

## Living in the Last Hour

1 John 2:18-29

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In ancient China, the Chinese people were concerned that their enemy to the North would invade their country. So they built the Great Wall of China—a wall that was so high and so thick that it was considered to be impenetrable by any enemy. But in the first 500 years after the wall was built, China was invaded three different times. Was the wall not high enough? No, it was plenty high. Was it not thick enough? No, it was plenty thick. The Chinese had clearly thought through their enemy from without. But they had not thought through the enemy within. In all three occasions when China was invaded, the enemy walked right in the front gate. All they did was bribe the gatekeeper and they walked in. The Chinese had considered the enemy without. They had not considered the enemy within.

The same thing happened with the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire in the first century was considered to be unconquerable, and in many ways, it was. While they took great pain to secure themselves from the enemy without, they did not address the enemy within. The empire collapsed because of the corruption and the enemy from within.

John had a similar concern for the church. The Roman Empire, especially under the leadership of Nero, was seeking to destroy the church. Nero was martyring Christians about as fast as he could collect them. But rather than destroying the church, it was only making the church stronger. Yet, John had a greater concern. What Nero couldn't accomplish, John feared that the false teachers would accomplish. He called them the antichrists—the false teachers. These antichrists were emerging not from out there somewhere, but from within the church, and they were attempting to lead the church astray.

Paul had the same concern when he wrote in the book of Acts about the church in Ephesus. He told the elders, “Savage wolves are going to rise up from among you. They will try to slaughter the sheep among you.”

When we think about Lincoln Berean Church and about what God is doing and how God is blessing, the question arises: What could possibly happen that would cause this church to cease our effectiveness and no longer be faithful to our mission? It would be fair to say that the greatest risk to this church is *not* out there somewhere. It's not the world out there. It's not the government. It's not the school system. It's not the media. It's not Hollywood. It's not any of those things that we tend to blame. The greatest risk is that it will happen from *within*. The danger is that the antichrists, the false teachers, will emerge and that we will no longer hold to the truth—that we will compromise the essential doctrines of the faith. If that happens, that will begin our slide that will destroy us.

So, how do we make sure that doesn't happen? There are several things we could talk about, but what John addresses in this text is that one of the things God has put in place to make sure that doesn't happen is *community*.

Now, I find that interesting, because when most people think of community or fellowship they don't think of a high emphasis on truth. In fact, what a lot of people think about when they think of fellowship is a group of people standing around a campfire holding

hands and singing *Kum Ba Yah*. There can be such an emphasis on relationship that we don't offend anybody, so truth is minimized in order for relationships to be emphasized.

If that is your understanding of community, that's not a biblical understanding at all. As a matter of fact, what the New Testament emphasizes as authentic biblical community is that truth is essential for community to happen.

We've been learning about cultivating authentic Christian community in our study of 1 John, and now we will look at 1 John 2:18-29. Just by way of review, in chapter 1 we learned that the person and work of Jesus Christ is the cornerstone to this community. That's why it's *Christian* community—everything is built around Him.

We went on to learn that because Jesus is the light and He is the cornerstone of community, then community is lived in the light. When we live in the light with one another, our sin is exposed. That's part of what happens when we share our lives—we expose one another's sin. Therefore, that sin needs to be confessed and “He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” That's why its *authentic* Christian community.

Going through that process makes us more like Jesus, and according to chapter 2, verse 6, that's the purpose of community. The purpose is to make us more like Jesus, or as we say in our mission statement, to become “complete in Christ.” John went on to say that for community to happen we need to learn to love as Jesus loved, which means we die to ourselves in order to serve one another. Community cannot happen if we are a selfish people. So, like Jesus, we die to ourselves and we serve one another.

Part of that process is understanding, then, that we are family. And as family, there are those who are spiritually mature; there are those who are growing Christians, kind of living out in the trenches; and there are those who are new believers, just starting their spiritual journey. John says we have a responsibility to one another because we're family. We look out for each other, and that's what it means to love and serve one another. The reason that is so important is because there is an enemy out there who has created a world system to lure us away. John says, “I'm fearful that we might fall in love with the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the boastful pride of life. So let's look out for each other and make sure that doesn't happen.”

That moves us right into 1 John 2:18. This gets a little bit confusing, because John opens with the word “children,” and in this passage he's using two different words for children. We talked about the word for children that is used in verse 12—that is the word which means “to bring forth from” or “to come from.” It's the idea that we all come from the same spiritual parent; therefore, we're family. That word for children is the same one that shows up in chapter 2, verse 1, and the emphasis is on the fact that we are all part of the same family.

But in verse 13, a different word for children is used and that word means “to submit under” or “to be under the authority of.” That carries more the idea of a child who is still under the authority of the parent. In other words, the child still needs to be parented. In the same way, a new believer—a young Christian—still needs to be parented along the way. That's the word for children which is now used in verse 18. So, even though we understand that this message is appropriate for all of us, it is most appropriate for new believers because they are most vulnerable to the false teacher.

