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# The Practical Purpose of Orthodoxy



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Message by Pastor Tom, Interim Lead Pastor  
Sunday Sermon for May 13, 2012  
Scripture Passage 1 John 2:19-29  
Vancouver Chinese Baptist Church Vancouver, Canada



As you know I grew up in Glasgow which for many years has had the reputation of being a fairly tough city. I travelled to school in the centre of the city each day on a double decker bus. I was 7 years old and I went on my own.

Our children grew up in Victoria, a pretty nice city, but until they were well into their teens they were not allowed to go downtown on their own, but they did roam on their bikes all over our neighborhood, always making it home for supper.

All that changed in Victoria on March 24<sup>th</sup>, 1991 when a four year old little boy called Michael Dunahee went missing on Sunday afternoon while his parents were playing touch football with some friends just a few feet away from him. They turned round to check on him and he was gone. He was never found.

The next day, I remember all the children's playgrounds and parks, all the places where children gather and play were empty and there was an eerie silence over the city.

Humanly, this must be as excruciating and agonizing as it gets for any parent. Many of us as parents and grandparents know that the kidnapping, the

taking of a child, is as painful an experience as we could ever imagine.

We have 8 grandchildren whom we love to take out places with us, but we never let them out of our sight. I am sure you are the same.

Yet without minimizing that one bit, and without trivializing it, John perhaps opens up an even more serious abduction. It is all those occasions in which people have walked away from the truth and the faith. They are more than losing their lives. they are putting their souls in jeopardy.

**19 They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.**

John is addressing a most serious situation. People who have claimed to know Christ, claimed to be Christians but have left the faith and the community. Their going has been seen as proof that they did not really belong in the first place.

I can only think of a few people whom I know who have really done that, deliberately turned their back on the truth, but I can think of many many others who

in one way or another have been kidnapped. They have been seduced.

The Bible warns us about the dangers we face in this regard. Here are some of the things to watch for.

### 1. **Childishness and immaturity**

#### **Ephesians 4:14**

**Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.**

That is why there is the constant encouragement to grow in grace and in the knowledge of God, to know His word. It is so we will not be infantile in our faith. Christian growth is not chronological. It is not how many years you have been a Christian. It is relational.

### 2. **Consumerism that chokes us**

#### **1st Timothy 6:10**

**For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, and some people, eager for money, have wandered away from the truth, and pierced themselves with many griefs.**

There is a man in the New Testament who is called Demas. Here is what it says about him.

Demas, who loved this world and deserted me (2 Tim 4:10)

What a terrible epitaph for someone's life. You go to church on Sunday and you look around and say, hey, where's Demas, and someone says, he quit! He packed it in. He loved this world and deserted the faith. He represents many Christians who faced with the choice between the immediate and the eternal. They choose the immediate. They do what John warns us not to do (last week's study). They agape the world.

In one of his parables, Jesus warns us about how the cares and busyness of our world can choke out the word of the kingdom, which is the reign of God in us. Each of us needs to be aware of that.

### 3. **Shalowness**

We do not go deep in the matters of faith. It just stays on the surface of our lives.

That's why many scriptures such as Col 2:7 encourage us to be rooted and built up in our faith. We have to go deep before we can grow tall.

### 4. **Spiritual Confusion/ Uncertainty**

The result of not being rooted in faith is that we are easily seduced by the many voices in our culture. So Christians wander off into some version of new age or another world religion such as Buddhism. They see spiritual truth as a kind of cafeteria where you go down the line with your plate, and you take a little bit of this and try a little bit of that. Salvation is good. Heaven sounds fine so we will try that. Not too much discipleship that could be hard to take. Go easy on servanthood. It's also a little hard to swallow. Perhaps a sprinkle of Buddhism will not hurt. How about some meditation that sounds nice, and so along the buffet line we go.

Some Christians are so uncertain of what they believe that they cannot discern what is truth. They are putting themselves in danger, living in harm's way.

### 5. **The Church. Some Christians in one way or another to be honest have been burned by the church. They say to themselves, I don't need that any more. I am out of here.**

I think we can understand that. Harriet and I have been in pastoral ministry now for over 40 years. I will be honest with

you, and we have seen and known the church at its best and also its worst. We have been loved and cared for, and we have also been abandoned. There have been times when I wanted to quit. Some people we know have walked away from the church. You may know some who have done that.

If you asked people in each of these categories if they still believed they were Christians, I think many of them would pretty much say YES, but whatever passion or excitement or enthusiasm they used to have is pretty much gone. In the language of John, they have not truly remained.

Here is what we must face. Our greatest danger may not be that we will deny and renounce the faith. We will not turn our back on it. Our greatest danger is that we will simply settle for a mediocre version of it. We settle for a dim shadow of what it really can be. I feel deeply for people like that.

Why does something like this happen?

Well, there may be a lot of different reasons, but perhaps at the heart is this, people often did not grasp what truly lies at the core of their faith especially in the work of the Trinity for them. Without this strong grasp in the inner heart of their faith,

things silently slipped through their fingers.

