

SERIES: Authentic Christian Community/1 John, Wk. 3

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If you use basic principles of interpretation for interpreting the Scripture, for two thousand years, the Church has been unimaginably united and together on the fundamentals of the faith -

— so much so that it leads John to say in Verse 4:

You are from God, little children, and have overcome them (meaning the false teachers); **because greater is He who is in you** (that would be the Spirit of truth) **than he who is in the world** (which would be the spirit of error). (*NASB, 1 John 4:4)

That word **overcome** is a Greek word that would be used in some sort of a battle. There's been a battle; there's been a war; and they have emerged as the victors. It reminds us this isn't just agreeing to disagree; this isn't just some confusion. This is a cosmic war. The enemy has a very clear strategy, driven by the spirit of error — to lead people away from the Spirit of truth. And sometimes it feels like everything is kind of up for grabs and we're not sure who's going to win the battle. And that's the way these believers were. There's a sense in which the false teachers are very convincing; they're getting a following. "I'm not sure the truth is going to prevail." And so John comes along and says, "Whoa, you have the truth from God and **greater is He that is in you** — the Spirit of truth — **than he that is in the world** — the spirit of error. What you believe is *true truth!* Hang on to it; stand on it; because, at the end of the day, the real truth emerges as true.

Francis Schaeffer is the one that used to talk about *true truth*. There are all these truth-claims in the world, but, at the end of the day, there's truth which is true and that ultimately prevails. Think of it this way: let's imagine that I fade into the sunset, and you get a new preacher, and the new preacher convinces you that you can fly — very compelling, very charismatic — and convinces the majority you can fly. The majority sincerely believes this is true — but you aren't convinced. You're saying, "You know it seems like everybody believes this, but I don't think it's true," and you start to feel very insecure. At some point in time, we all have to go up on the roof and somebody has to step off the roof. At that moment, *true truth* prevails. No matter how sincere you were; no matter what the majority believed; at the end of the day there is truth which is true — and it ultimately prevails. And what John is saying, is that there is a Spirit of truth that is within us as believers, and ultimately, truth prevails. **Greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world.**

In Verses 5 and 6, he gives the second test. I think it is a little more subjective than the first one:

They (meaning the false teachers) **are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them.** (Vs. 5)

Now in Chapter 2, we defined **the world**. I'm not going to go back through all of that. But just a summary would be that we talked about the world's operating system — that Satan himself is

the architect of the world's operating system. Its essence is that you can be your own god. You can decide for yourself what's right and wrong, and good and evil, and, on the basis of your performance, you can make yourself significant; you can give yourself value. That is the world's operating system. Since the architect of the world's system is the same architect of the world's message of this counterfeit Christianity, there's a lot of alignment between the counterfeit message and the operating system. So the people of the world hear it and say, "That sounds like it's true," because it lines up with the operating system that defines their life, and that's what John is saying — that the architect of the world's system is the architect of counterfeit Christianity, and there's a resonance with people that live in this world. This is one of the reasons why religion is so popular and so widespread — because religion is nothing more than simply inserting God into the world's operating system. It carries the idea that you can define God any way you want, that you can still, in essence, be your own god. You still have the freedom to define right and wrong, and, at the end of the day, you can perform — through religious activity — to make yourself significant. When people hear that, they say, "That sounds right...that sounds right! That sounds like everything I experience in this world; that's in perfect alignment with the world's operating system. That's the truth!"

Many times I've said that I believe that the concept of grace is so counter to everything you experience in this world, it could have been a concept only conceived in the mind of God. It's so radically *other than* everything in this world, it couldn't have come from anywhere else. And that is why, when the people hear the message of grace, there something in them that says, "That can't be true; that can't be right. It's contrary to every way this world works."

Verse 6:

We are from God; (Vs. 6a)

The **We** there is referring to the apostles. It's important to remember: in the First Century, they didn't have a New Testament, so the authority, in essence, of Scripture, was coming directly from the apostles. John started this letter by saying, "*These are the things that I have heard from Jesus. These are the things that I have scrutinized. I've seen it; I've touched it; I know it's true.*" Through the Spirit of God, he is declaring God's truth. So the authority of the apostles, to our day and age, would be the authority of the Scripture. What he is saying is, "We, as the apostles, are from God."

