

I want to open up this morning where we left off in 1st John.

This will be the touch-tone passage that we will be moving through over the past several weeks and the next several weeks, addressing every issue in the Church from how we conduct business with one another, how we treat one another, how we treat people outside of the Church, spiritual warfare within the Church, spiritual warfare between the Church and the world.

There is the go-to letter if you really want to.

I think of Galatians and I think of Ephesians and I think of 1st John in terms of if I could read one epistle and what the apostles were looking at and how to do Church.

What did the early Church look like?

How did the early Church function?

Those are probably the three epistles that I would go to with all kinds of information.

Now that's not to discount especially 1st Corinthians and so forth or any other scripture, but you get it all.

You get it all.

You have a feeling that these congregations were like, "Either we don't know what to do.

Can you please give us an overview?"

Or, "We did know what to do and I really think as leadership we are straying.

Can you get us back on track?"

And I thought those two things were the motivations between, excuse me again, thank you, maple trees.

Those motivations between, you know, for the writing of these letters.

So now we're going to enter into a passage that's going to deal specifically with what we call spiritual warfare, but I want, I hope, that you take away from the preaching today a tremendous encouragement that you are absolutely empowered with everything you need as a follower of Christ to fulfill all of this.

It begins with this, because there's going to be a line drawn.

"Do not love this world nor the things in it or the things it offers you.

For when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you.

For the world offers only a craving."

Lust is in a lot of translations, lust for physical pleasure, lust for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions.

Now we've talked about this before, and we've talked about it, remember when I said, "If you own something that you can't give away, you don't own it, it owns you."

And so you need to have that perspective.

It doesn't mean, "Oh, we can't have nice things.

I don't want anything that, you know, no."

Listen to the language of scripture.

He's talking about love, hate, and lust.

These are top-level emotions.

Now if you're going to go and tell me, if I told you, I said, "No, you don't understand, Mark.

I love my motorcycle with the love of God."

Then I'm a heretic and you should throw me out of the church.

That's the kind of love, however, he's talking about.

So when we talk about loving our possessions or lusting after physical pleasures and physical things, understand that he's not talking about you enjoying your motorcycle.

You enjoying the home that you live in and the things that you've worked hard to possess.

But do you own them or do they own you?

That is the line of delineation.

And are you walking around saying, "These are all a blessing from the Lord and I love them with the love of God that I have for other fellow human beings."

That's wrong.

And you should know that's wrong.

I think you know in your heart that would be wrong.

So some people say, and you can twist it and kind of make it and shape it to say, "We must all be hermits.

We must all live in the desert without any possessions."

No, God is love.

And if you are applying that principle to the things that you possess, that's wrong.

So hear the words of scripture.

If you have things and you just lust after that carnal pleasure, you lust after that pleasure that you have, even with the things that you possess, the cars that you drive and the houses that you live in, that is wrong.

We're talking about Sermon on the Mount stuff here.

Not what is on the outside, right?

Or what is on the inside.

So yeah, get excited about going on a motorcycle ride, shining that baby up.

Get excited, "I'm really enjoying it.

Nothing wrong with that in the world."

Worked on my tail off doing that thing.

But if I make an idol of that thing and I begin to project the love of God upon that thing and I begin to say that it comes before wife, God, wife, children, church, then things are completely out of whack.

So we can't look at this scripture and say, "This is anti-world.

The church must be..."

No, we live here.

This is where God made us.

This is ultimately going to be His temple and right now His Holy Spirit dwells within His creation in the children of God.

So there we go.

The world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and a pride in our achievements and possessions.

And you hear the words of Jesus speaking to those and He will say on several occasions in several different contexts, "Enjoy what you're doing now because I tell you this is the only pleasure you will ever have."

So if you are disconnected, that disconnected from the Holy God, and you are all about you and your possessions and your job and your power and your whatever, enjoy yourself now because that's the only pleasure you're going to experience.

And Jesus speaks that to the Pharisees and He speaks that to believers and non-believers a lot.

These are not from the Father but are from this world and this world is fading away along with everything that people lust after.

Again, we talk about translations and we read the New Living Translation here in church, but that's a better word than craving because it goes to the Sermon on the Mount and it speaks to

what Jesus speaks of and the word actually goes more deeply than a craving, like a craving for ice cream.

You say I have a craving for ice cream, but I have a lust for ice cream, that's weird.

So lust is a deeper, more powerful word and if you're lusting after power in this world, if you're lusting after possessions in this world, that is something that you need to check yourself on.

And we are empowered by God's Holy Spirit, as we will discuss in a few minutes, to be able to do that and to be able to tell truth from lie and what is real and what is not and what is right and what is wrong.

So John's not going to leave us hanging.

God's Holy Spirit writing through John is not going to leave us hanging and just give us directives without any inclination as to how to fulfill them.

