

4,23,26 1 Jn. 2, The Conditions of the Church and the Intent of John's Letters

Before we move further into 1 Jn. 2, I just want to remind us that the *atmosphere* of John's letters is the warfare John is waging with certain religious movements that had infiltrated the Church and were sabotaging the fellowship (the abiding), that all believers need to have with the Lord in order to advance spiritually.

We've already seen some of the ways this war of deception has damaged the Church, but just to make sure we have the right frame of reference to be able to interpret some of the more controversial passages that are going to come up, I want to spend a few minutes reviewing the warfare we face as children of God and how those battles and temptations can be overcome.

We have to step behind the visible; behind the scenes. We can't understand what's happening in this world by 'observation' alone. All that takes place in the visible world has its source in the invisible world. Everything the Lord is doing and everything the enemy does is motivated by their commitment to their purpose.

Satan is aware that his survival depends not on preventing people from being saved (which he's all for, and will do what he can to make sure it doesn't happen); but he knows that his *ultimate* survival depends on preventing Christians from becoming overcomers, because, as we saw in numerous passages over the last few years, it will be *that* group of believers, the overcoming remnant of the Church Age, that will be God's instrument for casting Satan out of heaven; just a few examples that we've touched on in the past;

(1 Cor. 6:3) Don't you know that we will judge angels?

(Rom. 13:20) The God of peace will crush Satan under your feet.

(Rev 12:9) The great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

Now, what did our Lord Himself tell us would be the greatest danger we would face in the final generation of this Age?

(Matt. 24:4) – Take heed that no one deceive you. . .

I won't take time to break down all the passages in John's letters that confirm this emphasis; for now, I'll just cite some of them to show how consistently John emphasizes this. All of these are addressing deception in terms of hypocrisy, false teaching, or imitation.

(1 Jn. 2:22) Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

(1 Jn. 2:26) These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you.

(1 Jn. 3:7) Little children, let no one deceive you.

(1 Jn. 4:1) Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

(1 Jn. 5:20) We know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true.

(1 Jn. 5:21) Little children, keep yourselves from idolatry.

Another New Testament author, Jude, also saw what was happening and actually switched gears in the middle of his epistle to address it;

(Jude vs. 3-4) While I (intended) to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to exhort you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation.

And in 3 Jn. vs. 3-4, John wrote: For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

John's greatest joy in relation to those he had instructed is that they were walking in the truth. As we saw in our study of the gospel of John – Truth means "full reality."

Throughout 1st John, he will show that when a person claims one thing but lives something else, people may be impressed with what they see, the person's *reputation* may be exceptional, but God sees a misrepresentation, He sees the unreality that is there. These people are not walking in the Truth, no matter how good the outward appearance looks to those around them. This can be true of individuals or churches. God desires truth in the inward parts (Psalm 51:6) – He wants honesty, transparency, and reality. Anything that is *not those* things is deception.

Satan's war against us takes many forms, but ultimately deception through imitation is what rises to the top of Satan's agenda. At the end, the world will be presented with an imitation Christ, just as at this time in history, the Church is being presented with an imitation Christianity.

So, the question becomes, do we know that? Can we see what forms these deceptions are taking, are they clear to us? And are we scripturally and spiritually equipped to discern and withstand them?

Even though the enemy deceives the nations and hates all of humanity; his primary targets are those who are moving toward spiritual adulthood – they are the only ones in this universe that pose a genuine threat to Satan's position and power. If he can keep Christians from growing, he can remove the threat of his being cast out of heaven.

Satan's energy is directed, more than anywhere else, at either keeping believers in a place of spiritual infancy or at deceiving them into spending their lives in something either less or other than God's plan for the Church.

This not only explains why life is so incredibly difficult for growing Christians, but it also explains why the majority of believers are involved in alternate versions of Christianity which have a "form of godliness" but are not in God's plan, and why most Christians are perfectly satisfied living on the milk of God's Word.

As long as they have clearly defined religious obligations and duties that allow them to live a life of external religious service, they are satisfied with the illusion

that their understanding of God's Word and His purpose for us is sufficient to advance their spiritual growth.

Satan has been remarkably successful in accomplishing these things. As a whole, the Church is Laodicean, just as the scriptures said it would be, and has no clue as to their actual spiritual condition. Sardis and Laodicea are expanding. Philadelphia, as representing God's remnant, is shrinking and increasingly coming under assault from all sides.

