

1 John 2: 24-28: Remain in Him

Text: 1 John 2: 24-28

Exegetical Big Idea: God and his gospel is eternally unchanging, and abiding (remaining) in Christ through faith in his gospel is the journey and reality for those who have the genuine Spirit of Christ in them.

Homiletical Big Idea: **The only authentic Christianity is lasting, unchanging Christianity.**

Fallen Condition Focus: Our human nature is to rebel against God and resist his commands even though they are life-giving. Humanity is of only 2 categories. There are those who let the good news of Christ change them, or those who twist the truth of Christ into a lie and remain unchanged. Only those who are transformed by the gospel however will see the Lord.

Intro:

[The more I have the privilege of being a father, the more I can see why the relationship with God and his people is often in the Scriptures explained to us on the basis of a Father to his children. Children have an implicit trust for their parents, as must Christians to our Heavenly Father. Children are totally dependent on their parents for basically everything, as are humans in general but specifically God's people. Children need to be disciplined and corrected so that they become mature, as do Christians need to be disciplined by God so that we may become mature. Overall there is also a vast difference in just the level of knowledge and wisdom between parents and their children. How much more so between God and his children. But there's one more similarity that has dawned on me in particular lately. You know it's not that hard of a task to teach kids how to *do* things. Admittedly, my wife does a lot of the teaching in our household and I'm very grateful for that. But kids can learn numbers and letters and colours and things like that very quickly. You know what's insanely more difficult to teach them? It's a lot harder to teach them *not* to do things. I'll say things like "kids, your sister is building a tower, do not knock it down. Kids, daddy's coffee is right there, please do not play over here. Kids, daddy is painting our kitchen table, please do not touch it. Girls, your baby brother is sleeping in the next room, do not yell." Those are all very real conversations in our house, but you know what happens? The tower gets knocked over, the coffee gets spilled, the wet paint gets touched, and the baby brother wakes up. You would think that it would take more energy to actually do something as opposed to *not* do something, but you'd be wrong. But of course the more I parent the more I realize that I'm not all that different than my kids.

5 times in these verses John uses the same word that is translated into the English as remain, or abide, or continue. John is hammering home the idea here that Christians need to stay where they are! Don't move, don't change the gospel. It's perfect the way it is. You don't have to *do* anything with it, but instead you just have to *not* do anything with it.

John's main focus here for his readers to understand that the gospel does not need to be changed. And because the gospel does not change, his charge here is to remain in it! Don't move from it, it's the only life-giving gospel and the only way to remain in it is to *not* move from it. John is telling his readers, and us today that:

The only authentic Christianity is lasting, unchanging Christianity.

Verses 24-25: **The Gospel has remained the same from the beginning.**

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John is speaking to his Christian brothers and sisters here when he says “as for you”. He’s contrasting, like he usually does, the authentic Christians with the false teachers. John really can’t be any clearer with his message that these 2 groups couldn’t be more different. In no way do we get the sense that John sympathizes with the false teachers. He doesn’t give any credence to their doctrine. There’s no sense in which he believes they may have some valid ideas and therefore the two groups should try and get along. As we saw last week he called them “anti-Christ’s”. It’s clear in John’s mind that these are fundamentally 2 different groups of people. Those that have jettisoned the gospel and do not believe the core beliefs of the Christian faith, and those on the other hand who are holding on to what they have heard from the beginning.

And in case you think that John is being too harsh, the consequences of trying to change or improve the gospel of Christ are real! John is clear in verse 24 that only those who remain in the true gospel that was handed down to them once for all by the saints will in turn remain in the Son and in the Father.

Paul says the same thing to the church in Corinth as he writes in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. He exhorts them that if they hold on to the gospel which he preached to them, they will be saved. Paul goes on to remind them that Christ died for their sins, and that he was resurrected again on the third day according to the Scriptures.

Let that truth live in you says John. I am reminded of the charge in Philippians 2 when Paul urges the church in Philippi to “work out their salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose” God works in his people to accomplish his tasks as we remain in and grow deeper in the gospel. The more we trust God, the more he works in us.

The gospel that the readers of John’s letter, and Paul’s, heard and believed is the same gospel that we must hear and believe.

Don’t change it! There’s nothing wrong with it. It’s perfectly fine the way it is. It’s not broken!

[I remember my parents buying a brand new car when I was younger. It was Honda Civic. I remember complimenting them on their purchase because Honda engines are known to be of excellent quality. That was an amazing car. I loved driving it. It was a standard transmission and it was a ton of fun zipping around town in it. Honda’s are built very well, and other than regular maintenance and upkeep on things like breaks and oil changes, it was a reliable car. They put a ton of kilometers on that thing. You know what? They don’t have that car anymore. You know why? Because it got old, and unreliable, and eventually compared to the idea of a new car with fewer kilometers it didn’t have the sparkle it once did when it was brand new.]

