

1 John 2. 24-29. Bethesda Bible Teaching. 21 February 2010.

Our reading for this morning consists of 1st John chapter 2, verses 24 to 29.

*As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If that which you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.
And this is the promise which He has promised us—eternal life.
These things I wrote to you concerning those who would deceive you.
But as for you, the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true, and is no lie, and just as it has taught you, abide in Him.
And now, little children, abide in Him, that, when¹ He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink in shame from Him at His coming.
If you know that He is righteous, you know (a different word, possibly carrying the sense here 'you can rest assured') that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.*

First, I need to pick up the threads from where David left off last week. It is clear from verses 22 and 23 that the false teachers entertained very low ideas of the status and dignity of our Lord Jesus. In His (our Lord's) own words, recorded, as it happens, in *verses 22 and 23* of John 5, they failed to honour the Son as they made out that they honoured the Father.²

I am reminded of the story told of an encounter between Athanasius, the Bishop of Alexandria, and the Roman Emperor Constantine I during the fourth century. For much of his life, Constantine, the first so-called Christian Emperor, inclined to the view that our Lord Jesus was in some sense less divine than the Father. 'On one occasion', so the story runs, 'Athanasius, the valiant defender of the truth as to Christ's equality with the Father, was summoned before one of the emperors [Constantine], who had given his ... son [one Constantius] the honour of sharing the imperial power, and of sitting with himself upon the throne. Athanasius bowed low before the Emperor, but utterly ignored his son. "What!", exclaimed the angry ruler, "do you pretend to honour us while dishonouring and paying no attention to our son, whom we have made the sharer of our authority?" "Do not you," answered Athanasius, "profess to honour God the Father, while refusing to give the same honour to His coequal Son?"³ Good point, brave sir.

John could see the distinct danger that some at least of his readers might be side-tracked from the faith, and led away by the false teachers from the truth concerning the Person of Christ. It was to counter such that, in part at least, the apostle had been moved to take up his pen.⁴

In our section, John notes two principal safeguards against the errors being promulgated by such men – two resources which the Lord provided to enable each of His people – and I have my eye on the title advertised for this morning's talk – to stay 'on course as a Christian'.⁵

In this passage, John makes two main points – heralded in each case by his 'as for you'.⁶ First, 'as for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning' in verse 24, and, second, 'as for you, the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you' in verse 27. This two-fold 'as for you' stands over against the false teachers – the mini-antichrists – about whom, as John tells us, he had been writing ... especially in verses 18 to 23.

First, he exhorts his readers to let that which they had 'heard from the beginning' abide in them. Last week, David drew our attention to the word 'denies', which, as he pointed out, dominates the verses immediately before our section today. I hardly need tell you that the word which dominates our passage is the word 'abide', occurring, as it does, six times in just five verses,⁷ referring here, as it often does, to the Christian's experience and enjoyment of his or her close and intimate spiritual fellowship with both the Father and with the Lord Jesus.

Thank God then that He has not left His people without adequate resources to deliver them from being led astray. But the apostle knew well that, if his readers were ever to be delivered from the many errors abroad, two things at least must '*abide in them*': first, that which they 'had heard from the beginning', and, second, the 'anointing' which they had 'received'.

First then, verse 24 – which is linked closely to the preceding verses by the repeated mention of 'the Father' and 'the Son'. There can be no doubt that fellowship with both the Father and the Son must rank as one of the greatest blessings which the believer can ever enjoy. But such communion requires, John tells his readers, that they 'let that abide in' them which they 'heard from the beginning'. In other words, that they adhere closely to the original apostolic message as it was delivered to them when they first became Christians – as opposed to that which many of them may have been hearing more recently from the false teachers. That original message was God's unchangeable and all-embracing truth, and anything added to it was therefore, by definition, error and falsehood.

We ought perhaps distinguish John's description in verses 13 and 14 of our Lord Jesus as 'Him who is from the beginning', an expression which emphasizes His pre-existence and eternal deity, from John's words here, 'that ...

which you heard from the beginning', namely, from the time when they first encountered and believed the apostolic gospel. And this same unchanging message must 'abide', must 'remain', must be given a home in their hearts and lives.

By all means, as Christians, they could – and should – be ever learning more of its depths and its riches, but under no circumstances were they to move away from what they had heard at the first. There was no scope for altering or varying the truth concerning the Lord Jesus. They were to hold God's revelation continually in their minds and to let it affect the way they lived. I have no doubt that John would have sounded a loud 'Amen' to his fellow apostle Paul's exhortation to the church at Colosse, 'let the word of Christ *dwell* in you richly'.⁸ And John himself had, just a few verses before, paid tribute to the 'young men', in his own words, that 'you are strong, and *the word of God abides in you*, and you have overcome the evil one'.⁹

But, having mentioned briefly a most serious consequence of being deceived by the 'lie' peddled by the false teachers – namely, of losing, not only the Son, but, because in denying the Son one loses the only way to the Father, of losing the Father also¹⁰ ... having then mentioned briefly a consequence of being deceived by the 'lie', the apostle reminds his readers of a glorious consequence of holding fast to the true gospel which they had embraced. For, John assures them, if that which they had heard from the beginning 'abides' in them, they, for their part, will 'abide' in the Son and in the Father – they will continue to enjoy intimate fellowship with them both.

