

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Walking in the Light with Jesus

(Studies in the Apostle John's first letter)

Prepared. Warned. Engaged.

(1 John 2:12-27)

Study #3

Introduction: Opportunity costs...

We normally use the phrase "*opportunity cost*" in relation to the world of finances. An "opportunity cost" represents the benefits we miss out on when we choose one way to spend money over another.

Like when you took yourself to a movie and spent three hours of time plus twenty dollars on a ticket and popcorn. It was a great time. Your "opportunity cost" was all the other ways you could have used that time and money and didn't.

And, really, it doesn't much matter. In the grand scheme of things, an evening plus twenty bucks won't make you or break you.

But, if you decide to go to a movie every Friday and Saturday night, over the course of years, you have quite an "opportunity cost" wrapped up in Santikos. You could have spent those dollars and that time in other ways that would have made a very big difference.

The purchase of a house, a car, a college education, and other big-ticket items demand that we consider the opportunity AND the opportunity costs involved.

The bigger the expense, the more important it is to weigh the opportunity costs when it comes to finances. Opportunity costs must be considered, too, when it comes to intangibles like time, energy, relationships, personal development, a spiritual life.

It's really important to weigh opportunity costs when considering whether to live as a sold-out, committed disciple of Jesus.

The cost is high. We are to deny ourselves, take up our cross daily, and follow Him. We are to love Him more than family and give up everything for Him.

We might conclude that the costs of living for Jesus are too high - and many people do.

I fear that what we don't do often enough is consider the opportunity cost of NOT following Him, NOT offering ourselves to Jesus as a "living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1-2). What do we miss out on when we don't follow Him? What does saying "No" to Jesus' call to discipleship cost?

This morning, our look into 1 John forces us to consider the opportunity costs of NOT following Jesus for all we're worth. John's message today is a message worth hearing.

Orientation to what is to come...

We start this morning with a couplet of triads - two set of three statements - John makes, in order, to children, fathers, and young men.

It's a fascinating little section and lots of Bible scholars have lots of opinions about what John has to say here. And everybody is pretty sure that John is speaking symbolically and that's he's not speaking directly to literal children, fathers, and young men.

But if not that, what?

After wrestling with it this week, I think he's given us all (young and old alike; male and female alike) some great confidence-building affirmation and some great vision for our futures BEFORE we get to the major section of the letter for today.

We'll start out by making a few observations about what the two things he has to say to "*little children.*"

Preliminary: Who you are; who you can become...(vv. 12-14)

****You who believe ARE little children of God (vv. 12, 13c)*

[12] I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you¹ for His name's sake...[13c] I have written to you, children, because you know the Father.²

First, their sins are forgiven, something that is universally true of people who have believed in Jesus.³ These "**little children**" are not John's children. They are little children of their heavenly Father. They are saved, justified before God. They are redeemed.⁴

Second, they "know the Father." And here, John addresses them with a different word. First (v. 12), they were "**little children**" (Greek - *τεκνία*). Here, they are "**children**" (Greek - *παιδιον*)

What is remarkable about these "**children**" is that they have a relationship, a connection with, God the Father. They know Him, just like babies and toddlers and young kids know their earthly father, all who believe in Jesus have the same with God. They know God.

John also writes to those he calls "**fathers**."

****You can BECOME "fathers" (vv. 13a, 14a) who know the Lord!*

[13a] I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning...[14] I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning.

There is no variation in what he says to fathers like there was with the children. Same identifier and same descriptor. These "**fathers**" KNOW "**Him who has been from the beginning.**"⁵

The reference is either to the Father or to the Son or maybe to both. And there is a sense here that these "**fathers**" have a greater depth of knowledge of God than do the "**little children.**"

The fathers' connection with the Eternal One puts them in contact with reality as it was from the beginning. They have a seasoned experience with the Eternal God. And, as we have already seen in this letter to be growing in a relationship with God is to be growing in obedience to God's commands.

John is commending the "**fathers**" for having attained a measure of maturity.