They were seduced, kidnapped. They have not remained. A key word in John, to remain is to stay the course, to finish. In a society that is awash with consumerism and relativism, there is a need for orthodox thinking and unyielding commitment to truth.

The rest of this passage for this week is not an easy one, so I will try to untangle it for us by seeing how it speaks about the different persons of the Trinity, Father Son and Spirit, and they are the antidote. The answer to staying the course all the way to the end and beyond.

**20 But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.**

**21 I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth.**

**22 Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist-- he denies the Father and the Son.**

**23 No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.**

**24 See that what you have heard from the beginning**

**remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father.**

**25 And this is what he promised us--even eternal life.**

**26 I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray.**

**27 As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit-- just as it has taught you, remain in him.**

I will be honest. This is not the easiest passage. My suggestion is that we stand back from it. As we stand back from this passage and look at it through a wide angle lens.

Woven through this somewhat complex passage are numerous references to the orthodox truth and doctrine which we call the Trinity. The belief in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Its importance and value lies beyond mere orthodoxy for the sake of orthodoxy. It is truth of the Trinity that keeps us safe. The truth of the Trinity is woven into the central work of salvation. God the Father arranging it, the Son accomplishing it on the cross, and the Spirit applying it to our lives.

## **KNOWING GOD AS FATHER IS THE KEY TO A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM.**

Many people would say that they believe in God. Frankly, they are not sure what kind of God they believe in. Sometimes people talk about God as the big guy in the sky, a kind of cosmic grandfather to us all.

In our society, we have seen the work of many 12 step recovery programs, and they have brought many people freedom from the addictions that have bound them. I am not being critical of them in any way. Early in the steps to recovery, people are told that they need to reach out to a higher power, often with the description, whoever you believe that power to be. It is the necessary step of acknowledging that there is a power outside us that we need to reach for and find. The struggles of life cannot be mastered just by pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps. To that end, this first step is good.

But if that is as far as it goes or if this is as far as the person in recovery goes. If it stays there, it may well fall short of truly leading us to come to know God as Father.

At the very heart and core of his life and ministry, Jesus knew God as His Father. We learn to come to him in prayer. Our father who is in heaven, holy be your name. More than anything else, Jesus refers to God as His Father, an intimate relationship within the divine family. He came to do the Father's will. He said, I and my father are one. My heavenly father knows your need. In my Father's house are many mansions and I go to prepare a place for you. Jesus says that no one really comes to know the Father except through Him.

Orthodox truth and thinking about God in a confusing world in which we hear a cacophony of religious voices, all calling us in different directions, orthodox truth invites us, demands us to know God as much more than a higher power, whatever you call him to be. He is not some nameless cosmic grandfather or someone in the universe to be addressed "to whom it may concern". He is to be known as nothing less than God our Father.

He is the Father whose hand holds us tightly, who watches for us to come home when we are having one of our prodigal moments. We are always welcome to climb up on his lap. He will always listen to our stories of childlike joy. He will always have an ear for our

struggles, whether they be large or small.

### **KNOWING CHRIST AS THE SON IS THE KEY TO HIS IDENTITY.**

**22 Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist-- he denies the Father and the Son.**

**23 No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.**

**24 See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father.**

Gnostic teachers had a terrible struggle trying to understand Jesus. Who was he? What was his true nature?

Remember the dualistic nature of gnosticism which is the context of this letter. The spiritual and the material cannot come together. They ended up on a kind of teeter-totter. One the one hand, some saw him as all divinity, no real humanity. Stories were told of how Jesus walked along wet sand and did not leave footprints because he had no real body weight. At the other end of this doctrinal teeter-totter, people taught that he started as a human being. Then somehow God came upon

him during his earthly life, then left him, and he died as a human being again, just as he had started. Between humanity and divinity a whole range of options developed about who Jesus really could be.

Add to this the confusing new age theology of Christ-consciousness or the reduction of Christ to being just a great moral teacher, and we have robbed him of everything that makes Him all that he truly is.

At the heart of every heresy and cult is a substandard understanding and belief about who Jesus truly is. The ultimate doctrinal test for professing Christians is always centred on the person of Jesus.

On the one hand, we hold his humanity. This means nothing less than Jesus took to himself and entered into everything that constitutes a fully human experience.

We are reminded, we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has entered into all that feel and know. He has engaged with every frustration of being human.

On the other hand we hold his divinity. He was in the form of God. In his inner life he walked with the Fathers' will. He inspires us beyond the

ordinariness of being human. Jesus supernaturalizes our natural existence and the routine of humanity.

There are three major confessions in the Bible about who Jesus is:

1. **He is the Son of God.**
2. **He is the Christ, which means the Anointed One.**
3. **He is Lord.**

This is the confession that we make in baptism. One of the reasons that baptism is so critical is that it does not let us forget what we declared. We may want to, but we cannot. In baptism, we confess that Jesus is BOTH Son of God and also LORD. We surrender our lives, our will, our heads and our hearts to him in an unforgettable act of confession.