And more also ... they will enjoy the fulfilment of our Lord's promise – recorded on numerous occasions by John in his gospel – that to all those who believed in Him He would give eternal life – both as a present possession, and, in its fullness, as an unending experience in glory ... knocking spots off anything the false teachers had on offer. 'This is the promise which He has promised us', the apostle says, 'eternal life'. Without a doubt, one of the greatest of all promises from *the* greatest of all Promisers.

'These things I wrote to you', John adds, 'concerning those who would deceive you'. He had earlier accurately labelled such men as 'antichrists',¹¹ and now exposes their true intention and purpose, namely, as he says, 'to seduce you and to lead you astray'. For, although they had renounced any pretence of believing the apostolic gospel, and had formally separated themselves from the orthodox Christian community, they were still actively and aggressively – and indeed, with my eye on the tense John uses, still continually – engaged in attempting by all means to lead the believers away from the apostolic faith and fellowship.

Having appealed in the previous verses to the original and pure Christian message which his readers had 'heard' and embraced, the apostle now appeals in verse 27 to the indwelling Holy Spirit which they had 'received' at that time. John's point is simple. 'I have been warning you', he is saying, 'against those who are intent on deceiving you with their claims to secret and superior "knowledge", but, since the "anointing" (which, along with David, I take to be a graphic description of the Holy Spirit) ... since the "anointing" abides in you, you have no need of any such supposed spiritual supplements!'

If, that is, John's readers are, according to verse 24, to 'let' the truth of God 'abide' in them, the apostle assures them in verse 27 that the Spirit of God already does, and always will.

It goes without saying that John's description of the Holy Spirit, both here and back in verse 20, as the 'anointing' has its background in the Old Testament practice of anointing prophets, priests and kings with oil when consecrating them to God's service. Indeed, I note that, when Samuel poured the flask of oil on Saul's head, he declared that 'the Spirit of the Lord will come upon you', and, again, when he anointed young David, we read that 'Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward'.

Our Lord Himself was, of course, 'anointed ... with the Holy Spirit',¹² and so it is that *the Anointed One* – 'the Holy One' of verse 20¹³ – Himself is the Anointer.¹⁴

And the 'Anointing' received by the Christian is, John says, 'true and is no lie'. Indeed 'it' – or better 'He' – certainly is ... for, if we have it right, John is referring to the One of whom our Lord spoke three times – as recorded in John's gospel – as 'the Spirit of truth'.¹⁵

And the apostle stresses, not only *the fact* of their anointing with the Holy Spirit, but *the permanence* of that anointing. For the Anointing which they had long before 'received from Him (the Lord Jesus)' was *still 'abiding'* in them – according to our Lord's own promise recorded in John 14 verses 16 and 17, 'I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Counsellor, that He may abide with you forever ... He dwells *with you* and will be *in you*'.

Indeed, during the same so-called 'Upper Room Discourse', the Saviour promised that, consequent upon His glorification, the 'Spirit of truth' would do at least three things. He 'will', Jesus said to the apostles, 'bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you',¹⁶ ... He 'will teach you all things',¹⁷ and 'will guide you into all the truth',¹⁸ ... and He 'will announce to you things to come'.¹⁹ I guess that, in one sense, John's own writings can be seen as something of a fulfilment of these promises ... with his gospel's strong emphasis on those things which Jesus had

said when with the apostles ... with his epistles (including this one, of course) conveying the Holy Spirit's teaching and guidance into God's truth ... and with his Book of the Revelation focussing very much on 'things to come'.

But here 'the Anointing' – the Holy Spirit – is said to teach, not the apostles, but, as John says, 'you' – to teach all those who are indwelt by the Spirit.

When the apostle says, 'you have no need that anyone should teach you ... His anointing teaches you about all things', John clearly *doesn't* mean that Christians have no need to be taught by those gifted by the Triune God to do just that!²⁰ Indeed, if John's readers had no need of 'teaching', why ever, we would need to ask, was John writing to them. For, as we know only too well, we all need help from the teaching gifts given to the church to instruct us further into a clearer and fuller understanding of what God has said in His word.

So what then does John mean when he speaks as he does? Well, in context he is writing concerning the Person and glory of our Lord Jesus. And, concerning the Saviour, John is saying that his readers do not need to be taught anything new or novel ... anything beyond what they had heard 'from the beginning'. John has his eye, of course, on the claims of the false teachers, who professed to have access to 'new light', to secret so-called 'mysteries', which they insisted could lift men higher than ever the message proclaimed by the apostles, and which was available only to the specially initiated – certainly not to common orthodox Christians.