The third set of comments is directed to "**young men.**"

****You can BECOME "young men" (vv. 13b, 14b), fit for spiritual battle!*

[13b] I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one...[14b] 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.

There are three keys to identifying a "**young man**" as John identifies them.

First, the "**young man**" is strong. Young men are known for their strength. Society has always depended on the strength and vitality of young men and strength is needed in lots of arenas of life, notably in battle.

The thrust of John's comments has to do with the spiritual realm, though, and he will have a lot to say today about facing spiritual opposition.

⁵ Here, the subject is what the theme had been in 1:5--2:2 - knowing God.

¹ In Greek, this is in the "perfect" tense, a past tense of the verb that indicates action continuing into the present.

² Elsewhere in this letter, the entire readership is addressed as "little children" (2:1, 18, 28, 3:7, 18, 4:4, 5:21)

³ Saving faith is belief in Jesus' Name. (5:13; John 1:12; 3:18)

⁴ As we have noted before in 1 John and will notice again, John is not writing to them to give them a test to see if they are saved. He is writing what he is writing to them because they are saved.

Second, ***“the word of God abides”*** in the ***“young men.”***

We’re on high alert when we hear John use the term *“abide”* because to abide in something signifies relationship. If the word of God *“abides”* in these ***“young men”***, it’s a step beyond saying that it *“lives”* in them and it’s way beyond saying that they know their Bible.

These ***“young men”*** are in a deep, meaningful, life-changing relationship with God’s living truth.⁶

And third - John says it twice so we can’t miss it! - these ***“young men”*** have ***“overcome the evil one.”***⁷

There has been no mention of the devil or Satan or opposition of any kind to this point in 1 John.

That changes today. The apostle says that those who are strong and in whom the word of God abides have *“overcome”* the enemy’s attacks. They are best equipped for spiritual warfare.

Now, let me tell you what I think John has done by giving us these images of children, fathers, and young men.

The “point” of the three images...

In addressing ***“children”*** and ***“little children”*** he is reminding all of us of two too-good-to-be-true truths.

All who believe in Jesus are forgiven of all sins they ever have or ever will commit AND they are vitally related to a heavenly Father who is crazy about them.

Today, you can rely and rest and revel in that.

By addressing ***“fathers”*** and ***“young men”***, he is commending some of his readers for their progress on the path and giving the rest of us a vision for the future.

Once, the Apostle Paul described himself as having cared for the people he loved who were a part of the church in Thessalonica like ***“a nursing mother tenderly cares for her children.”***

There, obviously, gender didn’t get in the way of Paul providing this picture of how he cared for these people. In the same way, here, John calls anyone - male or female - who has entered into a mature relationship with God, ***“a father.”***

I had the joy of seeing George Redding on Friday morning. George is in his 90’s, took a couple of falls recently and is recovering in a nursing home.

I told George that I was preaching about him this Sunday and quoted 1 John 2:13, ***“I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning.”***

George looked at me and nodded (he knows Scripture like the back of his hand) and then said, *“Yep. It’s just like Crocodile Dundee.”*

Now George has always been very sharp mentally, but when he said that, I thought, *“OK. The lights just went out...”* Then, George added, *“Crocodile Dundee said, ‘Me and the Lord, we’re mates.’”*

The lights are all on and the elevator goes all the way to the top floor. George was just saying that he knows ***“Him who has been from the beginning.”*** He knows the Lord.

Nothing gets you to that place except time in the saddle, years of prayer. George is a ***“father.”***

I thank God for the men and women here who are great ***“fathers”*** who know and obey the Lord. And to every ***“father”*** here, I would say, *“Press on to know the Lord more fully, more deeply!”*

⁶ Note John 15, where the abiding relationship between the disciple and Jesus is reciprocal. Yes, we are to ***“abide in Him”***, but He also ***“abides in [you]”***. (v. 4)

⁷ They ***“have overcome”*** Satan (perfect tense) - a past victory with continuing results in the present.

