty putting it into practice because we get sidetracked by the little things, which John calls, "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the boastful pride of life."

John says, "You know what is most important; love your brother. Put his needs and wants ahead of yours." And when we have difficulty figuring out why we just can't seem to find time to do those things that loving your brother would call for, he gives us a brief list of how to classify our distractions.

Is it because we are too busy making a comfortable living for ourselves, so there is just not time to get involved with the brethren? That is the lust of the flesh.

Do our brethren get left out because we have goals that do not include them? That's the lust of the eye.

Do our brethren not fit into our lives because we like the direction we are going, and that's not the way they are going? That's the boastful pride of life.

When we read John's list (lust of the flesh, lust of the eye, the boastful pride of life), we tend to think of really terrible people (the flesh, lust, boastful pride). But the selfish, pleasure-seeking world is not John's point. He is writing to Christians who are doing their best to walk as Jesus walked. Our distractions are more subtle, so John's counterpoint to flesh, lust, and pride is love the brethren. If love for the brethren just doesn't seem to be working, look to these subtle distractions.

John is not writing to those for whose souls he fears. He is not writing to backsliders, erring brethren, or false teachers. He is writing confidently to those who, he is sure, want to do the will of God, and who might just benefit from a word of encouragement and a gentle reminder. John is doing the very thing he recommends. He is acting out his own love for the brethren by reminding them of the obvious.

John's third reminder is to beware of deceivers, but to live confidently.

[I Jn 2:18-19 Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not {really} of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but {they went out,} in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us.

22-23 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.

25-26 And this is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life. These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.

28-29 And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.]

John wants his brethren to be wary of deceivers, but not to the point of being scared to do anything. He wants them to know how to tell who is a deceiver, and at the same time to live confidently before God.

First, a word about the antichrist and the last hour. These words have become favorites of those who want to find modern day fulfillment of ancient prophecies. There is nothing so exotic here. John's reference is to a message he heard directly from Jesus, as recorded in Matthew 24:24, "False Christs and false prophets will arise to mislead, if possible, even the elect." Jesus was speaking about the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, as evidenced by the parallel passage in Luke in which He says, "when you see the city surrounded by armies..."

These false Christs who arose in the latter part of the first century were those who denied that Jesus was the Christ, obviously, because they claimed to be the Christ.

In v19, John says, "They went out from us." Paul predicted the same thing to the elders of Ephesus in Acts 20:30 when he said, "From among your own selves men will arise speaking perverse things to draw the disciples after them."

And, here in v28, John writes, "So that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming." John refers also to the destruction of Jerusalem, an event Jesus Himself referred to as "His coming." If the early Christians were not prepared for the destruction of Jerusalem, they would feel shame before their neighbors because the birthplace of their religion was being destroyed. Also, in the persecution that spread across the Empire after that, their confidence could be shaken because everything would be seeming to be going wrong. "Am I right to go this way? Is this happening because I am following a false religion?"

John says, "have confidence in your faith, especially because hardship will come and deceivers will come. Be prepared so that your faith will survive.

But, we live a long time after that coming of Jesus and these antichrists. What can we learn? First, live confidently. We are bombarded with teaching by those who find hints of Jesus' coming in current events. We could begin to doubt, suspect that we may have missed something. John says, "Live confidently, you know the Word."

We may begin to wonder when bad things happen to us. Perhaps we are headed in the wrong direction and these bad things are a wake-up call from God. John says, "Live confidently. You know you are born of Him."

These are the reminders from John to those who are trying to walk as Jesus walked. Don't be confused by those who claim to have found something new. You know the truth. Love your brother; watch out for the world. Live confidently, but be prepared for deceivers and hardship. These reminders are simple and direct, and of great use to us in continuing to walk in the light as He is in the light.