'Rubbish', John would say, 'for it is you who have the Holy Spirit, who enables you to discern and appreciate spiritual truth²¹ – and, in particular, spiritual truth concerning the person of the Lord Jesus ... that He is the Son of God and 'come in the flesh'. And, because the Anointing – the Holy Spirit – 'testifies' of Him,²² 'glorifies Him' and 'takes of His and declares it to you'²³ – because the Holy Spirit makes Him precious to you ... then 'abide in Him' – the Lord Jesus – continue in fellowship with Him.

And this indeed with a view to the time of His 'appearing' – His manifestation – to the time of His coming.

John writes in verse 28, 'Little children, abide in Him (that is, of course, 'you abide in Him') that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink in shame from Him at His coming'.

I know that some have made great play of the change *from* John's 'you abide' to his 'that ... we may have confidence and not shrink in shame', and have taken the apostle as attempting to motivate his readers to faithfulness by telling them that, as their spiritual father, *he* would suffer loss at the Judgement Seat if *they* did not continue in a consistent Christian profession and walk.

Personally, I do not see anything of that here. I note, for example, that John says in verse 11 of the next chapter, 'this is the message that *you* heard from the beginning, that *we* should love one another' – where John certainly does not mean that *they* had heard that *he* should love other Christians.

For my part, I understand the apostle simply to say that, if his readers heeded his exhortation – holding fast to the truth that Jesus was the Christ and the Son of God (as witnessed to by both the apostles and the Holy Spirit), then, when He, the Lord Jesus, appears, they would then have neither cause for any reserve (the word translated 'have confidence' implying 'freedom of speech') nor occasion to shrink back from Him in shame – as would any who dishonoured Him by imbibing the false teaching concerning His person.

Not, I have to tell you, that I contemplate my 'manifestation' before my Lord's Judgement Seat at all lightly.²⁴ I have many times pondered the opening words of verse 3 of James Montgomery's hymn – number 599 in Hymns of Light and Love – 'How shall I meet those eyes?'²⁵

Oh, to live in such a way now that I will have no cause to feel any shame at all 'before Him' when I 'stand' just there to give account of my service down here, and to 'receive back' for all I have 'done in the body' – whether good or good-for-nothing.

My reading concludes, 'If you know that *He* is righteous, you can rest assured that *everyone* who practices righteousness is born of Him'. But my time is gone. Not that this is any great loss, for I think we can well regard this verse as introducing a new section – which runs down almost to the close of verse 10 of the following chapter.

The main thrust of that section, as we will doubtless find out over the coming weeks, is that of the practice of – or 'doing' – righteousness, as opposed to the practice of – or 'doing' – sin or lawlessness.²⁶ I can still remember a colleague in the States once saying of those got excited at the time of their conversion, 'I don't care how high they jump – I want to see how straight they walk once they hit the ground'. I suspect the apostle John would have said 'Amen' to that.

Footnotes

¹ The literal translation 'if' does not imply any doubt as to Christ's return. It may well simply mark the time as unfixed and as therefore possibly coming within the lifetime of John's readers.

² John 5. 23.

³ H. A. Ironside, *John* pages 114-15.

⁴ 1 John 2. 26.

⁵ 'Staying on course as a Christian' is the heading given to this section by David Jackman in 'The Bible Speaks Today' series.

⁶ More literally, 'You'. Hence, 'You, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning' in verse 24, and 'you, the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you' in verse 27.

⁷ Out of its 108 occurrences in the New Testament, it is found 66 times in the writings of John; 40 times in his gospel, 23 times in 1 John, and three times in 3 John.

⁸ Col. 3. 16.

⁹ 1 John 2. 14.

¹⁰ 1 John 2. 23.

¹¹ 1 John 2. 18.

¹² Acts 10. 38; Luke 4. 17-18..

¹³ It is more than likely that the Lord Jesus is 'the Holy One' of 1 John 2. 10. See John 6. 69 and Rev. 3. 7.

¹⁴ Acts 2. 25-33.

¹⁵ John 14. 17; 15. 26; 16. 13.

¹⁶ John 14. 26

¹⁷ John 14. 26.

¹⁸ John 16. 13.

¹⁹ John 16. 13.

²⁰ 1 Cor. 12. 28; Eph. 4. 11; 1 Cor. 12. 8-9.

²¹ 1 Cor. 2. 14-15.

²² John 15. 26.

²³ John 16. 14.

²⁴ 2 Cor. 5. 10; cf. Rom. 14. 10.

²⁵ 'The Lord Himself shall come', James Montgomery. Also in *The Believers' Hymnbook*, number 272, verse 4. See <http://www.stempublishing.com/hymns/biographies/montgomery.html>.

²⁶ What Robert Law called, 'a life of truceless antagonism to sin', *The Tests of Life*, page 216.