**...he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us.
By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. (Vs. 6b)**

In other words he is saying, "If the Spirit of God is speaking truth, and within you is the Spirit of truth, there ought to be a connecting point. There ought to be a sense of resonance that says, 'Okay, I think that's true.'" So when you have the Spirit of truth dwelling within you, and you study the Bible, there's a sense in which there's a connection that says, "I think that's right; I think that's true; I think this is in alignment with the Spirit that is within me. And so you begin to separate out the Spirit of truth from the spirit of error.

Think of it this way: the statistics are always changing, but let's go with ninety percent; ninety percent of Americans consider themselves to be Christians. Do you then believe that ninety percent of Americans live their lives in submission and surrender to the truth of this Book? I would suggest to you that the number is dramatically less! In other words if, in this Book it says, "This is how you should use your time; this is how you should use your talents; this is how you should use your money; this is right — this is wrong; this is good — this is evil; this is moral — this is immoral, " do you think, if ninety percent of Americans were confronted with the truths of this Book, they would say, "If that's what God says, I will submit and surrender to it?"

Obviously the answer is, “No”. The overwhelming majority of Americans that consider themselves to be Christians would still, at the end of the day, say, “I am going to be my own god. I’m going to run my own life; I’m going to decide for myself what is right and wrong, what’s good and evil — and I’m going to make myself significant. I’m going to give myself value, on the basis of my own performance.” Ask yourself, “What message is that lining up with?” And isn’t it very possible that they have believed a counterfeit Christianity?

**...he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us.
By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. (Vs. 6b)**

What does all this have to do, then, with community? I think it has *everything* to do with community. At the end of the day, *Authentic Christian Community* requires that, with the Spirit of truth within us, we come together around God’s eternal truth, which is what then defines the essence of our community. In other words, truth is necessary to experience community. We live in a culture that doesn’t believe that. As a matter of fact, the culture in which we live believes that truth divides us; that it is truth-claims that create conflict. If we just get away from truth-claims, everybody would get along and love each other. And so the idea is we devalue truth, in order that we might love each other — and so we have community that’s all inclusive. Now it’s a wonderful concept to think of *authentic community* that’s *completely inclusive*. My first question would be: show me one single community where that’s ever happened, because I would suggest to you, that that is a totally bogus concept.

You can have a group of people, but, if you want community, community by its very definition means we come together around basic beliefs and values. Think of it this way: there are ten people at a coffee shop and they decide, “We want to be a community. We want to go deeper as a community, but we want our community to be inclusive. Everybody is welcome.” So, after a couple of weeks, somebody new joins the group, but the person that joins the group doesn’t like some of the members of the group. So, he starts criticizing them, and starts judging them, and starts picking at them, and just creating conflict everywhere. At some point in time, the group’s going to say, “Hey, you can’t be in our group anymore; you are just turning it into a disaster.” And suddenly we realize, “Whoa, you’re not inclusive.” Suddenly you’re very *exclusive*, because you’ve said we have certain beliefs and values that are going to define our group, and you don’t belong here.

Every single community — to be a community — has to have beliefs and values that bring them together. Our culture gets real confused about this one. Think of it this way: imagine two different groups. One is Planned Parenthood and the other is the Crisis Pregnancy Center. Planned Parenthood has a board, and one of the members of the board has a religious experience, and suddenly decides that abortion is wrong — so at every meeting starts saying, “I think abortion is wrong; I think it’s sinful. I don’t think we can keep doing this.” How long do you suppose that board would allow that board member to stay? At some point, they would have to say, “You aren’t like us anymore. You don’t have our beliefs and values. You must go.”

Okay, now imagine the Crisis Pregnancy Center. They have a board member that has an experience, and decides, “I now believe that abortion should be up to the woman. I believe in choice and, if a woman wants to have an abortion, that’s fine with me” — and meeting after meeting after meeting voices this opinion. How long would it take before the board would finally say, “You don’t share our beliefs and values. I’m sorry, you must go.” Both groups just did the exact same thing. Yet in our culture, one group would be considered very open and

accepting, and the other group would be considered very closed and rigid. The fact of the matter is, in order to have community, you must have beliefs and values. Every business has certain core beliefs and values, and, if you violate those, you don't stay. That's just the way it is.

