

COUNTERFEIT Christianity

A Preacher's Guide to 1 John



Bryson Smith introduces his 1 John sermon series...

Life is full of fakes.

Fake money, fake designer clothes, fake addresses, fake names.

1 John is all about fake Christianity.

John wrote this letter at a time when churches were under an ever increasing threat from Gnosticism. Full blown Gnosticism had not yet developed but it was in the makings and Church after Church was falling victim to false teachers who were teaching a more "enlightened" way concerning Jesus and sin. John wrote to expose this fake Christianity. He does this by presenting three main features of authentic Christianity – three characteristics that will be present in anyone who has a genuine faith.

These are:

- a) an obedient lifestyle
- b) a loving character
- c) a true knowledge of Jesus.

John examines these three characteristics over and over again. It's for that reason that 1 John can seem very repetitious to both read and preach on. Unless you are careful to pace yourself you can find yourself saying the same things from the pulpit week after week.

For this reason, when preaching through 1 John it is necessary to not say everything from each section. It's a case of saving things to say on the following Sundays. I tried to do this by giving one sermon on each of the three characteristics of authentic Christianity that John mentions. By the time I added another few sermons to introduce and conclude the book my sermon series looked like this:

Sermon 1: an introduction to the background of the letter.

Sermon 2: an overview of all three features of the authentic Christian.

Sermon 3: a focus on the feature of the obedient lifestyle.

Sermon 4: a focus on the feature of a loving character.

Sermon 5: a focus on a true understanding of Jesus.

Sermon 6: an examination of how all three features are interrelated.

Sermon 7: a more detailed examination of the antichrist

What follows are brief summaries of each sermon. The titles and subheadings are those used in the Church outline.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Stott's Tyndale commentary is about the best thing I found in print. If you can get a hold of Carson's talks at the 1986 Easter Katoomba Convention they are very helpful also.

Talk 1
BACK TO BASICS
(1 John 1:1-2:2)

Jesus: The Man

False ideas about Jesus were just as popular in John's day as ours. Now it's people like Barbara Theiring. Then it was people like the Gnostics whose strong dualism led them to argue Jesus wasn't fully man and sin wasn't such a big deal.

The Person Of Jesus

In v1-4 John drags his readers back to the basics - that Jesus was a physical man and that our faith is based on historical events.

The Work Of Jesus

John now attacks the Gnostic idea that what we do with our bodies doesn't matter. It matters so much that Jesus' whole reason for coming hinges on the seriousness of sin.

Back To The Basics

We must not desert the basics. Jesus is the Son of God who physically came into this world to save us from the sin which we are all guilty of.

Talk 2
AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANITY
(1 John 2:3-27)

Picking the Fake

In a world full of fake Christians John writes to assure his readers that they are the real thing. He does this by detailing three characteristics of the authentic Christian.

The Test Of Obedience.

The Christian who is not interested in obeying Jesus is a fake

The Test of Love.

The Christian who doesn't love their Christian family (ie is unprepared to serve them) is a fake.

The Test Of Truth.

The Christian who denies certain truth about the Lordship and person of Jesus is a fake.

The Tests: Comfort or Challenge?

Are you obeying Jesus? Do you love the others at Church? Does your lifestyle reflect that Jesus is the Christ? A transformed life will not earn you a place in heaven but it will show whether or not a place has been put aside for you.

Talk 3
LIKE FATHER LIKE SON
(1 John 2:28-3:10)

The Family Likeness.

Righteousness is the divine family likeness. Jesus is righteous therefore everyone born of Jesus will also seek to do what is right.

Argument From Jesus' Second Coming.

The true Christian wants to be ready to meet Jesus. The child of God is preparing his or her life for that day by seeking to be pure and blameless.

Argument From Jesus' First Coming.

Jesus' first coming showed Him to be opposed to the nature of sin and the originator of sin. So should the follower of Jesus be.

Whose Child Are You?

Do people see the divine family likeness in you? Are you opposed to sin? Do you treat sin seriously? Are you making real attempts to purify your life so that you'll be ready and unashamed when Jesus returns?

Talk 4
LOVE ONE ANOTHER
(1 John 3:10-24)

A Lesson Worth Repeating

The exhortation to love one another is one we've all heard but we should never get sick of hearing it or doing because it is a vital sign of being a Christian.

Hate is a Sign of the World

Cain is the prototype of the world. Just as Cain resented the righteousness of his brother the world resents the righteousness of the genuine Christian.

Love is the Sign of the Christian.

Jesus is the prototype of the Christian. Love is a commitment to unselfishly put another persons interests before your own. It is unconditional.

What Sign Are You?

Who do you take after? Cain or Jesus? When something happens in our Church that upsets you how will you handle it? Get in a huff and leave, or press on in love and remain committed to those who might even get on your nerves?

Talk 5**TO KNOW HIM IS TO LOVE HIM**

(1 John 4:7-5:5)

The All Or Nothing Principle.

Over the past 3 sermons 3 characteristics of authentic Christianity have emerged; obedience, love and truth. The genuine Christian has all three! Indeed the three are so interconnected that you can't have one without the others.

God's Love & Ours

John's starting point is that God is love (v8,16). To know God is to see love in action. That love is contagious; to know God will also mean you become a loving person.

God's Love & Jesus.

God's love and Jesus are also connected. Hence the person who knows God will not only be loving, they will also know the truth about Jesus. Indeed the person who denies Jesus will be unable to love properly because they can't grasp the depths of God's love.

Our Love And Obedience.

Love and obedience are also tightly linked. If you love God you'll obey Him and if you love others you'll do what's best for them ie treat them the way God commands.

Are You All - Or Nothing?

This passage is hard to follow. The ideas turn in on each other and interlock. That's because it is showing that love, obedience and truth are all interrelated. You can't have one without the other. The genuine Christian has ALL three!

Talk 6**BLESSED ASSURANCE**

(1 John 5:6-21)

The Ring Of Confidence.

Product after product offers us confidence in things like hygiene or popularity or safety. Jesus gives us confidence in things that matter for all eternity.

The Truth about Jesus.

John returns to how he started his letter ie reaffirming the truth of Jesus' physical coming. He didn't just become the Christ at his baptism (a gnostic idea) but He was the Christ in blood as well as in the water of baptism.

Confidence in...

The fact that Jesus came in the flesh gives us confidence in:

- a) eternal life
- b) our prayer life
- c) safety from sin and
- d) the truth.
- e)

A Final Word Of Warning

The Greek is specific. *Beware* the gnostic. Beware the lax attitude to sin and the false ideas about Jesus. Go back to the basics and then you can have confidence in this life and the life to come.

Talk 7**EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT THE ANTICHRIST BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK.**

(1 John 4:1-6)

A Morbid Fascination.

People have always been fascinated by "the Antichrist." There are plenty of books and movies speculating about "his" identity.

The Context Of 1 John

John is writing about "gnostic" false teachers who deny Christ.

The Antichrist in....

- a) 1 John 4:1-6
- b) 1 John 3:18-23
- c) 2 John 7

A Future Warning Or A Present Danger?

The Antichrist is anyone who denies Christ - not necessarily some "future bogeyman."