This is what John was trying to prevent. John told his readers that “. . . there are *many* “antichrists” (imitation Jesus's) among us” and this began in the early church. It's reaching its consummation in the final generation. So, if we can understand what fellowship and abiding with the Father, Son and Spirit are from John's perspective, if we can understand why it's impossible to grow unto full stature without those things, then maybe we can avoid being taken in by the massive variety of deceptions and temptations that are currently flooding Western Christianity.

Again, we have to keep these realities in mind if we're going to make sense of what John is warning about. Why is Satan doing what he's doing? Why is he so obsessed with an imitation Christianity? What is motivating the intensification of his wrath as this Age draws to a close? And most important of all – what are we personally doing about it?

Are we aware of the “what” and the “why” behind the enemy's tactics and warfare?

John wrote his letters to expose and define deception, in order to provide protection against what is obviously becoming a much more powerful and subtle deception than anything which has ever existed before. If possible, the elect *will* be deceived if they aren't growing in knowledge and becoming increasingly skilled in their spiritual discernment of what is true and what is false.

Men like John and Jude (and Paul near the end of his life when he sent his letters to Timothy and Titus) wrote in a way that could almost be interpreted as panicking, but these men had way too much faith in God to go there. However, if those same

men were alive today, watching what's happened to the church now, panic might be a possibility; and most believers who are living in this generation are like "the frogs in boiling water" illustration; it's happened so slowly and subtly that most are not even aware of how far it's gone over the last 2000 years.

Ok, point being that John's letters are about recovery and prevention of further loss. If we can keep John's emphasis and goal in mind, along with the individual passages we study that apply that goal in his generation, certain passages will make more sense than they would if they were in a different context.

Before we focus on the individual verses, one final overall theme that needs to be looked at is what the Bible has to say about recovery in a day of declension or falling away. John's situation was only the beginning of two millennia full of loss and recovery – repeated thousands of times. This was also true of Israel in the Old Testament. We can see over and over again how Israel (both northern and southern kingdoms) would start out well, then gradually fall away, and then God would raise up prophets to bring about recovery and awakening to restore the spiritual life of the nation to what it had been meant to be from the beginning.

The early letters in the New Testament, through the apostles, laid the foundation of what Christianity, what the Church of the living God, was meant to be. And as we see in the book of Acts, God revealed to us the history of the Church in the first century, which started out pure, undefiled, and theologically sound, and then gradually moved into what necessitated John's and Jude's epistles as a call to return to the truth, the reality, of the Church. The Church was meant to be the embodiment of Christ Himself continuing, by the power of the indwelling Spirit, what He had begun in the time of His life and ministry recorded in the Gospels. In Acts 1:1-2 Luke wrote;

"The former account I made, O Theophilus (the gospel of Luke), of all that Jesus *began* both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up . . ." then in (Eph. 4:11-12), Paul wrote: "He Himself (then) gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the (continuing) building up of the body of Christ."

The work of Christ involved the revelation of the Father through the body of the Son (“If you’ve seen Me, you’ve seen the Father”, John 14:9). This was to be continued corporately through the Church. Christ is now corporate- as Head and Body of a new humanity, with the mission of bringing about the revealing of the Son through the many-membered body of the Church (“We who live are always delivered to death (to the self-life) for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus may be manifested (revealed) through our mortal flesh (2 Cor. 4:11).

Christ has never stopped revealing God visibly through Man, He only moved from doing so individually to doing so corporately. The Church has never been intended to be anything more or less than the corporate expression of the indwelling Christ.

Christianity, on the other hand as it exists today, is simply man’s best attempt to do what only God can do and as such, it becomes an imitation rather than the reality. People do not see Christ corporately manifested through our mortal flesh, they see Christians attempting to duplicate what the Bible says should be happening, but which can *only* happen if it’s being done by Christ Himself. We’ve gone from Christ *continuing* His *own* work in this world through willing and equipped vessels- to WWJD.

Now, let’s take a few minutes on the “how” of bringing about the recovery of lost vision, then when we see John’s approach to this in his letters, we’ll see the way John was led to bring about a spiritual recovery in the Church near the end of the first century when Laodicea was becoming the most visible form of Christianity.

Knowing those things will help us discover and understand ways in which we can be a part of bringing about a recovery in the Church in our generation.

Beyond our personal commitment to spiritual growth through study and prayer, our “vocational” responsibility is to bring Christ to the lost and enable our brothers and sisters in Christ to know God’s means of spiritual advance and, as we’ll see in John, to be protected from the enemy’s attempts to sabotage that advance.

Once we understand the specific factors that enable the recovery of the Lord’s people to God’s original thought for the Church, we can then pray and watch for opportunities to clarify God’s purpose to anyone who is in search mode.

