

“THE SPIRIT’S PROTECTION AGAINST SPIRITUAL DECEPTION”
1 JOHN 2:26-27

It’s always good to have a little protection — that’s why we have health and life and disability and car and house insurance, among others. But we don’t always realize the things that are protecting us. Like the little sister of Patricia Opfel. Patricia tells the story about their growing-up years:

My little sister, always a problem eater, was stalling one night at supper by asking about the various things in the salad.

Exasperated, my father finally explained, “It’s *good* for you! The green things prevent scurvy, the yellow things prevent poor eye-sight, the white things prevent weakness, and the rest of the things in there prevent spankings!”

Smart dad. And now, an informed child. She didn’t know just how well-protected she was.

We like protection — including protection from things like spankings. But there are things that are more significant as well.

When I first moved out of my parental home, I remember thinking, “I’m preparing for ministry, but do I know what will make a good church? How will I be protected from bad, or even worse, false teachers? Will I be able to make a good decision about a church?”

The sad fact is that there are many teachers in many churches who are bad, false, and intentionally deceiving. What is our protection? The Lord has given us faithful commentaries and similar kinds of resources; there are godly teachers in godly schools and there are wise pastors and elders.

But John points to something else in this passage — the gift of the Holy Spirit. In John 14, Jesus promised,

“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.” (John 14:16–17)

And the verses before us this morning are a reflection of those verses, though John now sees what was promised as having been fulfilled. So he says, yes, there are those who oppose the truth of God (vv. 18-19, 26). But the Lord has also given us provision against those who are in opposition: He’s given us His truth (v. 21), He’s given us Christ Himself (22-25), and He’s given us the Holy Spirit (20, 27).

SPIRITUAL DECEIVERS EXIST TO DECEIVE BELIEVERS.

THE SPIRIT OF GOD IS GIVEN TO BELIEVERS TO TEACH AND REVEAL THE TRUTH.

In these two verses, John focuses on the provision of the Spirit as our protection against deception. Just what does the Spirit do in protecting us?

1. The Spirit is Our ANOINTING (vv. 26-27a)

2. The Spirit is IN Us (v. 27b)

3. The Spirit is Our TEACHER (v. 27c)

SPIRITUAL DECEIVERS EXIST TO DECEIVE BELIEVERS.

THE SPIRIT OF GOD IS GIVEN TO BELIEVERS TO TEACH AND REVEAL THE TRUTH.

Just what does the Spirit do in protecting us?

1. The Spirit is Our ANOINTING (vv. 26-27a)

- The reason the believer needs the anointing of the Spirit is because there are some who are not living by the Spirit (v. 26).
 - ✓ When John says, *these things I have written to you*, he's not talking about another letter, but about the things he's already written in this letter, and specifically about the things he has just said in the previous paragraph. He has written about the truth of the Word of God and the Gospel (v. 21) and the truth about Christ as the infinite God-Man (vv. 22-23).
 - ✓ And John has written about these things about *those who are trying to deceive*. Notice what he says —
 - While these individuals have left the church (v. 19), they *are* still, presently, working to deceive those who are still in the church. Maybe they've set up another church down the street or started a parachurch ministry or maybe they just like to get together for social events and subtly attempt to pervert the thinking of the believers in Asia Minor. We don't know how they do it, but John's emphasis is that they are still actively working to distort the truth about Christ and the gospel.
 - Notice also that this is intentional and not accidental. Every teacher says things in error because of the frailty of his tongue. In one sermon I accidentally used the word "heaven" where I should have used the word "hell" and a teen-age young man asked me about it later. Other times, I've misread things or misinterpreted or haven't thought clearly and accurately. Those are slips of the tongue and mental deficiencies, but they are not intentional deception. But these men are *deceivers*. They are attempting to lead people astray from the truth. They are liars; they know they are lying, and they are lying for their own selfish intentions.
- ... Jesus promised that there would be deceivers (Mt. 24:24; Jn. 10:4-5).

Matt. 24:24 "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect."

... Paul observed that there indeed were deceivers (2 Tim. 3:13; Tt. 3:3).

- 2 Tim. 3:13 *But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.*
- Titus 3:3 *For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.*

... We do well to remember that the deceivers then and the deceivers we see now have the same source for their false teaching — They are antichrists (vv. 18, 22) and as antichrists, they are followers of the preeminent antichrist who will come at the end of time to oppose Christ and take His place (v. 18a). And that antichrist is a follower of Satan, who Jesus calls the father of lies (Jn. 8:44; cf. Rev. 12:9; 20:10). If someone is a liar, Satan is his source. He is a mouthpiece of the ultimate Antichrist — the devil who attempted to usurp the throne of God.

➤ Notice one final reality about these deceivers in this verse — they aren't successful. They are **trying** to deceive, but the church has stood strong against their threatening attacks. If they had been successful John would have been writing to correct the church and discipline the leaders; but he is writing to encourage them to continue to stand against this threat.