The community of faith, then, is no different. We're often criticized for being exclusive, but a community of faith is no different than any other community. It has to be defined by certain beliefs and values. That's what brings us together. What is dramatically different, is that we at least have the possibility — because we as the children of God have the Spirit of truth dwelling within us — that **if the Spirit of truth is bringing us together around the eternal truth of God, we have the possibility of deep, rich community, beyond what the world could ever possibly know.** As a matter of fact, the potential of the level of community that we could experience, as the people of God, is absolutely staggering. Is it possible to experience community with a friend that does not share your beliefs and values? I would say, "Yes it is...to a degree." Over my life, I have had friends that do not share my beliefs and values, and they are people that I love dearly, and they dearly love me. But within them is the spirit of error. Within me is the Spirit of truth. Within us, there is a cosmic war going on, and because that is true, there's always going to be a limit to the depth of community we can experience. It can only go so far.

So think of it this way: imagine in your mind a relationship you had with someone that does not share your beliefs and values — as a child of God, a relationship you had with an unbeliever. You loved that person; that person loved you. It was a deep, rich relationship. Now think about the potential. Think about what you had experienced. What is the possibility, if you could experience that level of community — with, at the core, a cosmic war going on — what is the potential for deep, rich community with two people that both have the Spirit of truth around God's eternal truth? The possibility of the depth of that community is absolutely staggering! I'm not asking you if you're experiencing that. I am saying, "Think of the possibilities — and why wouldn't we want that? Why wouldn't we pursue that?"

If you want to define community as a handful of people sitting around your living room, or a handful of people at the coffee shop, chatting about the game, and sharing a few things, and moving on with life, that's up to you. But if the possibility was so much greater than that, why would you ever settle for that? It's a bit like marriage. We can say you're married if you have a marriage license. You live under the same roof; you've had some children; there's not a lot of conflict at home; everything seems to be going okay. Basically, we're friends, but on the intimacy level, we'd be maybe a "2" or a "3". If it was truly possible to experience an intimacy level that's an "8" or a "9" or a "10", why would you ever settle for a "2"? Why would you want to live that way?

In the same way, if you want to settle for community that's a "2" or a "3", that's up to you. But if it is really possible to experience a community that is so deep, that is so rich, that is so life-giving to your soul, that it would be an "8" or a "9" or a "10" — if that is really possible — why wouldn't we pursue that? Why wouldn't we be passionate about that? Why wouldn't we give everything we have, to experience that which my soul might breathe life, out of that level of community? That, **if we together have the same spirit, and that spirit is the Spirit of truth that's bringing us together around the eternal truths of God, the level — the potential of community — we could experience is staggering!** Why would we ever settle for anything less than that?

Our Father, we're thankful that You love us. You didn't leave us as orphans to just kind of wander our way through life with no meaning or direction. Lord, You've actually put the Spirit of truth within us. You've given us the very Spirit of God within us, to lead us

to that which is true. Lord, I pray this morning that we would get just a glimpse of the possibility of what could be, as we submit ourselves to the Spirit of truth, and together pursue Your eternal truths, that we might experience a level of community that the world around us could not even possibly dream of. Lord, that's what we ask for. In Jesus' name, Amen.

In the message today, we talked about the fact that ***authentic community requires shared beliefs and values. Shared beliefs and values require truth***, so it would be right to say, without truth, it's just a group of people hanging out together, drinking coffee. In a culture where the importance of truth is diminished, and we've become so selfish and individualized, there is a real hunger for authentic community, more than just connecting on social media, or hanging out at the coffee shop, but genuine, deep, soul-satisfying relationships. John reminds us, that ***the very Spirit of truth is in us, as believers***. The Spirit in us should allow us to connect supernaturally, at a level unknown to those without Christ. Perhaps in this culture of social media and disconnection, ***one of our greatest witnesses as the church, and perhaps one of the most attractive witnesses, may be in creating places of authentic deep community***. This gives testimony to the world, that we truly are followers of Christ.