

The Key to Perseverance

a sermon in the series
Life in the Son

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at Oak Grove Baptist Church, Paducah, Ky.
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I John 2:20-28

But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. 21 I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. 22 Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. 23 Whoever denies the Son, does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son, has the Father also. 24 Therefore 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 And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life. 26 These things I've written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. 27 But the anointing from which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as that same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him. 28 And now little children, abide in Him, that when He appears we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

Last week we discussed surviving sifting and how God sifts His people. That may have seemed foreign and novel to you, if not also harsh that God would appoint His people to difficult challenges in life. It may have seemed strange that He would even use temptation to sift the believer to prove whether or not they are really His. Cannot God just speak peace to our hearts and grant us assurance that we are His children and not bring this thing called sifting upon us? Well yes, He does do that. Even John will speak of that before we are finished with this Epistle, regarding the testimony of the Holy Spirit from within. But that is not enough. Not when we are still flawed and messed up like we are, for you can even hear from God and begin to doubt that you heard Him.

God has built into our life concrete as well as abstract; objective as well as subjective evidences of our faith and one of them is the gift of perseverance. Many a day you've been tested. Many a troubled hour you have been in conflict, challenged. Sometimes it felt like you could not endure it any longer and you thought to yourself, *I'm done. I quit. I'm throwing in the towel. I cannot be a Christian. I can't live like this.* But what happened? You picked up the towel again, didn't you? You didn't give up. Here you are this morning and although your heart may be empty and very dull, you are still here and there is still a flicker of a flame, a spark in the lantern of the heart. Why? Because God has kept that spark alive. It's not your spirituality; it is God and His promise to you.

Therefore, perseverance is one of the most irrefutable proofs of the Christian faith. God keeps

us. Here in this text the apostle John shows us the key to how God does that, how He works that mechanism of perseverance in the life of the believer, how He keeps us safe and keeps us going on. He begins in verse twenty by saying:

I. A Christian Knows Something

“But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things” (1 John 2:20).

That is a huge statement and it needs some explaining. So let me first, as I often do, use process of elimination. I don't know how I learned that, but it's the way I've always thought, even as a child. We will test every theory and if it cannot withstand the test we eliminate it until we find one that can.

A. What John Does Not Mean

“All things” does not mean all knowledge concerning everything. John was not saying Christians have an anointing that they know all there is about science, mathematics, language, and literature. You are not walking encyclopedias, or should I say in this day and age Wikipedias. You don't know everything there is to be known. That's certainly not what John is meaning.

In chapter three verse two, John says that neither he nor the church knew everything. “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be.” We don't know what is going to happen to us when Jesus returns. We don't know what these bodies are going to be like, what our minds will be thinking or how we're going to feel, but we know that when He is revealed we shall be like Him. John tells us we don't know everything.

Secondly, it does not mean spiritual knowledge. He's not talking about information. You don't know all there is to know about the Bible or about God or about His ways. If you did, why would John be writing this epistle or why would we have a New Testament or an Old Testament? This is why we need to be careful in this generation of religious spiritism that says if you learn or know certain things and can agree with them, then you belong to God. That's not true. That's a demonic spirit's lie making all of Christianity rest in the brain.

The Bible doesn't talk about Christianity as an intellectual faith and I'm not advocating that Christianity is mindless. It is absolutely not. God doesn't say faith is a leap into the dark; it's a leap into the light. The light of God's revelation, God's knowledge. But no Christian has all spiritual knowledge, not even the apostle John.

Thirdly, it does not mean they needed no teachers. It was one of the gifts given to the church: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. If it is one of the gifts God has given to the church, then it would certainly indicate that we do need teachers.

Four, it doesn't mean all Christians are identical in what we believe. We don't all believe the same

way. Even in this congregation of like-mindedness and unity, on specific issues of the Scripture and doctrine there are differences. Some of you may tend to be more Calvinistic, some of you may be more Armenian, some of you may be more dispensational while others may be more covenantal in your theology. Some of you have no idea what I'm talking about. There are differences and it doesn't mean that all Christians should believe the same thing. Not even the Scriptures on this side of heaven require that.

B. What John Means

What John is saying is that the church knew all the essential elements of the truth, the truth of Jesus' humanity and deity that is essential to the Gospel. This is all about who Jesus is. Remember last week? We talked about the Gnostics. The Gnostics had come up with two different theories—both were wrong—that Jesus didn't really come in a bodily form. They taught that He really wasn't God. One group of Gnostics said that Jesus was only a man and the Spirit of Christ came upon at His baptism and left at the crucifixion. Other Gnostics said that even the body you saw wasn't real but was a phantom body.