When we studied 1 Cor. 2:14-16, we saw that Paul was telling the Corinthians (and us) that it's impossible to distinguish between an imitation Christianity and the Truth by using our own resources alone; our observation, our mind and our powers of interpretation and discovery. The human spirit under the guidance of the Holy Spirit is our only hope of seeing the invisible – of seeing imitation vs. reality.

Just to put us all on the same page, I'm going to repeat an explanation I gave about this in the past. Once that's clear, we'll be able to see why John wrote what he did as a defense against the "antichrist" spirit of His day, because it definitely applies to our time also. Ok, here's what we saw a few studies ago on this:

Think of how *you* decide the truth or genuineness of something or someone (a person, a church, a book, an organization, or whatever you feel needs some examination). Is this the process you go through?

First, you use your eyes to observe anything that might give you a clue. You look at what's happening around you, at what the people are doing- and you listen to what's being said to see if it matches the Bible. Then you combine all the information you've gathered and your brain goes into action sorting everything out – the good from the bad, the baby from the bathwater, the right from the wrong. Maybe you even take some time to think about all of it, or take a break and then go back and have another look, because you want to be thorough and you know that first impressions can be wrong, so you wait awhile, do some more examination and comparison in the scriptures. You might even talk to others and get their opinion to see if they have any insights, anything you might have missed. You do all these things before making a final decision about whether to commit to this.

If that's your process, then you're likely to be deceived. That's the same process an unbeliever uses for literally everything in their lives. It's also the process used by most Christians about all those things I mentioned in the beginning – churches, pastors, books, organizations, movements, etc.

If you're thinking – well, if *that's* not the way we discern, how do we do it?

The natural man, the Adamic race, is soul and body. The five senses of the body feed information to the soul which does the thinking and deciding. But anyone who is born again, born into the new race of humanity, is not just soul and body – he’s spirit, soul and body (in that order). He has an organ that he never had before; the human spirit indwelt by the Holy Spirit from Whom the human spirit receives all spiritual information and discernment.

Paul says it’s impossible (not difficult; not unlikely; “impossible”) to determine spiritual deception using the mind, emotions, and our five senses;

(1 Cor. 2:14) The natural man (literally, the “soulical” or “soul-based” man) does not receive the things of the Spirit of God . . . nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

We are “spirit” beings now and are to live as spiritual beings.

(John 3:6) That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

Flesh is what we were; it’s not what we are now. I realize that learning to live in the Spirit is something that takes time, but without it, Christianity becomes what it is now – a soul-based religious organization of Man.

This is why, in the end times (our times), Christians will be “. . . ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth (the knowledge of reality)” (2 Tim. 3:7). The only way to be fully protected from deception is if the spirit, not the soul, is doing the examining of whatever has come into our lives. Most believers aren’t even sure what the spirit is, let alone how it functions or why it’s meant to have dominion over the soul. So, it’s unlikely that their “spiritual senses” are going to be trained through practice to mature spiritual discernment.

The reason contemporary churches are what they are has nothing to do with a lack of sincerity or commitment – or any intention to deceive people. They simply don’t understand who we are and why we’re here.

Most of them are really nice people; they are moral, genuine. They're just living in a Matrix. They belong another world, another humanity, but they don't know what that means. They can express a perfect "form of godliness", but not Christ Himself – only Christ can do that.

Now, to deepen that a bit, listen to these comments by Sparks;

The Church, as the body of Christ has been brought into association with the Lord for the purposes of spiritual interpretation and administration. There is all the difference between natural judgement and spiritual judgement, through spiritual understanding brought in to check, arrest, and bring back those departures, declensions which are the result of the imposition of the mind of man into the things of the Lord. Look at the history of the things which bear the Lord's Name, and you will see quite clearly that the departure from the full thought, the original intent, of the Lord, and subsequent failure and weakness on the part of the people of God, has this one thing as its cause; that man, even with every good intention and desire to further the interests of the Lord, has sought to carry on God's work by his own consecrated judgement, understanding, thoughts, ideas and intentions. And all unconsciously and imperceptibly, the Lord, as to the immediate and direct government of His own affairs, has been edged out, set back. In the course of time Christian leaders have taken His place.

Now, for us, in 2026, the problem is being able to discern that which is genuinely of the Lord as over against that which, by all outward appearances, looks exactly like what the Bible seems to identify as true Christianity, but instead, it may only be a very close approximation. It is not what God is after, but it *looks* like it is.

There are many examples of this in the Bible because the enemy is very good at it.

(Rev. 3:1) "I know your works, that you have a name, a reputation, that you are alive, but you are dead.