And for anyone who hasn't even considered knowing the Lord more intimately, John's words describe a vision for your future. Let your aspiration be to press on to know the Lord.

Not unreasonably, John calls those who are fit for spiritual warfare, "**young men**." The commendation is given to any brother or sister of whatever age who is strong in the Lord and in whom the word of God abides.

I thank God for the young and old men and women who are "**young men**" here. You are strong in spirit. God's word has found a place in your heart. You have overcome in battles past and you are fit for the battles ahead.

The invitation is to anyone who is not presently a "**young man**" as John defines it, to get spiritually fit, open your heart to nurture an abiding relationship with God's truth so that you'll be prepared to overcome the evil one. The battle is raging, and you are needed on the front lines.⁸

John has reminded us of what we have in Jesus as God's little children. Our sins are forgiven and we know God. He's placed before us a vision of becoming "fathers" and "young men". Now, he turns our attention to enemies with which we must contend.

Facing Down Opposition from "the World" (vv. 15-17)

Those Who Love the World (v. 15)

[15] 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.

What in the world is "the world"?

The word "**world**" (*κοσμος / cosmos*) means, generally, "*an ordered system.*"

And there are different systems the word refers to as it is used in the Bible.⁹

Sometimes, as the Apostle Paul used it in Acts 17:24, it's a way to refer to the physical planet earth. And, sometimes it's a way to talk about the sum total of all people everywhere.

That's what's in view in John 3:16, where we read that God loved "*the world*" so much that He gave His only begotten Son so that anyone who believes in Him will have eternal life. It's what John meant when he wrote in this letter that Jesus is the propitiation (i.e. - atoning sacrifice) for our sins and not for ours only, but also for the whole world. (1 John 2:2)

But sometimes the word "*world*" refers to a culture that has been poisoned by the enemy. That is the sense here in 1 John 2:15 and we are not to love THAT world.

Now, based on the verse, I'm not going to urge that we disengage from 2019 society, that we abandon our culture, and that we retreat to a Christian isolationism. John wouldn't either.

He wants us to be aware and on guard against a system, put together by a diabolical genius that calls for our loyalty and affection.

You can't love the world and the Father

John has just finished praising his readers - them and us - for great spiritual standing. He still gives this warning because the danger is very real that any of us would fall for the seductions of the world.

No Christian, no matter how mature, is fully immune to the world's lure. If any of us think we aren't temptable, we're being very naive. To not listen to John carefully about this means that we haven't reckoned with either the world's power or the susceptibility to sin within our own redeemed hearts.

⁸ It may be that this letter is written to the elders of the churches to which John was giving oversight.

⁹ Our English word "cosmetics" derives from "cosmos", a connection that requires some mental gymnastics. The sense is that the one who uses cosmetics is "ordering" the system of their physical appearance.

John knows that it's possible for a believer in Jesus to love the world and the tragedy of that is that if we love the world, we won't, we CAN'T, love God.¹⁰

That's what Jesus said when He told us we can't love God *and* material riches. (Luke 16:3)¹¹

John says what he says in binary terms. Love God or love the world. You will love one and you can't love both and to the extent that we are loving the world, to that extent we can't love God.

So, what, exactly, is "**the world**"? John describes it.

Defining Elements of the World (v. 16)

[16] 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.

Taken together, these three elements of the world sum up the world's enticements. There is, of course, lots of overlap, but generally, this is what he's talking about.

The lust of the flesh

There is "**the lust of the flesh.**" That involves immorality in all its forms, drunkenness, gluttony, giving in to any addiction. Here we think of the *idolizing of pleasure.*

The lust of the eyes

Then, there is "**the lust of the eyes.**" This is whatever is visually appealing, but not properly ours. It's desiring (the old word is "coveting") things to which we have no right. It's greed.