So all this section here is about who Jesus really is. Was He born of a virgin, was He really a man and was He born of God at the same time? This is essential to our salvation. One must believe—I do not apologize, it is a point of theology and doctrine that must be adhered to: that Jesus was born of a virgin by the power of the Holy Spirit. He is not the natural offspring of any human being, He is made and conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin, born fully man as if not God but fully God as if not a man. That is essential. Why? Because friend, if He's just a man and not God you're still lost in your sin. The sacrifice for sin had to be of infinite value in order to pay for an infinite crime. The crime of Adam was infinite; the crime of your sin is infinite. A mere man is not infinite in value nor ability. God gave His own Son as an offering for sin. Jesus gave His life and God said, "Finished. Enough. Sufficient. The payment is in full." He must be fully man and fully God. Why does He have to be a man? Because man was the one who rebelled in the garden and we need an advocate, a mediator, one who can sympathize with us, at the throne of God.

Look at verse 21; John clearly defines what he's dealing with here: "I've not written to you because you do not know the truth." You see, he focuses on the truth, not all truth, but specific truth—the truth about Jesus. "But because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth." The context is dealing with the truth of who Christ is. That's what every believer knows.

II. What is the Anointing?

In verse 20, "But you have an anointing from the Holy One," we also see it again in verse 27, "The anointing you have received from Him." The anointing is the Holy Spirit. He's the One doing the teaching. This is not God just giving to you supra-knowledge, intellect, and information like we said before. No, this is God.

Why does John refer to Him as "the anointing"? Because the Holy Spirit is often symbolized as

oil. It was oil that fed the flame in the temple. It was oil that rested upon Aaron's head and his sons separating them to the task of priesthood. At Jesus' baptism, what do we see as He's lifted up out of the water by John? "The Spirit came and descended upon Him." The Bible says that is the confirmation of God, the anointing of God; He was anointed "with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him."

Therefore, the Holy Spirit is the anointing, He is the oil. And the anointing John is specifically dealing with is the giving to us a certain understanding. The question this morning is who is the Holy Spirit? I'm not going to spend a lot of time on this, but it is an important question and you need to do your biblical due diligence, you need to do your research—you need to know.

First of all, let me say briefly, the Holy Spirit is not an 'it'. He is not an inanimate object, nor is He a good force like in Star Wars, "May the force be with you." That's not the Holy Spirit; He's not some inanimate, unseen force. He is a person. He is the third person of the Godhead. He is as much God as Jesus or the Father is.

How can I get you to understand that? I don't know, because the problem is I don't understand. All I know is that this is what this Book has revealed God as and it makes sense to me in this way: God has to be multiple in persons although one being in order for there to be fellowship and love. How can you have fellowship and love if there is no other person? So within the eternal triune God was internal love.

He is the representative also of Jesus Christ to us. Jesus said, "I'm not going to leave you comfortless or as an orphan, I'm going to send another Comforter to you, one like Me and He's going to testify of Me." So the Holy Spirit is the literal representative of Jesus Christ to you because Jesus is still both God and man, and in His humanity He is in heaven at the right hand of God. He ascended back to the Father but ten days later He poured out upon the church the Spirit of the anointed.

Which tells me this: there is a mystical aspect to Christianity.

A. The Mystical Aspect to Christianity

What do I mean by 'mystical'? It comes from the idea of mystery. The word has developed to advocate that God deals with people on a subjective level not just objective. In other words, there is revealed truth God called the Bible, but God also takes objective truth and applies it in a very subjective, personal way. Mystical people believe that God is within them and they often look inward to speak and deal with God. Some mystics elevate the subjective over the objective.

There is a mystical aspect. I don't care how many people deny this about Christianity; Christianity is a very personal, subjective faith. God is real and He is real to us.

The Christian faith is not just an intellectual exercise. The Bible tells us that God is somehow tabernacled within His body so that when you and I come together like this we can have every right to expect some manifestation of God Himself. God makes Himself known, He reveals Himself, He shows Himself and has God not done that this morning? Who is here among us that will leave saying, "I don't know if God was amongst us at all"? Oh friend, if you leave whispering those words to yourself, I can only say your heart is so overgrown with the weeds of this world that God's glory cannot bloom in your soul.

Let me give you biblical proof. In Jeremiah 31:34, the New Covenant is promised and it says, "No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more."

What does He mean? This is that anointing. This is this mystical aspect that when you are born again something happened to you that opened up spiritual understanding. You didn't need anybody to explain to you who the Lord was—you met Him. It's the same thing in 1 Corinthians 2:13-14, the natural man cannot understand or perceive God because God is spiritually known, or perceived and understood.