Jesus never does that and the Epistle writers just don't do that.

Speaking as a teacher, you would always hate that.

You're given an unfunded mandate.

That's what it is, right?

Do this!

Okay?

How?

There's nothing else there.

Jesus doesn't do that, nor do the Epistle writers.

So along with everything that people lust after, but anyone who does what pleases God will live forever.

So how do we know the difference here?

How do we know it?

We're going to find that out in the next passage.

I have two - as a pastor you do a lot of hard things.

Two of the hardest are predicting the weather and adjusting the temperature of your section. [laughter] Ask any pastor, they'll tell you I am not lying.

You've got an event, we had a ride planned, are we going to go?

Every weather app in the world said it rained between seven and nine.

It was gorgeous.

And we're sitting at home, tired of bikes.

Predicting the weather and adjusting the temperature in the sanctuary, there should be a special class and seminary for that.

Not only how to do it correctly, but how to engage in the spiritual warfare that will come no matter what.

It's true.

Speaking of which, you see my segue here.

You know, this is serious stuff, but as followers of Jesus Christ, we have a joy within us that this serious stuff and the knowledge of the evil that is racking the world can't even take away.

When we gather together, we will always enjoy our fellowship and we will always have fun if you will, but not ever, not ever at the expense of the word jar.

When we talk about having joy that exceeds human understanding, love, that is a supernatural definition of love because God is love, the peace that surrounds you regardless of your circumstances, I think that we really ought to live that way.

We can come together in church with fellow believers and be supported in that for sure.

And then we go out and we worry over every little detail and we worry over every little circumstance and we say, "This made me feel bad.

This made me feel sad."

You have the joy of the Lord within you and that is going to be there regardless of circumstance, yet on the other hand you say, "This circumstance made me feel a certain way."

You can't have both.

Now, are you human?

And you're like, "Oh, gee whiz.

Come on, man."

But that does not take away the joy or the peace or the love that is within you.

"Man, I've got a serious problem that I need to fix.

Lord, grant me the wisdom to do such.

Grant me the peace now as I move forward in this family situation.

It's very difficult."

But it's not taking anything out of you.

You can't take God's Holy Spirit out of you.

You can ignore Him, but you can't take Him out of you.

And this is what John is talking about here.

Because every spiritual gift that you need to combat the wickedness of the world, to engage in victory in the spiritual warfare, you already have as a follower of Jesus.

"Dear children," and again, the New Living Translation is a little salt on this, and this is a term of endearment.

It's not always used as a term of endearment, but John actually says, "My little children."

Now sometimes, you'll hear Jesus say that, or even one of the apostles say that, and they'll be sort of taking a poke at somebody's faith.

But now, it's a loving term, right?

Shepherd, the sheep-type term.

"My little children, the last hour is here.

You have heard that the antichrist is coming, and already many such antichrists have appeared.

From this we know that the last hour has come.

These people, these antichrists, left our churches, but they never really belonged with us.

Otherwise, they would have stayed with us.

When they left, it proved that they did not belong with us."

This is a very important passage.

Because we speak of the antichrist upon which many eyes may be fixed, right?

But, we also know, and we will find out as I will read, that any of those who deny Jesus as Savior and Lord is antichrist.

And those who are actively doing so, you may say, "These are the antichrists among us."

Where do they come from?

The church.

They come from the church.

This is a very important passage to understand.

And how we, in the Word of God, can be led astray by probably the only other being, if you will, that knows the Word of God, as well as any theologian on earth, and that is Satan.

So when you're in the Word of God, at one point you are absolutely at the pinnacle of your spiritual health and power and victory.

But you are also very vulnerable to the twisting and turning and reshaping of God's Word.

Because you want to believe.

You've invested so much into God's Word.

You read God's Word.

You want to learn God's Word.

And Satan's like, "Okay, I will teach you something about God's Word."

You take this left-hand turn, or this right-hand turn, you know there's lots of theories out there that Jesus never really died.

He just was so injured and he swooned on the cross, and they thought he was dead, so they took him down.

We're not really talking about a supernatural being.

Whatever.

We have so many Christian churches that invoke the name of Christ, but are anything but Christian.

Why?

Because there's power in the name of Christ.

There's power in the name of Christ.

And because God's image-bearers want to worship Him, and they know that Jesus Christ is the way I should be worshipping Him, so Satan invokes the name of Christ, and God's image-bearers gather to worship under that banner, and it's all wrong.

It's wrong.

A lot of what they're saying about parts of the Bible that are being ignored or reshaped or remolded, all of the ice of Jesus, what I believe, goes into the Scriptures, not what God is saying in the Scriptures comes out.

That's exegesis.

All of that goes on.

And it's going on within the church.

One of my favorite sayings is, when we're in the Epistles, is that they weren't written for non-believers.

They were written for believers.

They were written into the church.