... There is a good reminder in that for us — we do not have to be susceptible to false teachers. It is possible to cultivate discernment and be the pillar of truth God called us to be (1 Tim. 3:15). One way to do that is through teaching about error — being unafraid to point it out and say, “that’s heresy and it will destroy you spiritually.” Some would have us to preach a “be happy” message; but part of our calling as shepherds is to warn about dangers. And just as I would be a foolish father if I didn’t train my children about dangers of playing in the road and financial dangers with credit cards, so I would be a foolish and useless shepherd if I didn’t point out spiritual dangers.

... But John also says we have an even greater provision against these false teachers. The primary way to cultivate an ability to stand against heresy is through the use of God’s provision for us — the Holy Spirit (v. 27).

- Verse 20 says ***You have an anointing***; here John says ***the anointing which you have received...***

What is this anointing?

- ✓ In the OT, anointing was done of kings, prophets, and priests to symbolically indicate the blessing or authority of God (e.g., Ex. 28:41; 1 Sam. 10:1; 16:1, 12-13; 2 Kings 9:11-13). The idea of the provision of God carries over to the NT use and the provision of the Holy Spirit.
- ✓ In the NT, Jesus was also anointed. In fact, His title Christ means “anointed one,” it is a Messianic title that refers to Is. 61:1 — “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted...”

- So when Jesus was baptized and the Holy Spirit came upon Him, it was a fulfillment of this passage and a reminder of the blessing and authority and power of God working in and through Jesus (Lk. 4:14-18).
- And just as Jesus Christ operated under the power and authority and blessing of the Holy Spirit, so Jesus also gave that same Spirit to anoint every believer: (Jn. 14:26; 15:26-27; 16:13-14; 2 Cor. 1:21-22). Christ is the “anointed one,” and as “Christians” — little Christs — we are “little anointed ones.” We are not Christ, but we have the same Spirit who anointed and empowered the ministry of Christ.
- ✓ Notice also that John says this anointing has been *received*. That implies two realities:
 - It is a gift. We don’t have the Spirit of God through merit; we have the Spirit like everything else in our lives — because of grace.
 - We already have the gift. Jesus promised it in John 14; but John writes confidently that every believer has already received it. At the time of conversion, every believer receives immediately the gift of the Spirit as a down payment of the full salvation that is to come (Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30; 1 Cor. 6:19).
- ✓ So what is John’s point about the anointing? Why is it so important? Because in the OT, it was symbolic of God’s grace being poured out on an individual to equip him for service. And every NT believer receives that very grace to live in the truth and avoid error through the gift of the Holy Spirit. We are not helpless and defenseless; we have been given the same resource as Christ as He lived His life on earth.
- So we have an anointing — the gracious blessing and provision of God; but we have even more.

2. The Spirit is IN Us (v. 27b)

- The anointing is a gift from Christ that resides in the believer, in contrast to the OT anointing which was *on* the one anointed.
- Notice that John says this anointing *abides in you*.
 - ✓ The anointing is not some lifeless, symbolic flask of oil. It is a living entity that has taken up residence within me. *Abides* means He is alive and it also means He is presently living in us.
 - ✓ And this Holy Spirit that indwells me will *always* dwell in me. He is given as a gift, never to be taken away. The OT saints did not know that reality (Ps. 51:11). But in the NT, we know that once we have received this gift, we cannot lose Him. He is ever present with us (Jn. 7:37-39; Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 2:12).
 - ✓ Further, the Spirit of God is not some mystical force that is within me; it is the third person of the Trinity who indwells me.

- So what is the value of having the indwelling Holy Spirit? “So what?” some might be tempted to say. “What’s so extraordinary about the Spirit of God in us? There are at least three implications:
 - ✓ *We have fellowship with the Father.* One of the themes of the book of John is fellowship with God — in fact, some commentators believe it is *the* theme. Fellowship with God is one of the first realities John addresses in this letter (1:3-4). But not everyone has that fellowship (1:6). How can we have fellowship with the Father — how can we have communion and identification and unity and intimacy with God the Father? Through the indwelling of the Spirit, a member of the Tri-unity of God:

“...the Spirit’s personal presence in us means we are brought to enjoy the Spirit’s own intimate communion with the Father and the Son. If the Spirit were not God, he could not do that. It is all because God is three persons — Father, Son, and Spirit — that we can have such communion. If God was in heaven and his Spirit a mere force, he would be more distant than the moon.”

(Michael Reeves, Delighting in the Trinity)

- ✓ *We have an internal ability not to sin.* If you were to tell me to throw a baseball, I could do that. But if you were to tell me to throw a baseball like Yu Darvish and try to save the Ranger’s season? Impossible. I can’t do it. But what if Yu Darvish were living in me? Then I could. Similarly, if God tells me, “you don’t have to sin,” I’d say that’s impossible (which was Jesus’ point in Mt. 5:48). But if the Spirit of God — the infinitely powerful God who does not and cannot sin and never changes — comes to live in me, then a verse like 1 Jn. 2:1 really is possible. As a believer, I don’t have to sin, not because I’m so good; no, I don’t have to sin because God is infinitely good and He has taken up residence in me to produce the fruit of His life in me (Gal. 5:22-26).

