

“The Last Hour”: 1 John 2:18-23

by Pastor Tim Dodson,
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John 2:18-23 (18) Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. (19)

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they

might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. (20) 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.



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1 John 2:18-23

The apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 13, verse 5 ... *Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you [a]re disqualified.* It was clear that Paul had no qualms about a person “examining” their stand in Christ, or for that matter, examining *another* person's stand in Christ. He stopped short...as we all should...of damning an individual to hell...due to our perceived understanding of another, *which, by the way, is the true rendering of the command by Jesus “not to judge,”* but he knew what it meant to be a “fruit inspector,” a.k.a. Matthew 7.

The apostle John, in this letter, has also taken up that torch. John has been presenting the grounds for one's redemptive assurance through the “test of communion and unity.” Communion with God, communion with Christ the Son, and communion with the indwelling Holy Spirit. But John's not done, for he is going on now to present even the test of *lateral* communion, that of the communion and unity with one's spiritual body, the church community. It's been said that assurance concerning one's Christian faith can be drawn from the nature of the enemies he encounters. John is exposing these enemies and by doing so is calling upon *us* also to expose them for what they are.

There is no doubt these enemies of ‘God and truth’ are dangerous. True believers need to understand that, and clearly know how to deal with them. To avoid spiritual deception, we must be able to discern both people and doctrine; to be aware when something fails to pass the “smell test” and to confirm status “*by testing the spirits as to whether they are of God...*” (1 John 4) before plunging forward. “...*because many false prophets have gone out into the world.*” The way to develop such discernment is to abide both in the Word and in the Spirit. This is all so important because some actions cannot be withdrawn and sometimes cannot ever be repaired.

Paul too warned us of such: “*For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also, from among yourselves, men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore, watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.*” (Acts 20:29-31) I have been witness to folks being conned by such wolves, and lacking the spiritual discernment necessary, they fell prey to made-up self-serving stories, false doctrines, and an “easy Jesus” belief system. It's a stunning display that encompasses ego-stroking, false promises, and emotional deception. If it had music, it would be an opera.

We all probably have a little info on this “antichrist” thing...although perhaps only from Hollywood and other such media. Back in the late 70's, there was a series of movies called “The Omen.” Scary stuff. However, it only added to our already existing misconceptions that this antichrist will be this overtly terrible dude that we'll see coming a block away. Wrong. The *one* antichrist will fly under the radar for many years without suspicion.

All while these other “little” anti-Christ’s will come amongst us locally and will attempt to usurp the forward movement of that church.

Note again Paul’s plea in Acts 20...these “savage wolves” will “come in amongst you.” Therefore, it is safe to assume we won’t have to go looking for them in the lofty glass offices of modern politics. And if they actually *looked* like ‘savage wolves,’ no one would be fooled because no one would go anywhere near them. No, they will look normal and will often appear quite upright. Eventually, however, such folks do indeed show their colors. I’m not even personally convinced that, in all cases, they actually *know* they are a wolf! They just explain away why they, *on occasion*, have ‘sheep in their teeth.’ And the best cover of all is to use smoke and mirrors to point to others as guilty of doing what they themselves are in fact doing. The picture would show an overgrown child holding a gas can and matches, a burning village in the background, and pointing to someone outside the picture frame.

Verse 18 says it is the “last time” or the “last hour” or even rendered “last days.” Notice that John says, “We **know** that it is the last hour.” Yes...indeed we do. We know because there are so many who are denying Jesus Christ. So many little anti-Christ’s. Such language is invariably spoken of in negative and scary terms, so much so that it seems to call for foreboding music in the background when such is verbalized. But let us remember that much is going to happen in those ‘last days’ and not all of it will be negative. Check out Acts 2:17... “and it shall be in the *last days*” God says, “that I will pour forth my spirit on all mankind.” Hmmmm. That sounds awesome huh? However, there is also no doubt that things are going to get ugly too. The ‘gap’ between right and wrong...holy and unholy...real and fake...faithful and wicked, will grow exponentially. It will become increasingly hard to hug the ‘middle ground.’ And that can only be a good thing!

