

February 10, 2019

1 John 2:18-3:10

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

First John is written as a sermon with the key purpose to defend Christian communities against false prophets and to remind them that as children of God they are to live in the light and love one another. We see that this section is tied to our last sections tied through the repetition of the phrase "I am writing to you" which first occurred in 1 John 2:1. Today's section dives into the conflict that existed within the community to whom the letter is written. A community divided over divergent teachings of what it means to confess Jesus as the messiah and thus as God; as well as what living as Jesus lived looks like. The division in the church seems to come from some docetistic teaching about the nature of Jesus. Docetism was the ancient belief, common in Greco-Roman culture, in the superiority of everything that is "spiritual" over the "physical". It led to much debate and division in the church, and eventually to the first great Christian Creeds (The Apostle's and Nicene Creeds) seeking to articulate the oneness of Jesus as Divine and Human. These false teachers, called antichrists, seemed to imply that there is no connection between our spiritual-ity (beliefs) and physical actions (ethics). This can lead either to an extreme asceticism and withdrawal from the created world or a lax ethical attitude which considers human action as not important. The pastoral author writes to counter that false teaching, reminding the church of what it means to be a child of God, and to see in Christ the invisible God, modeling our lives – spiritual and physical – on his life and example.<sup>6</sup>

*Children* παιδίον [paidion]: a young child; a little child, an infant, little one; a child under training; <sup>6</sup> **little children** τεκνίον [teknion]: (the diminutive form of téknon, "child" ("a child living in willing dependence")) – a little child; (figuratively) someone deeply loved (endeared). *Both terms are used to refer to pupils or disciples, those following, and maturing into a teaching or the likeness of a teacher. This language of filiation (father-child) was common in the Ancient world.*<sup>6</sup>

**THE LAST HOUR** : this expression denotes the end times, the imminent return of the Messiah Jesus, which was a common understanding which pervaded the early church who thought they were living in the "end times" which had a huge ethical impact on them as their teachers urged them to live lives of great integrity and mutual love.<sup>6</sup>

**ANTICHRIST(s)** : we've become so used to these terms that we often forget that the word is only used in 1 and 2 John within the Bible. Curiously here it's used both in the singular and plural. The Greek word suggests "substitute messiah" implying that such person(s) are false prophets, teaching a false Christ, or substitute messiah; that's to say that they are rival teachers within the community who advance fundamentally different theological ideas about Jesus. They seemed to have offered a teaching that deviated so much from what the people had heard from the beginning (the past) as in verse 24, that it denied Jesus as the son of God, and thus denied God. Their teaching went against the confession of faith central to the community rallied around John's gospel: "<sup>30</sup> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup> But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name." - John 20:30-31<sup>6</sup>

<sup>18</sup> *Children*, it is **THE LAST HOUR!** As you have heard that **ANTICHRIST** is coming, so now many **ANTICHRISTS** have come. From this we know that it is **THE LAST HOUR**.<sup>19</sup> They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. But by going out they made it plain that none of them belongs to us.<sup>20</sup> But you have been **anointed** by *the Holy One*, and all of you have knowledge.<sup>21</sup> I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and you know that no lie comes from the truth.<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> No one who denies the Son has the Father; everyone who confesses the Son has the Father also.<sup>24</sup> Let what you heard from the beginning **ΛΒΙΔΕ** in you. If what you heard from the beginning **ΛΒΙΔΕΣ** in you, then you will **ΛΒΙΔΕ** in the Son and in the Father.<sup>25</sup> And this is what he has promised us, eternal life.

<sup>26</sup> I write these things to you concerning those who would deceive you.<sup>27</sup> As for you, the **anointing** that you received from him **ΛΒΙΔΕΣ** in you, and so you do not need 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, **ΛΒΙΔΕ** in him.

<sup>28</sup> And now, **little children**, ἈΒΙΔΕ in him, so that when he is revealed we may have confidence and not be put to shame before him at his coming.

<sup>29</sup> If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who does right has been born of him.

**3**<sup>1</sup> See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called *children of God*; and that is what we are. The reason the **world** does not know us is that it did not know him. <sup>2</sup> Beloved, we are *God's children* now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. <sup>3</sup> And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

<sup>4</sup> Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. <sup>5</sup> You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. <sup>6</sup> No one who ἈΒΙΔΕ in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him. <sup>7</sup> *Little children*, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. <sup>8</sup> Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil; for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup> Those who have been born of God do not sin, because God's seed abides in them; they cannot sin, because they have been born of God. <sup>10</sup> The children of God and the *children of the devil* are revealed in this way: all who do not do what is right are not from God, nor are those who do not love their brothers and sisters.

#### QUESTIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF EXAMEN & CONTEMPLATION

- **What shimmers in your attention in this reading?**
- **What does it mean to be born of God?**
- **How do respond to those who disagree with you in regards to faith and theology? How do you struggle to love them?**
- **What invitation to act, speak or be do you hear in today's scripture?**

ἈΒΙΔΕ: this language for belonging and remaining in relationship with Jesus and God. It harkens strongly to John 15:1-7

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower... <sup>5</sup> I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who ἈΒΙΔΕ in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. ... <sup>10</sup> If you keep my commandments, you will ἈΒΙΔΕ in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and ἈΒΙΔΕ in his love. <sup>11</sup> I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

<sup>12</sup> "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. ... <sup>16</sup> You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. <sup>17</sup> I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

<sup>18</sup> "If the **world** hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you....<sup>26</sup> "When the *Advocate* comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. <sup>27</sup> You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning."

born of God : This language comes from John 1:12-13 "<sup>12</sup> But to all who received [the Word of God], who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God." Here this idea contradicts that expressed in 1 John 1:8-10: namely, that the children of God don't sin. "<sup>8</sup> If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup> If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." Rather than being nonsensical, could it be that the author is using the ideas taught by the "antichrists" to insist on the reality that we all are sinners and that carrying out acts of Christ-like love are the only adequate demonstration proving that one is a child of God (the very thing they seem to lack).

<sup>18</sup> In my notes, I borrowed freely from *Seek. Find.: The Bible for All People* (The Contemporary English Version) ABS 2006 and *The Epistles of John*. David Resenberg. Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.