The gospel does not need replacing. It never goes out of style. It never breaks. It always works for salvation. The gospel is the promise of God for eternal life.

There is always the temptation to surround ourselves with people who will say what our itching ears want to hear.

You know why there is the temptation to surround ourselves with people who will tell us what we want to hear? Paul tells Timothy this in his second letter to him. He warns Timothy that the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but will surround themselves with teachers who will say what they want to here in order to *suit their own desires*.

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This is the wrestling match of every Christian isn't it? We can either suit our own desires, which will lead us away from Christ, or we can humble ourselves before him and give him the glory that he deserves and have fellowship with him.

Look at what John says in verse 25: "And this is what he promised us – even eternal life"

You can suit your own desires for a time, but they do not lead ultimately to life and joy. If instead you humble yourself, and accept the timeless gospel, you will have the promise of eternal life. And God always keeps his promises.

The only authentic Christianity is lasting unchanging Christianity.

Verse 26- 27: The Holy Spirit teaches his people nothing but truth.

John is writing concerning the false teachers to the churches in Ephesus, identifying them and calling them out for what they are. We cannot be soft on harmful false teaching that attacks at the heart of the gospel. We cannot treat such views as a valid "opinion". We should call them out for what they are, just like John does here. Any so called gospel that celebrates or ignores sin, or any so called gospel that places a person at the centre is a false and deadly gospel, which is really no gospel at all. They only serve to lead people astray. And let's not kid ourselves, it's happening today! Look again at what John says in verse 26. "Are trying to lead you astray" means that in the present, there are those who are trying to take you from the right path!

John is writing "these things", and I think we need to understand the "these things" as remaining in belief of the gospel for eternal life. So if remaining in the gospel of Christ leads to eternal life, then being led astray means that you will forfeit eternal life.

The language here is like that of going somewhere and taking the correct path. Remember of course Jesus says that *he* is the way. In Mathew 7 Jesus refers to himself as the narrow gate and the narrow path. It's narrow not to limit the number of people to go through it, but because there is only one way to God, and that is through Christ alone.

[There never seems to be an end to construction. It's one of my pet peeves to be driving along and see that a road is closed due to construction. It just bugs me that now I have to go around where I want to go and add time to my trip. Now when the road is closed, the construction people put out signs showing the correct way to go. They are placed at every place you need to make a turn in order to avoid the construction and safely get around it. Those signs are there for a reason and they are very helpful to show you the path you need to take to safely and correctly get to where you're going. But sometimes, I'm not in the mood for taking the long way around, even if I know it's going to get me there. Sometimes, I think it best to try my luck and see if I can get through on that road. My thinking is "surely they wouldn't close the entire road, what if people live down there?" So there have been times when I ignore the signs and drive around the giant sign that reads "road closed". You know what happens more often than not? I get half way down the road and find out that yes, they can dig up the road so that there's no way to cross. My shortcut has turned into an even longer trip because now I have to backtrack in order to get back to where I was when the signs started. If my wife's in the car it's usually a

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quiet drive back because she's too gracious to tell me she told me so. See those signs are there for a reason but in my pride I think that surely I am the exception. All those other cars can waste their time going the long way around but me, I'm smarter than the rest of them.]

The false teachers follow that exact same logic. The Scriptures are clear signs that point to the salvation of Jesus Christ alone, but the pride and arrogance of the human heart says "but surely I am the exception, and you can be too". There is a shortcut to happiness and satisfaction. But ultimately, if you do not turn around from that foolish and false mentality, it will only lead to a dead end, and the consequences of rejecting the gospel are eternal. The consequences, as we already saw, is the forfeit of eternal life.

So how is this avoided? The Holy Spirit's leading.

John gives us great hope in verse 27. We are not left to ourselves to try and figure out the things of God. But we have one who is the great Teacher, the Holy Spirit who indwells each and every authentic Christian. Now, John says here they don't need anyone to teach them. Now he's not saying that you don't need teachers. He can't be saying that because after all, he's writing a letter *to teach them*. But he is saying that the ultimate teacher is the person of the Holy Spirit living in each authentic Christian.

The Holy Spirit is the ultimate teacher because he is always leading back to the supremacy and glory of Jesus. You can be sure that if there is some teaching that leads away from the supremacy and glory of Jesus, then it is not the Holy Spirit! And this makes perfect sense when you think about it because the Holy Spirit will always teach in line with the Word of God because all of Scripture points to the supremacy and glory of Jesus, and it *has* to because Jesus *is* the Word of God in the flesh.

Whenever you open the pages of Scripture, you must have the honest prayer and desire for God to reveal himself to you in his Word, and then desire for that Word to *change you*.

