

Script, Pastor Frank R. Johnson

First John: Authentic Faith for Jesus' People

#6: Preparing for Spiritual Opposition

1 John 2:18-27

Take a first look.

I. It is a dangerous world out there, even in Wonderland. We were warned in Lewis Carroll's *Jabberwocky*.

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

"Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!"

He took his vorpal sword in hand;
Long time the manxome foe he sought—
So rested he by the Tumtum tree
And stood awhile in thought.

And, as in uffish thought he stood,
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
Came whiffling through the tulgey wood,
And burbled as it came!

One, two! One, two! And through and through
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead, and with its head
He went galumphing back.

"And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!"
He chortled in his joy.

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

II. It is a dangerous world out there, because as we have been frequently reminded, “Ideas have consequences.” There is a somewhat famous book by that title published by University of Chicago Press in 1948 and written by Richard Weaver. The title sentence has suggested a number of applications through the years.

1. For example, followers of the religion of Islam who have taken militant statements from the *Quran* literally, have set out in our time to kill or enslave those who either do not believe in the Prophet Muhamad or do not believe in their exact interpretation of Islamic teaching, including other professing Muslims. The campaign to eradicate the Jews, not only from their historic land in Israel but also throughout the world goes under various banners: ISIS, Hamas, the Taliban, Al Qaeda, the Muslim Brotherhood. All these militant Islamist groups hold similar ideas and have similar goals, centered in their hatred of Jews and all who support them, notably including the United States of America. *Ideas have consequences.*

2. In 1978, a group of just over 900 men, women, and children died in the jungle of Guyana. A documentary about this was released in November of 2018. A man named Jim Jones was the pastor of a church called The People’s Temple. He had charisma, a commanding personality, and big ideas. When he started to do things that were borderline criminal, the heat began to rise. He led his followers—and by then, they were *his* followers—to Guyana, in the north of South America, to establish what was officially known as The People’s Temple Agricultural Project. What was established to be a paradise on earth turned into a nightmare of repression and violence. Jones began to teach that he was the reincarnation of Jesus Christ. The disillusioned tried to get away. Those who tried to escape were shot. Finally, a U. S. Congressman and a contingent of journalists visited the compound and threatened to expose him. Jones ordered them to be ambushed and killed before they could leave on a private plane. Then, he ordered everyone to line up and drink from cyanide-laced punch. Those who wouldn’t drink it were shot. Jones lay dead in the compound among the total of 918 people. He was found with a bullet in his head. Few escaped to tell the grisly tale. 409 of those who died, over half of them babies and children, are buried at Evergreen Cemetery in Oakland, California. *Ideas have consequences!*

3. In 1848, two men aspiring to greatness, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, wrote a document entitled *The Communist Manifesto*. It was originally published in German. About a half-century later in November of 1917, a group calling themselves Bolsheviks overthrew the government in Russia and established the Soviet Republic. Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky were main figures in this takeover. Not long afterward, Lenin had Trotsky murdered. Before long, under the power of Joseph Stalin, the USSR, or Soviet Union, included countries all over Eastern Europe. At the heart of Soviet Communism was the Marxist idea that “religion was the opiate of the masses.” In other words, Communism as a political philosophy was *atheistic* at its core. Before the USSR dissolved in 1991, it had accounted for more than 100 million deaths—people who were killed or starved by an artificial famine to secure and maintain government power. *Ideas have consequences.*

4. But, about 2025 years ago, give or take about three years, a boy was born into a peasant family. They claimed that this was no ordinary birth. The mother became pregnant, as the story goes, without a human father. The child had a most unusual beginning, though his childhood remains largely untold. Not much of his story has been told until he reached manhood at about age 30. Then, in about three short years, he went about proclaiming the

kingdom of God, teaching the people, and healing all kinds of illness and even demon possession. He finally was arrested by the religious powers of his time and betrayed to the Roman government. They were finally convinced to execute him through crucifixion. But then, something unprecedented in the history of the world occurred. He was raised to life again, not just to another physical life that would end in death, but to something different. When his followers came to see this for themselves, they turned from scared and disillusioned disciples hiding behind a locked door into courageous preachers of that Man's message. They were fearless and bold. As one objector reported, they "turned the world upside down" (cf. Acts 17:6, KJV). In truth, they found the world upside down already and were trying to turn it right-side up, which for those standing on their heads seemed like they turned it upside down. Stay with me now. This message was taken up by those who believed, they kept proclaiming this message until it came all the way down to us today. *We* have become followers of Jesus Christ because those who saw and heard His teaching preserved it in the writings of our New Testament in the Bible. *Ideas have consequences!*

III. It is still a dangerous world, a world of competing ideas and a world in which the story of Jesus—the story based on His teaching and life as described in the New Testament of the Bible—has been changed by some into a different story. We should not be surprised, because that was already happening in the first Christian century. The Apostle John warns us through his writing in our New Testament book of First John to beware of spiritual opposition that will distort the message of Jesus.

