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We are going through John's first letter to the followers of Jesus' teachings in his generation. This old man has not lost any of his "thunder"! He is excitedly encouraging Christians in their journey life, helping correct errors in understanding and the application of God's law, reminding them (and us) how to live in a meaningful relationship with Father God.

This week our Prime Minister offered us five tests for Brexit. Any deal with the EU she said, **must**:

- respect the result of the referendum
- work and not break down
- protect jobs and security
- be "consistent with the kind of country we want to be" - modern, outward-looking and tolerant
- bring the country together.

Listening to her speak, I thought she had taken it straight from Jesus' manifesto for His Church!

The Church (we the people, not the building nor the institution) whom Jesus will take into the Father's kingdom, should meet the following tests:

The church **must**:

- respect the result of His sacrifice on the cross by which He defeated death, the outcome of which is His resurrection.
- accept His resurrection, the power of which works without fault, because the Holy Spirit has been sent to **make** it work.
- protect the integrity and security of the work of the Church: witnessing & prayer
- be "consistent with the kind of Church Jesus wants us to be" - relevant in each generation (*modern*), missions-minded (*outward-looking*) and loving our neighbour as ourselves (*tolerant*).
- keep the Church in demonstrable unity.

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Five tests which benchmark the visible character of the Church.

Over the past two weeks, we have examined three tests which John says establishes the core of our Christian faith, three tests which demonstrate whether we are following and living by Truth, or untruth: the **moral** test which examines our **true** relationship with God (obedience to His Law), the **social** test which examines our **true** relationship with our neighbour (loving them as ourselves), and the **doctrinal** test which examines the extent to which our lives are influenced by the world around us, and the extent to which the message of **antichrists** has distorted Truth and introduced falsehood in our way of thinking. The battle for **doctrine** is the battle for our minds, because obedience and disobedience are wilful decisions which take place in the mind.

In the closing verses of chapter 2<sup>1</sup>, John explains **how** we guard against these twin deceptions, the influence of the world and the teachings of **antichrists**. He uses the word **abide** (i.e. **live continuously in us**) repeatedly, to underscore the importance of the Word of God **making its home in us**. When Christ appears again, says John, we will not shrink from Him in shame, rather recognise Him with confidence.<sup>2</sup>

The Christian life is one of balancing between, living for today and looking out for tomorrow, and this tension is often misunderstood: there are people looking for tomorrow and not living for today, and there are people living for today, not anticipating tomorrow.

Isn't it incredible to contemplate with confidence, we have a tomorrow?! We must keep reminding ourselves, *Yesterday is history, today is reality, and for us Christians, tomorrow is hope made real!* John, the last of the living apostles, lives every moment of the day, anticipating Christ's return. And why not? After all he personally witnessed Jesus' ascension when two

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<sup>1</sup> verses 24-29

<sup>2</sup> 1 John 2:28

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angels said, *This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.*<sup>3</sup>

As it was with John, so it is with us. Letting the the Word of God **abide** in us, make its home in us, draws us into an exciting vision of the Christian life. We can be quite happy and content thinking about and anticipating being restored into God's eternal kingdom, but the problem is that we live in a world divided by contrasting and contradicting values, and we feel like the world does not understand us, so why bother influencing the world - its too much work!

I was in a coffee shop a few weeks ago and witnessed a customer engage the owner of the coffee shop in a dialogue about religion. The customer asked the coffee shop owner, penetrating questions about her faith, and she replied with the detail being asked of her. *Why do you believe what you do? Does it make you feel better? Why do you follow this denomination and not another?* ... and so it went for for about 20 minutes, at which time the customer said, *Well, I don't believe there is a God. Religion is cause of too many troubles in this world. I'm better off just as I am.* After all the trouble the coffee shop owner took to respond to the customer's questions, she felt like, why did I bother speaking to this person? It was too much work!

John explains. *The reason why the world does not know us (even not care for us, could not be bothered listening to us in a serious way), is that it does not know Him (God)*<sup>4</sup>.

The world has defined God for itself, and when their **god** does not behave and act they want, there is then, no **god**.