It's more than a normal appreciation of material things. It's material-ISM. It's *idolizing possessions, stuff.*

The boastful pride of life

Finally, John says that the world is all about "**the boastful pride of life.**"¹²

This is boasting about our gains and arrogance over our advances. It's making sure our consumption is conspicuous to that everybody knows. It's being afflicted with the dread disease of affluenza, being a control freak and *idolizing power.*

There is no lasting satisfaction in the way of "**the world.**"

After we have satisfied our lusts, gotten what we were greedy for, or piled up accomplishments, can we just admit how quickly we are hungry again? The appetite must be attended to again, and in every-expanding portions.

That's "**the world.**" And John assures us that there is no future for "**the world.**"

The End of the World (v. 17)

There is no future for the world

[17a] The world is passing away, and also its lusts

"**The world**" is a powerful force here and now. But it is temporary. The world is on a short leash. This "**world**" system that is organized against God and His ways will one day vanish.

But there is a very different future in store for the believer who loves God and not the world.

¹⁰ The love of the Father speaks of our love for God, not God's love for us.

¹¹ James said the same thing in his letter to Christians at 4:4 when he wrote that "**friendship with the world is hostility toward God.**"

¹² "**Life**" here is the Greek "βίος" - simple physical life; not "ζωή" - always used when referring to eternal life.

A rich, abiding future is for the one who does God's will

[17b]...but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

Now, **"the one who does the will of God"** is who you think it is. This is the person who obeys God.

But, while **"the one who does the will of God"** probably means what you think it means, **"lives forever"** may not mean exactly what you think it means.

As John has already told us, to know and to obey God's commands is to love God. Another way to say it is that keeping God's word, obeying His commands, is to *"abide."*

And the best way to translate these words from 1 John is to say, **"the one who does the will of God abides** (Greek - *μενω*) **forever."**¹³

So, it is by obedience that you and I, children of God, establish an eternal identity that outlasts the present world system.

But John's not saying that the one who does God's will has eternal life. He's saying that the one who obeys will be in a close, intimate, "abiding" relationship with God into eternity. Forever.

By extension, the one who does not obey God's commands in this life will not have an intimate, rich, fellowship (an "abiding" relationship) with God into eternity. Woah.

We heard John tell us, **[15] Do not love the world.** Now we find that his words have teeth. There is an opportunity cost involved with loving the world.

Yes, love the world and we will enjoy material comfort to the max. We'll know physical pleasures and excesses beyond the limits that God has set. We'll have stuff to boast about and people may well be super impressed.

And eternal life is still yours. Your sins are still forgiven. There is no condemnation. But the cost of loving the world is the loss of a deep, intimate, "abiding" relationship with God now - and forever.

If ever there was a reason to be a *"father"* who is rooted in a knowledge of the One who has been from the beginning, this is it. If ever there was a need to be strong, to let God's word abide in us so that we'll be able to overcome the evil one, this is it.

There is a pitched battle for your heart's affections. And what hangs in the balance in your decision to love God or the world is the quality of your eternity.

Fight for holiness, for purity, for generosity, for compassion. Fight to know the Lord, because that fight will yield an eternal weight of glory beyond your wildest dreams. (2 Corinthians 4:17)

So, you and I are called to face down opposition to our souls that comes from the world. We are also to be ready to handle opposition from those who oppose our faith in this, **"the last hour."**

Facing Down Opposition from "antichrists" (vv. 18-27)

Antichrists are Here, So... (v. 18)

Now is the last hour

[18a] Children, it is the last hour...

Two thousand years ago, John said it was **"the last hour."** Today, it is still "the last hour" proving that, as the Apostle Peter said, **[2 Peter 3:8]...with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.**

From our way of looking at things, it's been a loooong hour. For God, not so much. He and we experience time differently.¹⁴

¹³ King James and ESV got the translation right. (IMHO)

¹⁴ See Hodges, pp. 106-107 for an explanation of time relative to John's use of the words **"the last hour."**

So, we can say that it was in John's day and it still is today "**the last hour**" and not be wrong or kidding around.

The "**last hour**" is not defined by duration but by the fact that it is the last era of this age. This "**hour**" will be followed by the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth.