They are for us to take heed, to learn from, to grow from.

And so this is a very, very powerful passage.

When he says, these Antichrists, from this we know that the last hour has come, for these Antichrists left our churches, but they never really belonged with us, otherwise they would have stayed with us.

Why?

Because the true word of God is being preached.

When they left it proved they did not belong with us.

But you are not like that.

Now he's preaching to that remnant.

Now he's preaching to the faithful.

But you are not like that, for the Holy One has given you His Spirit, and all of you know the truth.

So I'm writing to you not because you don't know the truth, but because you know the difference between truth and lies.

He's writing to believers to edify them.

And how is he going to edify them?

What does he say?

You know the truth.

Why?

Because God's Holy Spirit dwells within you.

And when you are with Him, spiritually, in prayer, in communion, and in His Word, you will know the truth.

Because you can read it and He will enforce it.

He will edify it.

He will bring it to life.

How many people here, reading your Bibles, and in my preaching, you'll hear that from time to time?

I've read this two dozen times, and I've never seen this before.

Do you think that's a sheer coincidence?



Do you think it's sheer coincidence that sometimes, well, nearly every Sunday, when something comes from the word of God, it touches people right where they are, and the circumstances in which they are, maybe between belief and unbelief, question and doubting, horrible circumstances of life, what it means to be engaged in spiritual warfare, etc.

And I hear this amazing testimony.

Were you spying on me this week?

How did you know?

No.

God's Holy Spirit takes care of the business of this church.

We talk about the business of the church, dollars and cents.

God's Holy Spirit takes care of the spiritual business of this church, if I am willing and you are willing.

Does that make sense?

He's our teacher.

I read the Word, I do what He's gifted me to do, but you are all gifted by His Holy Spirit to learn and to grow and to become the disciple of Christ that He sees you to be, the son or daughter of the Most High, that He sees you to be.

And that's what is important.

So I'm writing to you, excuse me, I'm going to cough again, not because you don't know the truth, but because you know the difference between truth and lies.

And who is a liar?

I told you.

Easy, Max.

I told you, He doesn't ever leave us hanging.

You know the difference between truth and lies.

How do you know who is a liar?

How am I going to apply these directions that He is giving?

Anyone who says that Jesus is not the Christ, anyone who denies the Father and the Son is an Antichrist, anyone who denies the Son doesn't have the Father either, but anyone who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

And this is where we get into the main takeaway from today.

You have everything that you need to engage in this truth, lies, good and evil, spiritual warfare.

And that is the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit.

Now, for a lot of individuals, that's not enough.

We see all over again in the country that we want God's Holy Spirit and some massive demonstration of God's Holy Spirit at work.

We've got to have that.

We've got to be throwing ourselves around our churches or banging on this or battling in this and doing, we've got to have more than just the promise and the power of God's Holy Spirit within us.

We've got to show that we have God's Holy Spirit.

God's Holy Spirit has to be doing something.

We've got to have that sort of proof that He's there.

I don't read that in Scripture.

What I read is that every follower of Jesus Christ has everything that he or she needs to walk in victory in the spiritual warfare in which you are engaged.

Simply by being an image bearer of God.

Cows are not engaged in this spiritual warfare.

You are because you are created uniquely, individually and as a very special creation of God.

His image bearer.

By virtue of being his image bearer, there is that battle for your soul.

Because you have won and the cow doesn't.

So nobody on earth escapes this.

But not everybody on earth is aware of this.

And those, many of those who are on earth are made aware of this, stray from this.

Because they figure, maybe I can use this knowledge to draw people in and maybe create my own little church, kingdom here.

Under the banner of whatever, whatever, Christ's church.

Whatever, whatever, Christian church.

And so we take the word of God in which there is great power.

And we deny that Jesus Christ is God.

We deny Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

We deny whatever aspect of God's teaching that is in his word, but we don't like.

We do whatever we want with him.

We recreate him in our image and people go, "Yeah, OK, that's a lot better."

And boom, you've got this mass gathering of heretical teaching calling themselves a Christian church.

And I'm here to tell you that it does not have to be that way because it really is not rocket science.

You have everything that you need by the virtue of submitting your life to Christ.

Being indwelted by his Holy Spirit.

You can reference Ephesians 5.

If we want you to cross between John and Paul.

So be careful how you live.

This is Ephesians 5, 15.

Be careful how you live.

Don't live like fools, but like those who are wise.

Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days.

Don't act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do.

Don't be drunk with wine because that will ruin your life.

Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Singing songs, hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves and making music to the Lord in your hearts.

And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul all about Ephesians and we love that "armor of God" thing.

And we'll take that armor of God and we'll think that somehow we need to display this armor of God.

And God's mighty sword is going to come down and slay us in the Spirit.

And there will be this great demonstration of God's Holy Spirit because our faith in Him isn't enough.

