

Remaining Faithful in the Last Hour

1 John 2:18-27

Please don't read anything into the fact that I'm preaching about the antichrist on Mother's Day. In our study of 1 John, this passage just happened to fall on this day. I'm not apologizing for this passage because I think it's an amazing text that will both challenge and encourage all of us.

In this passage John tells that we are living in "the last hour," which is basically the period of time between the first and second comings of Christ. Both the old and new testaments talk about this last chapter in human history so that we will know how to live appropriately. Sometimes it's called the "end times" or the "last days"; here it's called the last hour. Just like a good coach will prepare their team to do well in the fourth quarter or the second half or the late innings, John wants the church to be faithful in the last hours. Finishing well matters.

One threat, John tells us, during the last hours involves those whom he designates as "antichrists" (plural). We need to understand three things if we are going to remain faithful to Jesus in "the last hour": 1) what is true of "antichrists" (how we can identify them) 2) what is true of believers (how God has given us everything we need to remain faithful), and 3) our response (what we need to do to remain faithful). For clarity sake I'll group the verses that talk about each of these three topics; so we'll be skipping around a bit in this passage.

What is true of "antichrists." (1 John 2:18-19, 22-23, 26)

Verse 18 sets the context of this passage.

18 Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.

John calls his readers "children" to signify that he is writing with the affection and care of a spiritual father. He reminds them of something they had already heard, namely "that antichrist is coming" in "the last hour." John is the only biblical author to use the term "antichrist" (4x in 1 John and once in 2 John). When the prefix "anti" is added to a name or title it refers to someone who is **against** that person or someone who **claims to be** that person. John's readers had been told that in the last hour a powerful figure would arise who would set himself against the true Christ (Jesus) and would falsely claim to be Christ himself (see Matthew 24:24, Mark 13:22).

Interestingly, John doesn't discuss what is true of **the** antichrist (singular) who would one day come; he is more concerned about the "**many** antichrists" (plural) who had already come in that day. John identifies who he's talking about beginning in verse 19:

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 it might become plain that they all are not of us.

The antichrists John had in mind were individuals who had previously been part of the believing community. But when they “went out” (or separated) from the church, it became plain that they weren’t true believers. They didn’t just leave a church; they left the faith.

We learn more about the people John designated as antichrists in verses 22 and 23.

22 Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. 23 No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.

These hadn’t left the church because of conflict or disappointment. They left because they no longer believed that Jesus is the Christ - the promised Messiah who would save the people from their sins and who would reign forever. As we see throughout the gospel of John and here in the book of 1 John, your relationship with the Father and the Son rise or fall together: if you deny the Son you also deny the Father; if you have a relationship with the Son you also have a relationship with the Father.

Down in verse 26 John tells us one last thing about these antichrists:

26 I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you.

They hadn’t merely left the believing community and denied that Jesus is the Christ; they were also “trying to deceive” those who were still following Christ. They probably wouldn’t admit to trying to deceive Christians, but since they were lying about Christ (see verse 22; they were saying things that are not true about Him), that’s exactly what they were doing.

What does this mean for us? On the one hand, it doesn’t mean that we should label people who’ve left the church or left the faith as antichrists; John used that term to describe people who were actively trying to persuade Christians to give up their faith. On the other hand, such people do exist in our day, therefore we need to take seriously the rest of what John says in this passage. I am aware of numerous examples of high-profile people who have abandoned their faith in Jesus and who are now preaching a gospel that doesn’t declare that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life - the only way to the Father. Apparently many are following them because it’s less offensive to modern sensibilities. I could give you names, but I won’t because I don’t want you listening to them; I don’t want you to be persuaded by them. [I realize that this may sound close-minded; we live in a culture that encourages us to explore absolutely every philosophy and every lifestyle available. But Jesus said that the narrow path of discipleship - the one that few people take - is the only one that leads to life.]

After John identifies the threat of antichrists, he explains how God has given us everything we need to remain faithful. Let’s see what is true about believers.

What is true about believers. (1 John 2:20-21, 27)

20 But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge.

A more literal translation would be, “But you have *an anointing* [the term is a noun] by the Holy One” (as in the NASB and NIV). The noun “anointing” (χρῖσμα) is found in the New Testament only here in the verse 27. The verb “to anoint” (χρίω) is found several other places, almost always referring to God anointing someone with the Holy Spirit (see Luke 4:18 of Jesus and 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 of Paul). Just as various rituals in the old covenant involved anointing people by pouring oil over their head, in the new covenant God anoints us by pouring out the Holy Spirit into our hearts (Romans 5:5)!