“The same Spirit who was present at creation and caused you to be born again is at work to empower your inner person (that is, your will or heart) so that you might resist sins you couldn’t resist before and do the good things which would otherwise be impossible. Defeatist Christians who do not fight against sins because they figure they were ‘born this way’ or ‘will never change’ or ‘don’t have enough faith’ are not being humble. They dishonor the Holy Spirit who strengthens us with supernatural power.” [DeYoung, The Hole in Our Holiness, 81-82.]

- ✓ *We have an ever-present Teacher* living within us who will keep us from error and keep us living in the Truth (which is the final point John makes in this verse):

3. The Spirit is Our TEACHER (v. 27c)

- Because the Spirit lives in us, John says, *you have no need for anyone to teach you.*
 - ✓ Many have taken that verse and said, “I don’t need commentaries or teachers or preachers or church; I have the Holy Spirit of God and that’s all I need to teach me.”
 - ✓ Yet that cannot be true, because if it were true then why would John even write this letter? They wouldn’t need John’s letter to tell them this. John had already acknowledged that they know the truth (v. 21), but they still need to be taught. Further, God has established churches to uphold the truth (1 Tim. 3:15) and has given pastors and teachers (Eph. 4:11; Js. 3:1ff) to teach the truth. In fact, in contrast to those who say we don’t need teachers, the NT and the Epistles seem to particularly emphasize the need for godly teachers (2 Tim. 2:2, 16-18, 24; Rom. 12:7; 1 Cor. 12:28-29; over 60 uses of “teach” in the Epistles).
 - ✓ In fact, do you remember the final command of Christ?

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matt 28:19–20)

- ✓ So what is John saying with this, if we do need teachers and he says we don’t?
 - His point is not that we don’t need teachers, but that we don’t need a “special (secret) knowledge” that was being advocated by these false teachers. They said they had a mystical insight into the truth and if the believers in Asia Minor would just follow them, they could know these things, too. No, John says, “you don’t need that kind of teacher, because you have the Holy Spirit indwelling you to teach you.”

“If you have God’s Word in your hand and God’s Spirit in your heart you have everything you need to understand truth and grow in Christ. Don’t go on a ceaseless quest for novelty.” [David Jackman]

- Notice what else John says about the Spirit’s teaching ministry:
 - ... *The Spirit’s teaching is sufficient — [He] teaches you about all things.* Now John doesn’t mean, “He teaches everything there is to know in all the earth — calculus and physics and medicine and linguistics and every language...” But it does mean that everything that these readers and the believer need to know for life and godliness is taught to them by the Spirit. He is sufficient to teach them all they need to thrive spiritually (2 Tim 3:16-17; Ps. 19).

- ... *The Spirit's teaching is true.* All that is taught by the Spirit of God is truth. And nothing that the Spirit of God teaches is a lie. The way John says this is to emphasize the reality of what he's saying — “it *is* this, and it *is not* that...” The false teachers were instructing falsely with falsehoods (4:1, 6; cf. 1:6; 2:4). The Spirit teaches the truth (4:2-3; 5:6). And we know it is true because it can be tested against the standard of the truth, the Word of God. We know if something is Spirit-taught if it conforms to the truth God has revealed in the Word of God (4:1ff); if it does not conform to that, it is not true, and it is not from the Holy Spirit.
- ... *The Spirit's teaching is consistent.* John says this teaching is ***just as it [the anointing] has taught you***. At the beginning of the verse, ***teach*** is a present tense while here it is past. The idea is that what the Spirit is teaching now is what He has always taught. His truth is always the truth. Because it is truth and because He is unchanging, He always teaches what is true. He is not leading us astray and He never will and He never has.
- ... *The Spirit's teaching is about Christ.* John doesn't explicitly say that, but it is implied in the final words of v. 27 — ***you abide in Him***. The first thing we should notice is that while this might be a statement of reality (“you are abiding in Him”) it is probably better to understand it as a command (the spellings are identical in Gk.) — ***abide in Him***. If the Spirit is teaching the truth, then live in Him. Now the question is, “who is Him?” It might be the Spirit? But John doesn't refer to the Spirit here as a person (though the Spirit is a person), but as an anointing. The ***Him*** John has been talking about is Jesus (vv. 23-25) and John is about to make that very statement (v. 28). And in fact, a primary ministry of the Spirit is to reveal Christ (Jn. 14:26).

CONCLUSION: Let's put this all together. We live, as John's readers did, in days when the truth of Christ is under attack. But God has given us protection against heresy and error through the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit of God. He is our anointing — the blessed provision of God — and He constantly indwells us and He constantly teaches us.

God has given us all we need for life and godliness; much of that provision is given to us through the gift of the Holy Spirit to indwell us. Are we safe? Yes — we are safe because we are in God and He is in us through the working presence of His own Spirit.