That's what human beings crave.

And Satan knows it.

We talk about the armor of God at being that, as Paul does, and I just want you to understand that the armor of God is not some sort of license to go and dispense of the word of God.

The armor of God, Ephesians 6, is the final conclusion of the entire letter.

It says, "Finally I tell you, when you need to understand that when you are indwelt by God's Holy Spirit, you have the armor of God."

You have it.

You have it now.

You will have it when you leave this place.

You will have it every moment of every day that you are alive.

You will have everything that you need to walk in glorious victory of the cross, to know right from wrong and good from evil.

And you will have the discernment because God's Holy Spirit is within you, teaching you, guiding you, helping you.

You will have to know the discernment between the two and the choices that you should make.

When you engage in this relationship and you are intentional in this relationship with God.

I often say, if we equate or talk about this relationship as marriage, you can be married to somebody in a personal intimate relationship with them.

Perhaps the personal intimate relationship that man and woman come together in.

I can be married to somebody and not talk to them.

God wished them.

You didn't hear what he said.

He said, "Oh, I wish."

You can be in a relationship with somebody, but that's not a very good marriage.

That's my next point.

You can be married to somebody and never go home.

You can still be married to them.

You can be married to somebody and completely ignore them and not be intentional about engaging in a relationship with them.

You can still be married.

The same is true as you are saved and you are being sanctified and you are indwelt with God's Holy Spirit.

Engage in the relationship with Him.

Engage in it.

In prayer, in His Word, in godly conversations, in praying for awareness and discernment, in being intentional with all of these things.

Don't think of them as spiritual disciplines.

Think of them as being intentional in your relationship with the Holy God who has redeemed you.

If things become, I don't know, different.

Final piece here.

So you must remain faithful to what you have been taught from the beginning.

This is what I've been saying.

If you do, you will remain in fellowship with the Son and with the Father and in this fellowship we enjoy the eternal life He promised us.

You must remain faithful to what you have been taught from the beginning.

Remain faithful to what you have been taught.

That may require a little bit of intentionality because the world is coming at you a thousand different ways to take and twist what you've been taught into something else.

But He says if you remain faithful to what you have been taught and what have we been taught, by the power of God's Holy Spirit we have been taught the truth of God's Word.

By the power of God's Holy Spirit we know the difference between a man and a woman.

By the power of God's Holy Spirit we know when life begins.

By the power of God's Holy Spirit we know how we should love one another as believers in one of the quickest points of discernment as to whether or not you are intentional in your relationship with God.

By the power of His Holy Spirit is how you treat fellow believers.

By the power of His Holy Spirit we understand these truths.

We are taught a variety, a myriad of things that we need to know, understand and do as believers.

And the number one thing that we need to know, understand and do is love one another.

Love the Lord God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, all your mind and love your neighbor as yourself.

Boom!

There's our cornerstone.

Let's be intentional with Him, let's be intentional with that.

Now let's go and do and grow the Kingdom of God.

We have eternal life in Him, but you do not just simply say, "Oh, I give my life to the Lord Jesus Christ."

Put your head down and put your hand up if you want to be saved today.

And now, alright, go and live like hell for the rest of your life because you're good to go.

It doesn't work that way.

You are called to live a life that is worthy of your redemption.

I'm writing these things to warn you about those who want to leave you astray, but you, here it is again for the third time, but you have received the Holy Spirit and He lives within you so you don't need anyone to teach you what is true.

For the Spirit teaches you everything you need to know and what He teaches is true.

It is not a lie.

So just as He has taught you, remain in fellowship with Christ.

You're picking up what I'm putting down today.

The cornerstone of your existence as a son or a daughter of the Most High is the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit.

And that all works when you, as not only His image bearer now, but you are His child adopted into His family.

Are you really, as a child adopted into a family by a loving father who seeks to save, you're now going to ignore Him and ignore His word and ignore what He asks you and commands you to do?

Are you really going to do that?

Because I think that's pretty junkie if you do.

I know as a father I would hate to be treated that way.

You're not going to talk with Him.

You're not going to commune with Him.

You're not going to fellowship with Him.

You're not going to pray to Him.

You're not going to be grateful to Him.

You're not.

You're just going to.

I don't know what you're going to do.

Set aside five minutes a day to pray lately?

Five minutes a week?

I don't know.

You're going to what?

How much time do you spend in His word?

How much?

That's between you and Him.

All I can do is share with you what the word says is that the power that raised Christ from the dead lives in you.

And that is the power that will lead you in what is true.

Lead you in the discernment of His word.

Will lead you in your own behaviors.

And as you become more intentional in your spiritual relationship with God through Jesus Christ, you will grow into the individual that He knows you can be.

And we as Christians have solid ground of truth upon which we can live.

Forgive one another as I have forgiven you.

We're going to transition to prayer today.