Our author, John, saw an indicator that "**the last hour**" had arrived. It was the appearance of people he calls "**antichrists.**"

The last hour and Antichrist / antichrists

[18] Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour.

There will come a day when a capital "A" "Antichrist" will appear. We believe he's in view in the latter chapters of the book of Revelation (also written by John). This man who opposes Christ and all He stands for is "anti" Christ.¹⁵

But throughout this age and before the Antichrist shows up, there are lots of little antichrists running around. John has watched them come onto the scene, so he knows it's the last hour.

The Antichrists (v. 19)

[19] 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, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.

I think it's clear from this that John knew some of these guys - and how discouraging this would have been!

¹⁵ John is the only biblical author who uses the term "antichrist" and it is here in this letter (and once in 2 John). There is no mention of an "Antichrist" in Revelation (another book written by John). When we speak of the Antichrist, we may be referring to "the beast" (Revelation 17) - also called "the man of lawlessness" in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 - or to the false prophet who will assist the beast in deceiving humanity and turning them away from Christ.

The men and women who are now antichrists used to be a part of John's fellowship. They used to worship together. They all used to teach the same message. Now, they have a different message. They're no longer on the same page. John says that they "**are not of us.**"

So, these aren't people who taught Greek philosophy or the mystery religions of the first century.

And if we're looking to apply John's words about "antichrist" to 2019, we're not going to be talking about people who follow a different religion. John's not talking about Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists.

He has in mind lapsed church members who have twisted the simple message of Jesus into something complicated.¹⁶

And John is confident of much better things for us who are reading his letter because we have "**an anointing.**"

Our Anointing (vv. 20-21)

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

This anointing is courtesy of the Holy Spirit who guides us - if we are abiding - into "**all truth.**" (John 16:3) He protects us against error. And what is the error the antichrists were spreading?

The Antichrist's ID (vv. 22-23)

[22] 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. [23] Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.

¹⁶ Did John believe that these guys were not saved? When he uses "us" vs "them" terminology he often means to say that "they" were not saved, and this may be what he is saying. But it may be that he doesn't intend to make a judgment on whether they are justified before God, only a judgment on their walking in the light, which they are obviously not doing.

“Christ” signifies all that the Jews meant about deliverance and rule when they talked about Messiah. The **“Christ”** is *“the anointed one.”* **“Christ”** is Savior, the Son of God.¹⁷

To say, **“Jesus is the Christ”** is to say that He is the gift of God who is sufficient to save and to keep. To say that something must be added on top of the gift of Jesus in order to be saved and to be kept is to deny Christ.

What the “antichrists” of John’s day would have never said is, *“Faith alone in Christ alone saves forevermore”* because they were always adding stuff on top of faith in Jesus.¹⁸

Add obedience to certain laws and rules. Add esoteric knowledge available only to the elite. Add requirements to fit into the church’s culture.

The challenge to a vibrant faith is always to keep the main thing the main thing. John wraps up by telling us how to do just that.

Our Safeguard: Abide in Him (vv. 24-27)

[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. [25] This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life. [26] These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.¹⁹ [27] 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.

¹⁷ See John 20:30-31. See also John 11:25-27, where Martha confesses that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.

¹⁸ It is Hodges view that the “antichrists” in view here are the same false teachers in view in Galatians, who had “come down from Jerusalem” and who “went out from” the Jerusalem church. John disclaims them as strongly as the leaders of the Jerusalem church had done in Acts 15. I find myself in fundamental agreement.

¹⁹ Verse 26 lets us know that verse 25 is what the antichrists were trying to deceive John’s readers into believing.

Do battle with “the world” by realizing what it is and fighting for holiness. Do battle with antichrists who would deny the sufficiency of Christ by reminding yourself of the basics.

Remember the promise He Himself made to you: eternal life.

Test everything you hear taught against this promise:

Is it made conditional on your behavior?

Is it made tentative based on your obedience?

Is it linked to your following rules?

Abide in the sufficiency of Jesus.