Let's take a closer look at what he has to say in **First John 2:18-27**.

Translation: 1 John 2:18-27

¹⁸ Little children, it is a last hour, and just as you^{p1} heard that Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, from which fact you^p know that it is a last hour. ¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not out of us, for if they were out of us, they would have remained with us—but [they went out] in order that they may be shown that they are all not out of us. ²⁰ And you^p have an anointing from the Holy One and you^p all know this. ²¹ I did not write to you^p because you^p did not know the truth, but because you^p know it and because every lie is not from the truth. ²² Who is the liar except the one who keeps on denying, "Jesus is not the Christ"? This is the Antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. ²³ The one who keeps on denying the Son does not have the Father either; the one who confesses the Son also has the Father.

²⁴ As for you^p, what you^p heard from beginning, let it remain in you^p. If what you^p heard from beginning should remain in you^p, you^p also will remain in the Son and in the Father. ²⁵ And this is the promise which He has promised to us, eternal life.

²⁶ I wrote these things to you^p about the ones who are leading you^p astray. ²⁷ And as for you^p, the anointing which you^p have from Him remains in you^p, and you^p have no need that anyone should keep on teaching you^p, but as His anointing keeps on teaching you^p about all things, and it is true and is not false, also just as He taught you^p, remain in Him.

Take a closer look.

I. The reality of spiritual opposition. V. 18

1. *The Anti-Christ is foretold: "Anti-Christ is coming."* John assumes that they remember the teaching they received. At a cataclysmic moment in history an evil figure will arise called The Anti-Christ. John says, he "is coming." John mentions him four times in his

¹ The superscript "p" indicates that the pronoun is plural or that the verb includes a plural subject.

writings, three times in First John and once in Second John. This term is found nowhere else in the New Testament. It appears to be something that John taught, which may tie into themes presented in pictorial fashion in the final book of the Bible, the *Revelation*. But, he says that we do not have to wait for that shadowy figure to arrive, because ...

2. *Many anti-Christ*s have already come. If that were true in John's time, near the end of the first century, it is even more true now, these many centuries later.

A—We need to be constantly vigilant against distortions of the message of Jesus as found in the New Testament.

I—I re-read a book by Bruce Shelley entitled *Church History in Plain Language*. It lives up to its title. It is very readable and easy to follow. Professor Shelley tells the story of Jesus and His followers through the centuries with skill and clarity. He deals fairly with movements and personalities. But what his book demonstrates is that there have truly been many distortions of the message of Jesus, designed to fit the times in which His followers lived.

We must beware of a similar trap. We people are constantly trying to fit Jesus into our political or social or personal programs. What we need to do is be alert and on guard by systematically reading and re-reading His story from the accounts of the first and official eye-witnesses—in other words, the New Testament of the Bible. How will we know another Jim Jones when he comes along? His message will not ring true to our own reading from the Scriptures.

II. The nature of spiritual opposition, VV. 19, 22-23

1. *Disconnecting from the Church*, V. 19. John says, "How do we know that these people are "antichrists"? "They went out from us." In short, they pulled away from the Church and began to teach their own thing outside of that connection with the people of Jesus through the centuries. This is one of the dangers in our modern era.

A—How do we know that charismatic teachers in our time have "gone out from us" by leaving behind the original teaching of Jesus and disconnecting with the Church? Simply this: what they say doesn't match what we read in the New Testament of our own Bibles.

I—Now I must say right away that the Church (note the capitol "C") is more like a patchwork quilt than a seamless tapestry. We are sewn together by our common faith in Jesus Christ (more to that in a moment), even though there are some differences between each of the patches in the quilt. As we continue to read our Bibles, especially the New Testament but also the Old Testament, we learn to discern what is really important and what is not so important. We learn what ties us together in a common faith and what beliefs are so important that we must sorrowfully divide over them if they are not shared.

Or, maybe we should compare ourselves to different kinds of *pie*. Everyone knows the difference between pie and cake, though there are definite differences between pumpkin pie, apple pie, and banana-cream pie. But, they are all *pie*. They are not the same as cake. The true churches of Jesus are like this. Here is one of those centrally bad ideas that we must reject.