By reputation within the church and also within the community surrounding the church, Sardis was perfect – anyone examining it for defects would have come to the conclusion that it was "alive" spiritually. But the eyes of our Lord, as a flame of

fire, saw through the outward to the inward and determined that Sardis was spiritually dead.

(Matt. 23:27-28) You are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones . . . Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy.

In Matthew's case, the Lord was exposing the Pharisees' false Judaism; in the case of Sardis, He was exposing Christians who had created their own version of Christianity, but the underlying principle is the same. The enemy knows that the way to deceive people is to give them what they want. That's why, no matter what context or generation we're dealing with, the issue becomes embracing that which is popular in order fit in with what the majority believes is true. But as with Jesus and the apostles, the more people began to understand what these servants of God were telling them, the more resistant they became and the less popular our Lord and the apostles became.

Following a message Jesus gave in Capernaum, this was the response;

(John 6:60 & 66) Many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, "This is a difficult saying; who can understand it? . . ." From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.

As Paul grew in his understanding of what the Church really is, and began fully teach it in the churches he had planted throughout Asia minor, this is what happened;

(2 Tim. 1:13-15) Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me . . . That which was committed to you, keep hold of by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. (Because) this you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me.

Even if we overlook how that must have *felt* to Paul, because it had to be somewhat traumatic; knowing that the more he understood about true Christianity, and the more he taught what the Lord was showing him, he had to watch the overwhelming majority of Christians in Asia walk away from him.

What had happened to them? The Truth had been slowly, subtly replaced by an imitation that had become the popular form of Christianity of that generation. And because spiritual advance on the part of the Christians had ground to a halt, they did not have the spiritual discernment needed to identify what was taking place.

The Bible warns us in numerous places that the form of Christianity which will be popular in the final generation will be significantly more deceptive and outwardly beautiful to those who embrace it than anything that has been developed before now.

What those who have eyes to see what's happening now, is God's final shaking of the heavenlies spiritually (the place of *our* citizenship) to determine and solidify the two existent and remaining groups of Christians – spiritual vs. carnal / growing vs. stagnated. A remnant will be spiritually growing; the majority will be playing Church within the context of that which is popular depending on their personality and religious bent – i.e. Charismatic, Legalistic, Political, etc.

As this author explained it;

The peril or snare will be cunningly and ingeniously adapted to the 'prey.' What would capture some would make no appeal to others. The most spiritual will be presented with what appears to be most spiritual. Our particular temperament will be our peculiar danger. We shall have to, ever and always, be governed by principle, and not by feelings, preferences, arguments, or natural appeal. Intellectual pursuits, emotional ecstasies, activity-gratifications must be suspected.

That's where we are; and you and I have to decide whether we are willing (or not) to do as Paul warned Timothy, and as Jude warned in his letter – for the sake of the testimony of Christ and the formation of our Lord in His remnant, will we commit to hold fast to the Truth and do all we can to understand what the Church is regardless of whether “all in Asia abandon us”?

Is this overdramatized? Is it exaggerated? Not according to the prophetic warnings we're given in the scriptures regarding the challenges facing the final generation of the Church, let alone the warnings given about what this planet will be

experiencing once that final separation within the Church reaches its climax and we are removed. I don't think all of this is exaggerated at all; I believe that what's happening in the Church now, and what's coming to the world soon, are extremely serious.

It's actually possible that the current lackadaisical attitude of the Church toward a deep commitment to hold to the honor and desire of the Lord is one of the major reasons the enemy has found such fertile ground in the Body of Christ to deceive us.

The prophetic picture of how bad it is was painted for us 2000 years ago by the apostles who were allowed, by revelation, to see our time in history.

Right after the phrase "We have need of nothing" in Rev. 3, the Lord said, "(You) *do not know* that you are . . . blind . . ." The key phrase being "do not know". Nothing in all the Bible better describes what the scriptures tell us is the primary spiritual condition of the Church in this generation than that phrase, "(You simply) do not know".

One thing that is amazing about this is that right after the Lord made it clear that Laodicea is both the final Church of this age in terms of a majority, and that it also represents the worst in terms of the spiritual blindness of any Church, He turns to them in Grace and offers them the highest honor any believer can have in the Age to come- for those who heed His warning and accept His offer;

(Rev. 3:20-22) I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

He's offering to raise the lowest to the highest. No Christian, actually, no creation of God, can occupy a higher place in the Lord's eternal kingdom than that of sharing Christ's throne. That is pure grace; and it shows the true heart of Christ in a way that should fill all of us with both wonder and gratitude.