John wants believers to know that we have been anointed by the Holy One (a reference to Jesus - see John 6:69) and that we “all have knowledge” about Jesus. He continues in verse 21.

21 I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth.

As we see repeatedly in 1 John, John reminds his readers that when they believed the gospel **they received the truth**. If you are a believer in Jesus, you too need to lock onto the reality that God has given you both the Holy Spirit and the truth about Jesus. This is exactly what Jesus had promised the original disciples the night before He was crucified. He told them, “I am going back to the Father, but I will send you the Holy Spirit to remind you of what I’ve taught and to lead you into all truth” (John 14:26 and 16:13). The original disciples and those close to them wrote the documents we call the New Testament. Because we have those documents the truth is available to us too. When we believe in Jesus, we too are anointed by the Holy Spirit and we too have the truth.

Why is all of this a big deal in light of the fact that “antichrists have come”? Down in verse 27 John explains that we, therefore, have no need for anybody (especially antichrists) to explain to us what is really true about Jesus.

27 But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him.

The indwelling, abiding Holy Spirit is our best defense against the deception of those who’ve left the church and now want to enlighten the rest of us. John’s statement that “you have no need that anyone should teach you,” isn’t an absolute statement (or else he wouldn’t have written 1 John which contains teaching on many different topics). Rather, in a qualified sense, as genuine believers we don’t need anybody to teach us about Jesus as the Christ because we have been taught by God, the Holy Spirit, that Jesus is the Christ. That’s the one thing we know that we know.

I’ve seen this over and over in the lives of believers, including many of you here at Faith. When some tragedy strikes or when you fall into some sin or when you’re overcome with despair, **genuine believers cling to the gospel**. There are plenty of

things we don't know in this life; there are plenty of things we can't figure out. But there is one thing we do know: Jesus died for us on the cross, therefore we are accepted by God, wanted by God, and will spend eternity with God. This is our anchor in the midst of the storms.

In the last four verses of this passage John gives a couple of directives. If we understand that "antichrists" exist and that God has given us the Spirit and the truth, what is left for us to do to remain faithful? The short answer is "abide."

Our Response. (1 John 2:24-27) He first talks about letting the word abide in us and then about us abiding in the Father and the Son.

24 Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father.

What believers have heard from the beginning of our walks with Christ is the gospel, the good news about Jesus. When people challenge our faith and suggest that we're being narrow-minded (or whatever), we go back to the gospel and let it humble us and melt our hearts. We become convinced all over again that the gospel is the best news we could ever receive. God Himself did the unimaginable: God's Son Jesus became one of us, lived a sinless life, and willingly went to the cross to pay for our sins; by believing in Him we now have eternal life! If that word abides in us, we will abide in the Son and the Father.

In the second half of verse 27, John wraps up this passage by saying:

27 . . . But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie —just as it has taught you, abide in him.

John's logic at the end of the verse is, "Since the Holy Spirit has taken the truth about Jesus and impressed it on your hearts and minds, abide/remain in him [Jesus]!" As Jesus' words abide in us, we abide in Him.

In her book *The Madonna's of Leningrad*, Debra Dean tells about the Hermitage Museum in Leningrad, Russia during World War II. [Madonna - "my lady" in Italian; refers to a painting of Jesus' mother, Mary.] As the Nazis laid siege to Leningrad, the Hermitage museum staff packed up and evacuated 1.1 million pieces of art in case the museum was bombed. This was a labor of love by the museum staff who actually lived in the basement of the Hermitage during the siege. Most of the paintings were removed from their frames and rolled up in paper and packed in crates to be evacuated. Significantly, the empty picture frames were hung back on the walls as a pledge that the paintings would one day return.

Accounts tell us that during the war Russian soldiers who came back to Leningrad from the front would sometimes come to the Hermitage. Some of the tour guides knew the paintings so well that they could give tours with just the empty picture frames hanging on the wall. The paintings were so etched into their minds and hearts that they would

point out features and colors and tell the story of the paintings in moving detail. These descriptions flowed from such a deep place that “visitors could almost see them” (appendix of Madonnas of Leningrad by Debra Dean). Sometimes visitors silently wept because they were so moved by the descriptions of the paintings.

What if the gospel and the Scriptures in general captivated our hearts and minds in similar fashion? What if the words of Jesus were like paintings etched into our memories to the point where they captivated the deep places of our hearts. This doesn't happen by accident, and this can't merely be a technique or an isolate activity. Letting Scripture abide within us has to be the passion of our hearts. Abiding happens when we read the Word, memorize the Word, meditate on the Word, talk about the Word, and become doers of the Word. When we let the Scriptures captivate our hearts and minds, we will abide in Christ and we will be safe from those who would lure us away from him.