God's truth has both the elasticity to allow us to explore and also has the stability to keep us from wandering.

### **KNOWING GOD AS SPIRIT IS THE POWER FOR LIFE-TRANSFORMATION.**

Many churches and many Christians make one of two mistakes regarding the Holy Spirit. Either they exaggerate his work/ministry, making too much of it or they minimize his work and ministry, making too little of it.

2:20 and 2:27.

**20 But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.**

**27 As for you, the anointing you received (past tense) from him remains (present tense) in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit-- just as it has taught you, remain in him.**

Ephesians 1:13-14.

**13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,**

**14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession-- to the praise of his glory.**

Word deposit = an engagement ring.

I appreciate that there are different emphases here in different churches. Here is what I teach.

Every Christian is given the gift and the presence of the Holy Spirit when they become Christians. Everything we need is given to us in our spiritual birth. The continuous obsession

with some new thing is not the mark or characteristic of the Christian mind. The better question is do we live in the Spirit's true power which is given to each of us?

What is the work and task of the Holy Spirit?

Simply, the work of the Holy Spirit is a continuation of the work and ministry of Jesus.

**John 14:16**

**16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever--**

**17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.**

**John 16:7**

**7 But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.**

Ultimately his work in each of us is one of life change, life-transformation. He takes the rough clay of our lives and His work is to shape and mould the character of Jesus in us.

Sometimes when you challenge Christians about their lives or attitudes, they just shrug their shoulders and say, this is the way I am. I cannot change.

But this is a denial of the work and power of the Holy Spirit in us. This desire for transformation is a divine impulse within every one of us. For the Christian the change happens at the deepest and most inward place of our being. It is ultimately about the change of personality. God is transforming us and that is the hardest work of all in the universe.

There are three critical changes that take place in our hearts and lives through the work or anointing of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we are aware of these as they happen. Sometimes we are aware of them only in retrospect, as we look back. They do not happen just once, they are ongoing.

The first work is a change in consciousness. The Spirit, often slowly and quietly awakens within us a new awareness. It often comes like the silent march of the dawn, slowly but relentlessly pushing the morning fog away, exchanging the stale thoughts for fresh new ones.

But it is not enough for us merely to become conscious of

some new truth.

The second stage is one of conviction.

**John 16:8**

**8 When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment:**

**9 in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me;**

**10 in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer;**

**11 and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.**

I may be conscious of my need for change, but if that is all I do, it is unlikely that my behavior will change. Conviction moves me forward, and challenges me to place the truth of God alongside the lie that I am living, and then challenges me even more to choose the better choice.

We cannot be transformed until we give ourselves to the guiding power of the Holy Spirit. That is His holy task in our lives.

The final stage is one in which conviction is turned into action by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. When we understand God's truth clearly and are convicted by it firmly,

then a new law of action begins to rule us and shape us into righteousness.

The work of God in our lives insists. It insists that people can change. The transformation of the human personality is really possible. It is never easy, rarely quick, but it is possible. That is the real work of God in us. It is the profound realisation that I am not to try to do the right things. Rather I am to become the right sort of person. (We will unpack this in greater detail next week as we see what it really means to be a child of God.)

The last paragraph gives us a great picture. One that encourages us forward.

**28 And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.**

**29 If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him.**

Several years ago, one of our sons ran the Canadian Ironman in Penticton. I am really not sure why. The Ironman consists of a swim, 2.4 miles; then a bike race, 112 miles; then you finish with a little marathon which is 26.2 miles. For those of you who

think in metric, this is a swim of 3.8 K, a bike race of 180 K and a run of 42.2 K. No matter which way you measure it, it seems to be a long way.

Our son Peter has determined his personal time would be under 14 hours. That was his goal. His time as he came under the electronic score board was 13.59.29. He did it.

As part of the reward, he and all the others who made it to the end got a medal and a t-shirt. It says "finisher". So you could walk around Penticton the next day, that is if you could walk, with a t-shirt that said FINISHER!

Can you imagine Jesus standing just at the other side of the finishing line, a pile of t-shirts in his hand, ready to hand them out to all those crossing the line, and it simply says on them "finisher"?

He says, You made it to the end of the race, you did not quit, you did not pack it in, you did not walk out. You stayed to the end, and truth kept your feet moving forward, even when your muscles were sore, and your lungs were gasping for air, you did not quit.

What profound difference will it make to your life this week to live as a Trinitarian Christian to say, I believe in God the Father, almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

What real difference will it make to your life this week to say, I believe in Jesus, fully god and fully man, the one on whom God put human flesh and walked the earth?

As I believe in him, I confess that

1. **He is the Son of God.**
2. **He is the Christ.**
3. **He is Lord.**

What practical difference does it make in your life this week to say, I believe in the Holy Spirit, and he is at work in my life, shaping and fashioning me, speaking into my conscience, convicting me gently, but thoroughly renewing my mind?