As the Holy Spirit is truth, he can only teach truth. And guess what, we are not. The Holy Spirit will often reveal things in us that are not true, or that are contrary to the truth. We have an option, we can either ignore the teaching of the Spirit, and place ourselves over him in authority, or we can humbly be changed by him to come in line with the truth.

You know what the message of the Holy Spirit essentially is in the heart of the Christian? Look at verse 27 again. He essentially says "remain in him. Just keep going. Trust in Christ. He has you. You've sinned again? He's covered it, confess and get up and I'll help you kill it."

Keep our eyes, on Jesus.

[You remember the events of Mathew 14. Jesus make his disciples get into a boat and cross the sea of Galilee. Jesus himself stays behind and dismisses the crowd and then he goes up on a mountainside to pray. In the middle of the night there is a storm, a bad one. The disciples are struggling against the storm and they see a person walking towards them on top of the water. They at first think it's a ghost, but it's not, it's Jesus! Peter being Peter calls out to Jesus to give him the word and Peter will get out of the boat and walk towards him. Jesus says come and Peter immediately gets out and himself starts walking on the water towards Jesus. It's an incredible show of faith, but it doesn't take long before Peter looks around and sees the storm and as soon as he takes his eyes off of Jesus, he starts to sink.

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The work of the Spirit in the life of the Christian is essentially to always be telling us “keep your eyes on Jesus”. Don’t let the storms of doubt and temptation and lies scare you, keep your eyes on Jesus.

But that’s not all, of course that’s not the end of Peter. As soon as he starts sinking he immediately calls out to Jesus to save him. And what does Christ do? He reaches down with his hand, picks Peter up, and together they get into the boat and the storm stops.]

That’s the work of the Spirit in each Christian, to get us to keep our eyes on Christ, and when we fail, because we do, the Spirit helps us cry out to Christ for help, and our merciful saviour gives it every time.

That’s authentic Christianity, that’s unchanging Christianity.

The only authentic Christianity is lasting, unchanging Christianity.

Verse 28: Unchanging Christianity is the only thing that truly changes people.

While it is fundamentally true that true Christianity itself does not change, in that the gospel of Christ does not change. It is equally true that authentic Christians will themselves change.

There’s a profound reason why it’s essential that the nature of the gospel does not change. There’s a profound reason why it is essential that those who trust in Christ remain in him. And that reason is because Christ is returning, and his return means that we must become something that we are currently not.

John says to continue in him, that is Jesus, “*so that*” something will be accomplished. This is speaking of a consequence of remaining in Christ. If we remain in Christ, when he appears, we will be confident and unashamed.

Now this is a profound statement.

[I’ve done some funerals over my time here, and I cannot count how many times I have heard the family members say something like “I know they’re in a better place now, he or she was such a good person] Is that what gives you confidence before God? Is that what you’re going to stand on as an argument when Christ returns in blazing glory and sits on his judgement throne to judge the living and the dead? That you were decently good? You better have a backup plan.

Truth is, there is no backup plan. If that is what you are going to bank on when Christ returns, you will be ashamed. God will call all people to an account of their lives. How will you stand up in comparison to a holy God?

[There was a skating rink across from our house growing up. We used to go skating all the time and play pick up hockey. It was a ton of fun, but you know when the fun started wearing off? When my younger brother started to become a better skater than me. And a better hockey player than me. Now I’m no rookie. I can skate and play hockey decently, but soon Chris started being able to outskate and outplay me easily. Compared to some other people I’m not too bad. But there will always be someone better than me.]

You may think you’re a good person. You may think you’re pretty smart. And maybe you are. Sure, you’ve never robbed a bank or hurt anyone. But what does your life look like when you stand next to

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sinless perfection? You start to look pretty bad. We all do. John says here “before him at his coming”. John knows something, that all will stand before Christ. John will, the false teachers will, those led astray by them will, and authentic Christians will. We’re all on the same level in one sense, because we are all sinners and unholy before a holy God. But that doesn’t mean all will be under the same fate.

We need to be changed if we are to have confidence before God and stand before him unashamed.

God is holy, we are not, and remaining in God is the only way to remedy this problem. Because as we remain in God, he does a work in us to change us. Paul tells the church in Philippi to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose”. And that good purpose is to make you holy in Christ Jesus.

We need to be changed by the power of Christ.

We need to be changed because John has already told us that this world will pass away, but those who have been changed by the power of the gospel of Christ will live eternally with him in the New Heavens and the New Earth.

Unless we are changed from our unholy state, we will not see the Lord. And that church, is our greatest need.

So church, remain in Christ. As you remain in Christ, he will remain in you and work to accomplish God’s good will of making you holy everlasting life in his presence. That’s authentic Christianity. That’s lasting and unchanging Christianity.

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