In 2 Timothy 3 Paul says “*But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power.*” And how did Paul tell us to deal with these folks? Picket, protest, and vote the bums out of office? Write an internet blog to take them down? *What?* Paul says in verse 6 there “*from such people **turn away!***” Turn away...live different...live separate...be a different kind of person. And God will deal with these that “*resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith*”...and Paul says in verse 9 there in Timothy that eventually “*they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all.*” And we have certainly witnessed that in times past.

But for sure in the last days “*difficult times will come.*” (2 Tim 3:1) Let us never fail to acknowledge that or we will not take our walk seriously and eventually just slide into a lifestyle that says, “*Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.*” (2Pe 3:4)

Warren Wiersbe : “*Since the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God is doing a "new thing" in this world. All of Old Testament history prepared the way for the work of Christ on the cross . All history since that time is merely preparation for 'the end,' when Jesus will come and establish His kingdom. "The last hour" began back in John's day and has been growing in intensity ever since. There were ungodly false teachers in John's day, and during the intervening centuries they have increased both in number and in influence. "The last hour" or "the last times" are phrases that describe a kind of time, not a duration of time.*” (Matt 24:42) “*Therefore, be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.*”

Several times in scripture we are called upon to "be alert"...to "take heed" concerning these “last days.” Matthew 25:13, Mark 13:33, etc. A cursory review of the news today would certainly say that this is not a time to play it loose and fast! Matt 24:11-12 tells us that “ *...many false prophets will appear and will deceive many people. Sin will be rampant everywhere, and the love of many will grow cold.*” We need to do our absolute best to grasp all of this without finding ourselves huddling in the corner in a fetal position.

Holding our ground on all of this is not easy, is it? Dealing with this issue is a classic case of the “damned if you do and damned if you don’t” scenario. When so many of those all around us claim the mantle of faith and yet adhere to a severely compromised version of Christianity, what is a person to do? How do we avoid sounding judgmental and accusatory, self-righteous even, and yet still walk according to the pages of scripture?

It’s crucial to be aware of the context of this passage in light of the whole of the letter thus far. We read that people who love the world and its systems (1Jn 2:15-17) have placed themselves in opposition to Christ and are therefore called “antichrists.” This is not about some sort of horror-movie character with a secret 666 tattoo under their hairline. This speaks of something far closer to home and much more “real.” This speaks rather of the 'back-yard' of each one of us. Our culture has messed with us on the use of that title. It's hard to think of such a label up close and personal in our lives and world, isn't it? Could such be any more disconcerting? And yet there will indeed one day come **THE** Antichrist...

While John is the only writer who uses that particular term; other terms are used in other parts of Scripture;—the Idol Shepherd, the Lawless One, the Willful King, the Son of Perdition, the Man of Sin, the False Prophet, and the one who shall come in his own name. These different terms describe the same person, the one who shall arise in the days of the great tribulation and lead guilty apostate Christendom and Judaism farther away from God than they are (even) at the present time. (HA IRONSIDE)

Verse 19 "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us."

This passage describes the 'sifting of the church.' The separation of the genuine from the counterfeit, the professors from the possessors. In Matthew 13:25-30, Jesus tells us that the wheat and the tares "would grow together until the harvest," that the counterfeit nature of the tares will not be apparent until late in the game.

“They went out from us” refers to the antichrists that John has been speaking about. We gather then that these little “antichrists” were once participants in the community of believers, but had now departed from it. John says that proves they were never genuine members of the community body. John does not say these antichrists were *thrown out* but that they *went out voluntarily*. When they went out, it was not simply a matter of moving from one church to attend another. They left “THE church,” even while some of them indeed found another “church” at least in the broadest use of that word.

“They were not really of us...” - Where do many of these antichrists come from? Shockingly, they come from within the church. False teachers are teachers within the church; they hold positions of leadership within the church. The fact is, there were... *and are* ...today those in the Body of Christ, those who absolutely look like authentic, genuine believers, yet they have never been born of God's Spirit (Jn 3:3-5). They say the right things and pray the right words, but their lives have never been surrendered, their hearts are not changed, and they are not genuinely redeemed in Christ. There are of course blatant pagans out there who make no attempt to mask their position on God. But that’s not who John is talking about.