Its like looking at an expensive car, a Mercedes or BMW or similar and saying, *its actually a camel! It has four "legs" like a camel, people can sit on it*

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<sup>3</sup> Acts 1:10-11

<sup>4</sup> 1 John 3:1(b)

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*and go places. And when the camel does not behave they want it to, well the camel does not exist!*

This, says John, is **sin**. We have talked much about sin in the past, and the need to rethink for ourselves what this word really means. We are conditioned into thinking, **sin** is all about behaviour and deeds.

The real meaning of **sin** is this: **sin** *is an attitude towards life which:*

- 1) **disregards** *God's standard for living life, and*
- 2) **disrespects** *the authority of God. BOTH*

Behaviour and deeds is the **result of** living with disregard to God's law, and without respect to God's authority. Sin is literally, *law-less-ness*. If you hold the law-maker/giver in contempt, you won't accept His laws.

John reminds us, *the reason the Son of God (Jesus) appeared (came to us in human flesh) was to destroy the works of the devil.*<sup>5</sup>

John points out, *the devil has been sinning from the beginning*<sup>6</sup>. From the time satan asked us to exchange Truth (God's Word) for a lie, and deceived us into believing, it is better to believe the lie than live by the Truth, he has been sinning, i.e. he has an attitude problem: *satan*

- 1) **disregards** *God's standard for living life, and*
- 2) **disrespects** *the authority of God. BOTH.*

We have conditioned our minds to accept a caricature of **sin**: we believe **white lies** are acceptable. We believe a little bit of gossip and slander is not sin, as long as no one gets hurt. We believe a little bit of jealousy, envy and covetousness is OK as long as no one is deprived of anything. Believing this disregards God's laws **and** disrespect God's authority.

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<sup>5</sup> 1 John 3:8(b)

<sup>6</sup> 1 John 3:8(a)

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The question is this: can anyone, therefore, live the perfect life here on earth, without sin? Biographies of "saints" would have us believe they did, and that is why they are called saints.

The truth is, no one can live the perfect life here and now, on this earth; sin is all pervasive. John knows this very well, so his advice to us is, to **practice righteousness**. The word **practice** is the same as an athlete practicing their sport, vigorously, strenuously, incessantly, all without knowing whether they will win gold, silver, bronze or nothing! Yet the athlete persists in **practising** their sport.

In the concluding three verses of this section, John repeats **practice**, four times, contrasting those who **practice righteousness** i.e. living by God's laws and accepting His authority, with those who **practice sinning**, living outside of God's law and denying His authority.

Alfred Plummer<sup>7</sup>, a Church of England clergyman and a Bible scholar who died in 1926 at the age of 85, made this point very clearly, *'Although the (Christian) believer sometimes sins, yet not sin but opposition to sin is the ruling principle of (their) life. For whenever (they) sin and confesses it, (they) win forgiveness and continue to persevere with (their) self-purification; but the habitual sinner does none of these things, sin is his ruling principle and this could not be the case if (they) had ever really known Christ'*.

Plummer is correct: we will sin, but our life's energy should be exercised in opposition to sin. Sin should not be the ruling principle of our lives, but should or when we sin, we have a way forward. In chapter 1 John says, we should confess our sin, receive God's forgiveness, and continue to practice, living in opposition to sin.

We do not struggle alone with **sin**. We are a congregation, and much more than just a congregation; we are a living, vibrant community of

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<sup>7</sup> Plummer, Alfred (1841–1926), Church of England clergyman and Biblical scholar

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people who believe the above is possible when we **practice** living by God's laws and **practice** allowing God's authority in our lives.

Now the question to us this morning is this: will we be this living, vibrant community of people who are preparing and striving to pass John's three tests: the **moral** test of living in obedience to God's laws, the **social** test of loving our neighbour as ourselves, and the **doctrinal** test of not allowing the values of the world and the teachings of **antichrists**, to influence us?

We are God's treasured community! Not only do we have each other to help us on life's journey, God has released the power of the Holy Spirit to help us on this journey.

Will we rise to the challenge of being a living, vibrant community that Christ wants us to be, a body of people called the Church, whom He will joyfully present to the Father, when the time comes?

**AMEN.**