I don't know somebody until I actually meet and experience him or her. If you go to our home and look in our many bookshelves all through the house, you'll find books about Abraham Lincoln and other historical figures. Why? Because I like history and particularly I like Lincoln. I've read much about him, but as much information as I have about Lincoln, I don't know him. I could write you essays about Lincoln, but I don't know him at all.

But Autumn? I know her. I experience Autumn every Wednesday afternoon we meet at 4:30 and talk about a book we're reading together. We interact. That's what this is: God literally interacts with you so that you can walk away saying 'I know God.' That's what Jesus said in John 6:45, "It's written in the prophets, 'and they shall be taught by God.'" Taught what? Jesus. This is supernatural; this is mystical, if I can use that word. "Therefore everyone who comes to the Father to Me." But, let me be quick to say that this mystical aspect does not replace the necessity of the Bible.

Many years ago in America there was a movement called the Quakers. They would get together and they would start shaking as they received what they called "the light of illumination." They were very sound biblically in many ways, but they began to have these experiences where they were receiving "direct revelation from God," and many of them claimed that the revelation they received was on par with the writing of the apostles. Friends, I don't care what the person's name is or how stupendous and spectacular their ministry or if there are miracles attesting, it must all line up with the Bible, otherwise it's a mysticism gone bad and is unbiblical.

The anointing that John is talking about is not the same as the anointing the first apostles had, yet today there are people in church—you see them on TV all the time appropriating the title 'apostle' to their names—claiming to be modern day apostles with the same gifts and the same

inspiration of the early first church apostles. Let me tell you that is not biblical because the church has already been founded. Paul says in Ephesians 2 that the church is going to be founded upon the apostles and the prophets with Christ as the cornerstone, you and I are somewhere in the building as a living stones. The apostles are the foundation, those first century apostles. Does that mean there is no one today who doesn't have apostolic-like ministry? No, I believe we need to recognize those with apostolic-like ministries, they are the preachers to the preachers, they are the first among equals, they are the men God gives vision to that other pastors can follow. They know how to direct the mission activities of individuals and people come to them for that kind guidance—that's what an apostle did. I believe there are apostle-like ministries but they don't have the authority or inspiration of the first apostles.

This anointing has nothing to do with guidance. John is not saying, "you have an anointing that will guide you and help you make decisions." We have people today who are so mystical that God speaks to them in such a way that He gives them guidance. I'm one of those people; I do believe that. However, I have a caveat. I have a qualifying test, it is this: whatever guidance God may give me subjectively it must always fit within the perimeter of the revealed will of God.

You need to be wary if somebody comes to you and says, "I've got a revelation for you: you're supposed to quit your job, sell all you have and go to Africa and be a missionary. God has told me that and you better do it because He showed it to me." Can I tell you what you can tell that person? Tell them "I talked to God today and He never said anything like that to me." I know of a man that that happened to and because of the respect he had for this individual, He quit his job—he'd only been married about a year—and went to Africa. And nothing worked. He almost starved to death and there was no blessing or evidence that God had called them. And today that couple is not serving the Lord. I believe that God does give personal direction and guidance but He will never tell you something about your life to someone else that He hasn't first already told you. There is an undo emphasis on the Holy Spirit that leads to excesses and abuses.

One of the abuses is truth becomes very subjective to the mystic. They've got to feel it. I don't care if you can explain doctrine to them; if they don't *feel* that doctrine they're not going to accept it. They have to have some sort of feeling about it. That's making truth subjective. Truth, if it's subjective, is not truth. Truth is always objective.

Another abuse is they often elevate man above the Scriptures. This is what we have happening today? We have men giving us prophetic visions and telling us what God has told them and people are biting the bait, hook, line and sinker. They follow these self-proclaimed prophets, elevating them above the Bible. The men and woman who claim such closeness with God are nothing more than charlatans, building a religious empire.

When I was preaching in Poland, back in March, I was stating the essential elements of the Gospel. I mentioned no names. I didn't pick on anybody. I was being a good boy. I didn't mention Benny Hinn or Joyce Meyer or what's that guy down in Houston? I didn't mention any of those names. We had the morning session and that afternoon at lunch break one of the pastors came up to

me and said he overheard a conversation between two women, “Well, what’s wrong with Joyce Meyer? I like Joyce Meyer. Why is he so down on her?” I never mentioned her, yet what they heard from me wasn’t the same thing she preaches and they rejected my message because they liked Joyce Meyer’s message better. That’s what happens when you go with mysticism too far and don’t keep it grounded with the Word of God.