I hope everyone can see how indispensable understanding and experiencing the difference between soul and spirit is; how different natural, intellectual, observation is versus spiritual discernment. It may not have been this important in past generations within the Church Age, but it definitely is now.

As one author put it;

This is *not* to be an issue of judging one another, this is an issue of personal responsibility coupled with the ability to see, avoid and warn of the dangers. There is such a thing as a people being clear in spiritual perception, who are very clear as to how the Lord would do things, and how the Lord would not do things; *when* the Lord would do things, and when the Lord would *not* do things. That is discriminating between well-intentioned activities of His people *for* Him, as over against what is the pure, original, immediate mind of God about His own things being done *by* Him.

Peter's description of the suffering remnant's response to the Lord's return is in 1 Pet. 1:6-7; "Now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The phrase "*at the revelation of Jesus Christ*" refers to our face-to-face meeting with the Lord when He returns for us. At that moment, we will have been either a part of Philadelphia (extremely weak, but holding to the Truth for the sake of Christ's testimony) or we will be Laodicean (blind and self-assured).

And since no two people are alike, this is a spectrum. There are Laodiceans who are hard-core, fully rebellious; and on the other side there are people like Paul. We all fall somewhere in between, so our experiences will vary. In Mark 4 Jesus' parables describe a wide variety of outcomes – He talked about different kinds of seeded ground, and about 30-fold, 60-fold and 100-fold. Paul is 100-fold, I am not. I don't think I'm 30 or 60 either, but none of us see's what God sees, so I'll leave that with Him.

And everything we've looked at up to this point, as well as what we will see as we watch John make distinctions between true and false throughout his letters in the way *he* words this; all is designed to equip us and educate us so that what Peter describes will be what we experience.

To close, I just want to make sure, after all these warnings and exhortations, that we know we have hope and a future. So, I'm going end with a brief overview of the characteristics of those who are part of God's overcoming remnant at the end.

I can't take time now to look at all we've seen in the past about this group, but I can point out the primary character traits the scriptures tell us they will have.

First, many of the overcomers in the Bible have historical patterns of personal failure, but even though all of them (and all of us) grow at different paces, moving forward characterized all of them. They didn't let their failures prevent them from continuing to learn, to grow, to hunger for more of Christ and to increasingly reject the pull of the world and the compromise of Christianity to entrap them.

At the end of their lives, they were still standing. They may have been broken and defeated a million times, but in the end, like Jacob, they were ". . . leaning on their staff and worshipping God."

(Matt. 5:3-6) Blessed are the poor in spirit, (those who realize their own spiritual poverty), for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.

(Lk. 9:48) He who is least among you is the one who is great.

Finally (Isa. 66:2) This is the man to whom I will look and honor; he who is humble and of a broken spirit, and who trembles at My word.

Now, let's get personal with this.

Let's say, hypothetically, that you are involved in a church, or a relationship, that appears to be a mixture of good and bad theology. As mentioned earlier, we aren't called to judge people and we aren't called to confront or correct everyone we

meet. Our first priority should be to establish the kind of relationships that show our love for others. Then, maybe, if the Lord makes it obvious to us, we can offer what we know.

When the Lord spoke with the woman at the well, He didn't start with, "You are off track in more ways than I can even count". He started by asking for some water; and then by offering living water. He started with compassion, not correction.

For us, it could take weeks, months or longer to develop the kind of relationship with someone (saved or unsaved) that opens them up to *us*, not just to what we know. The bottom-line is that *how* we approach someone is just as important as what we say. First, we have to build trust; then we might have the opportunity to "speak the truth in love".

Until you're convinced that whoever you're trying to reach sees you as safe and as someone who genuinely cares for them personally, I'd let *everything* they say slide – just smile, pray and keep building the relationship. At some point, love will give truth an open door.

If we start growing impatient, feeling like *not* saying something means we are unwilling to defend the Lord, just remember two things – first, He doesn't need our help and second, the *way* we defend Him, the timing and the manner of our defense, is just as important as the defense itself. If *we* decide the when and how of this, it's likely that we will just mess things up.

I hate to end our study on a cliché', but it fits, because those we are developing relationships with are people, not projects. So, here's the cliché – "*They won't care how much you know, until they know how much you care.*" We've got to keep our priorities straight and wait for the Lord's timing and wisdom before we say anything to anyone; especially if that person is a brother or sister in Christ.

So, show them that they mean something to you; that you care about them. There's no point correcting someone until you sense they are open because of what they've seen in you, and because of what they've come to know about the relationship you have with them. That's when they are most likely to genuinely listen to what you have to say.