2. *Denying that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God the Father*, VV. 22-23. This denial defines what it means to “go out from” the Church. After all, the Church, *ekklesia*, is the *called-out* people of Jesus Christ, the Jesus Christ whose story and teaching are conveyed in the authorized books of the New Testament.

A—Here again is a simple test for determining true Christian teaching: does the teaching match what we read in the pages of the New Testament of the Bible, and of the Old Testament as understood in light of the New?

I—I went hunting for a few days several years ago. I hope that doesn’t disturb you too much—the idea of this pastor running around in the woods armed and dangerous. But I was hunting for a specific prey, a Whitetail Deer buck (meaning the male of the species). My friend and I who hunted together for those few days mused as we were driving along through the woods, especially as we passed a few cows who had wandered out into the deer woods, how insane it was for someone to shoot a cow thinking he was shooting a deer. Yes, this has happened. Clearly, the hunter who goes out into the woods with a loaded firearm must know exactly what is legal to shoot and what is *not* and must make very sure that he only shoots at a legal animal. If he cannot tell the difference between a cow and a deer, or if he is not careful and self-controlled enough to make sure that he doesn’t shoot at the wrong animal, he should stay home and play video games—and buy his meat from the grocery store.

Well, in a loosely similar sense, we must know what the true gospel of Jesus Christ is by giving constant attention to our founding documents. Then, we will be able to discern something else when we see it or hear it. Let’s summarize this idea.

III. The preparation for spiritual opposition, VV. 19-27

1. *Alertness to spiritual opposition: forewarned is forearmed: This is “a last hour.”* V. 19. Our best preparation for spiritual opposition is to know that it will come and to arm ourselves in advance for its arrival.

2. *The help of the Holy Spirit: “You have an anointing from the Holy One.”* V. 20. I take this to mean that we have the living presence of Jesus with us right now, the Holy Spirit, Who will lead us to understand and apply the teaching of Jesus.

Here is what Jesus promised (John 14:26): “*These things I have spoken to you^{p2} while remaining in your presence, but the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, That One will teach you^p all things and He will remind you^p of all things which I said to you^p*” (FJV³).

Again, He said (John 15:26), “*Whenever the Helper shall come, Whom I will send to you^p from the Father, the Spirit of Truth Who goes out from the Father, That One will bear witness concerning Me ...*” (FJV). This leads right to the following:

3. *An objective standard of truth: “let what you have heard from the beginning remain in you.”* VV. 21, 24. Here is what John said in this passage again:

² The superscript “p” indicates that the pronoun is plural.

³ FJV means Frank Johnson Version.

v. 21 (FJV): *"I did not write to you^p because you^p did not know the truth, but because you^p know it and because every lie is not from the truth."* And v. 24 (FJV): *"As for you^p, what you^p heard from beginning, let it remain in you^p. If what you^p heard from beginning should remain in you^p, you^p also will remain in the Son and in the Father."*

We have an objective standard for the truth in Jesus (Have I said this already a few times?). We have the New Testament of the Bible as our guide to uniquely Christian teaching. We read the Old Testament of the Bible (and we should keep reading it) through the lens of the New. But this is not just an academic exercise.

4. A personal relationship with God: have assurance of eternal life. VV. 25, 27. Hear what John says again:

v. 25 (FJV): *"And this is the promise which He has promised to us, eternal life."* And v. 27: *"And as for you^p, the anointing which you^p have from Him remains in you^p, and you^p have no need that anyone should keep on teaching you^p, but as His anointing keeps on teaching you^p about all things, and it is true and is not false, also just as He taught you^p, remain in Him."* Note especially those last three words: *"remain in Him."* This is not just a body of knowledge that we recite; it is a personal relationship that we develop. We have a relationship with the living God through His Son Jesus Christ, based on the teaching of Scripture, interpreted and applied by the Holy Spirit of God, leading to a spirit of discernment against spiritual opposition and distortions of Christian teaching.

Take it home (final applications): So, let's take this personally!

I. Do each of us have a personal faith in Jesus Christ as He is described and revealed through the pages of the Bible?

II. Are we staying connected to His Church through worship, study together in the Scriptures, genuine fellowship by the Holy Spirit, helping each other to abide in Jesus Christ?

III. Do we have a personal habit of reading Scripture regularly, praying for ourselves and others, and taking our cues for life from its pages?

IV. Are we alert, because of these good habits, to distortions of Christian truth that are flying around in our present culture?

"Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!"