John is referring to those who pass amongst us that are, *bluntly said*, merely religious fakers right in the midst of God's community of true believers. In passages such as Matthew 11:21-24, Jesus Himself warned that these folks who have experienced great exposure to truth and light, will suffer much greater condemnation and pain because of their denial. They will truly be "without excuse" when they stand before their Creator.

All of this is...*and indeed should be*, a matter of great anguish in the hearts of true believers. This is not to be a matter of spite or condemnation, but rather something that should cause all of us to weep at their loss. Indeed, it is a hard thing for us who are in love with Christ to grasp such an action. Because for so many of us, the thought of departure from Christ and the body of believers is unthinkable...*impossible*. For us, we have drunk the grace and love of God deeply and can't imagine living apart from it. We echo the words of Peter in John 6:68, who,

when he was asked by Christ if he wanted to depart, like so many had done before him, said, "*Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life.*"

Invariably, those that do depart try to recruit others from within the church to join them. They need others to ease their conscience. While such situations are painful and unpleasant, John's words here should prepare us not to be surprised when it occurs. Many of these folks have been given the label of 'backslider' when, in reality, they did not "slide back" but, in fact, were never true believing Christians at all. Like those that Peter speaks of, "*They prove the truth of this proverb: 'A dog returns to its vomit.' And another says, 'A washed pig returns to the mud.'*" (2Peter 2:22). They were never actually sheep, though they were thought to be. And to treat them as if they are just backslidden can be a real disservice to them. We must be careful to never give false assurance to one who is in such a position. By doing so we can inadvertently...*often under the worldly version of love*, usher them through the gates of hell. Let our love be constant, but always and forever *honest*.

Verse 20: "*But you have an anointing from the Holy One...and you know all things...*"

What is this anointing? Nothing less than the power and infilling of the very Holy Spirit of God in possession of a life. It is impossible to believe that the Spirit of God...Creator, liberator, redeemer, and healer could enter a living being without causing radical transformation. "*But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.*" (John 16:13) Thus under the power of the Spirit of God there is a new and inexplicable "knowledge" that is endued. So we could rephrase 1Jn 2:20 like this: "*You have the Holy Spirit from God in you and so you know the truth.*"

"*You know all things?*" Really? The primary concern of the Holy Spirit herein is the truth about Jesus Christ and about man and his world as they relate to Christ and to eternity. It means then all things that have to do with God and Christ and man's spiritual hunger; it means all things that have to do with man and his world, their purpose and fate; it means all things that have to do with Christianity and life, the purpose, meaning, and significance of life.

Later, John explains in chapter 4, verse 13 that "*By this we know that we abide (are at home) in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.*" In His Upper Room Discourse, Jesus tells His apostles that "*when I go, I will send Him (the Spirit) to you.*" In Acts, Jesus explains that His disciples would "*receive power when the Holy Spirit*" had come upon them (Acts 1:8) Therefore the Holy Spirit is to be our supernatural "source of power" for supernatural ministry, including the discerning of good from evil as well as true from false, as in the present context of false teaching about Christ.

The genuine believer knows the truth; he knows the Lord Jesus Christ is the Lord and Savior of men, the very Son of God Himself, and is in possession of the very Word of God. In addition to this, he has the Holy Spirit to teach him the truth and to help him remember the words of Christ. Therefore, there is no excuse for the believer ever being misled by antichrists or false teachers.

When Paul wrote to the saints at Rome, he said - "*And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another. But I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God.*" (Ro 15:14) So just as with the believers John was writing to, the believers in Rome needed not so much to be taught *NEW* truth but to be reminded of (and to live out) old truth they had already been taught. Yes...even the hard and uncomfortable stuff.

Isn't this true with us? Even if we have walked with Jesus for a number of years? Our greatest failures are often a result of failing to remember and/or obey truths we were taught years ago! Our prayer should ever be the hymn writer's words "Prone to wander Lord I feel it, here's my heart, Lord, take and seal it, seal it for Thy courts above." **Amen!**