B. Biblical Mysticism is to be Spiritually Governed

Verse twenty-one, “I’ve not written to you because you do know the truth but because you know it, and no lie is of the truth.” The spiritual understanding given to the church was in accordance to what they had heard. In other words, the Spirit of God takes the Gospel and says ‘yes and amen’ in your heart. If somebody gets saved this morning will not be because of my preaching. It will have nothing to do with technique or delivery. It won’t even be the result of what I say. It will be what is said by the power of the Holy Spirit saying ‘yes and amen’ in the sinner’s heart. And when that happens to the sinner, well from that moment on he couldn’t *not* believe it if he tried because Jesus has interacted with him on a spiritual level and gave him understanding. In verse twenty seven, “But the anointing from which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as that same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.” The Spirit always takes truth and applies it. Christianity does not render our minds useless. No, the organ of the mind is addressed by the Holy Spirit as well as the heart.

3. How Does the Holy Spirit and Truth Work Together?

This is what I want to spend the last few moments with you on. He grants the understanding of the truth, He grants illumination, He opens up your understanding. There was a natural understanding before: you knew you were a sinner, you knew Jesus died for you, you knew He rose from the dead and that you needed to repent and believe. Friends, I was a preacher before I was saved and people were saved listening to me preach. I knew the facts and could communicate them. However, the day He saved me, December 1, 1986, it was like the light came on. God didn’t say anything that I hadn’t already said, it was the Gospel, but He made me to know it, to experience it. It became alive and real and interacted with me. That’s what He does.

And then secondly, He conforms you to the truth. He just doesn’t give you understanding of the truth so you can say, ‘Yes, I believe that.’ He also conform you to that truth. Now I want you to see this. As Jesus’ representative, the Holy Spirit acts just like Jesus did when Jesus was on this earth. So the question we need to answer for the next few minutes is how did Jesus act in this world when He was here? The Bible answers the question for us.

The Bible says that Jesus acted according to the will of God the Father. He taught the truth, but He first embodied the truth. You see this in the opening words of the book of Acts. “The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to **do** and **teach**” (emphasis mine). I don’t think that the words and their order are accidental: Jesus *did* before He *taught*. He

embodied the truth. Do you know what I mean by 'embodied'? He let the truth so soak in His heart and mind that everything He did was truth with arms and legs. He was truth in action. He lived out what He taught. He practiced what He truly believed it because He is truth.

We know Jesus is teaching is true. But how do you know? We have the testimony of God when John the Baptist baptized Jesus, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Jesus said there is another testimony. When the Jews were not willing to accept the testimony of God, He said, "The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me." He told the disciples, "Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves" (John 14:11). In other words, 'look at what I do, and what I do ought to tell you that I am whom I say I am.' You see, once again, truth is more than intellectual. It is practical. It has to be lived out if it's true. Truth proves itself in life. A truth claim, if it's real, works.

Let's see if I can illustrate this. If I take this watch and turn lose of it, it falls. Why does it fall? Because there is gravity. Do you know that for over 5,000 years men had been watching things fall, but finally one day Isaac Newton said, "Oh, the apple fell," and he discovered the law of gravity. It was the way gravity worked in life making the apple fall, which led to the discovery of the truth of gravity. Truth always works itself out in life and by the way it works out in life you discover the truth.

Let me give you a real practical illustration everybody will get. In Acts 9:39, the Bible tells us of a horrendous story—Dorcas was dead. Dorcas was a believer in Jesus; she was not a preacher, she wasn't a teacher. She didn't have a kid's backyard Bible club; she didn't teach Sunday School, she was not so gifted. She lived out her truth by needle and thread. She made clothes for the poor. Believers heard that Peter was in a nearby town and they sent for him and the Bible says, "Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and the garments which Dorcas made when she was with them." They said as they handed Peter their personally tailored clothes, "Peter, don't you see what Dorcas did for me? It would have taken me a year's salary to buy this and she made and gave it to me." They were weeping, they were broken hearted. What led those people to know the reality of Jesus Christ in Dorcas' life? What she did. The way she lived her life: by giving herself to the poor.

A truth claim is real if it works. How does truth work in you? Is it working? Is truth not just in your mind, but also in your heart transforming and conforming you to it. Do you embody truth? Do you embody the love of Jesus and the Gospel and deny yourself, pick up the cross and follow Him the way He gave Himself away for others? Truth, if it's real, has to work itself out in life. That's what the Spirit of God will do. Has the truth transformed you?

I want to challenge you this morning. It's wonderful that you have the Holy Spirit and the anointing that has taught you the Gospel facts that Jesus is who He says He is, but if that's all you have you have a dead faith and you need to be born again. "By this shall they know you are My disciples, in that you love one another." The truth has to work itself out in life if it's really true. Amen.