He says, “Children {*new believers*}, it is the last hour...” What does he mean by “the last hour”? In other places in the New Testament it is referred to as the “last days.” It means the same thing. Sometimes people ask me, “Do you think we’re in the last days?” My answer is, “Absolutely.” Because, according to the New Testament, the last days started when Jesus came in the Incarnation and will conclude when He comes in the Second Coming. So we’ve been in the last days for nearly 2000 years.

When you think about the last days, don’t think so much in terms of quantity of time, but think in terms of *quality* of time. That’s really what it means. It’s talking about a period of time that will be defined by many different characteristics which the New Testament describes. The one that John emphasizes here is that it will be a time when the antichrists (plural) will rise up among us. Look at what he says in verse 18: “Just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour.”

We know that there is an antichrist, *the* antichrist, that is yet to come. But we also know that there will be people who will come in the spirit of antichrist and they are in our midst today. They were in the church in the first century, and they’re in the church here in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. That’s what John is talking about. The name means exactly what it sounds like: they are *anti*-Christ. They stand against the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Where do they come from? Verse 19: “They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us.” In other words, John is saying that there was a time when we thought these antichrists were a part of the church. We thought they were one of us. They looked like us; they walked like us; they smelled like us; they talked like us. By all indications, they were one of us. But then it was revealed that they really weren’t one of us—they never have been—and they went out from among us.

What does John identify as that which exposed them for what they really were? The answer is *community*. He says they did not remain with us, which is a Greek work often translated “abide.” It means to live with, to dwell with. It means to share your life with—what we talk about when we say community. John is saying that if you want a church that is vulnerable to the antichrists, the false teachers, then have a church that devalues community. Because, then, there’s lots of room for that person to hide, and they can have their way with many sheep before we even know they’re among us.

But to prevent that, we need to put a high value on community. When we share our lives with one another and we live in community, it does tend to expose those who really are *not* part of the family. They just don’t fit; they don’t belong. It becomes obvious, and they are identified.

We’ve all had that experience before. You meet someone you have never seen before and you start to interact, and pretty soon you can sense a connectedness. There’s something about this person that causes you to connect, and you start to think, *I wonder if this person is a believer*. Then, over a period of time, it becomes obvious that this is a fellow Christian. There is a connecting point that is really supernatural, but it’s there.

Whenever I travel internationally one of the things that strikes me is that you meet people from a radically-different culture, you don’t even speak the same language, but you

connect at this level and you know this person is a fellow believer. Then you end up finding out that yes, that's true ... they are.

We've also met people who claim to be Christians, but as we begin to interact and share our lives, it becomes obvious we're not connected. Something is not lining up, and it becomes obvious that this person isn't really a follower of Jesus. That's what John is talking about in verse 19.

What is this that connects us together? I think that's what he describes in verse 20: "But you {*meaning the true church*} have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth."

John says you have an anointing. First of all, it's helpful to notice the grammar here. He doesn't say you have *been* anointed, which would put the emphasis on the process. But he says you *have* an anointing, which puts the emphasis on what you received in that anointing. What you received was the very spirit of Jesus within you. There is kind of a play on words here that isn't obvious in the English. The name Christ is the Greek, *Christos*, which means Anointed One. So Jesus is the Christ; He is the Anointed One. Therefore, an antichrist is an anti-anointed one. That's being contrasted with those people who actually have the Anointed One living within them, through the Spirit of the living Christ dwelling within them. That's what he means by this word "anointing."

What brings us together to experience authentic Christian community is that each of us who has trusted Jesus Christ as our Savior has the living Christ dwelling within us. That's our anointing. He is there and He is alive and He connects us in a supernatural way. That is to be contrasted with those who are anti-the Anointed One. And John says they don't fit in the family. They don't belong, and that's why they didn't remain. There's no connecting point. There are opposed to the very thing that connects us together.

It's also worth noting in verse 20 that John is writing to new believers—spiritual children—and he makes a very emphatic statement that they all have the anointing. Once in awhile I watch the preachers on television and they kind of work themselves into a lather talking about this anointing. They talk about how you need to experience this ... and you need to go here and have this experience... or go there .... I wonder where they get that theology, because the Bible is very clear that at the moment you trust Jesus as Savior you receive the anointing—the very living Christ dwelling within you—His Holy Spirit. It's yours automatically at the moment of salvation, and it is the role of the Spirit to teach us the truth.

Beginning in verse 22, John goes on to identify the antichrist: "Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also."

Now, I have to tell you John is not politically correct at all in this particular text. First of all, he's very strong in his language. He doesn't say, "Who is this person with whom we disagree? Who is this person that we agree to disagree with?" He doesn't say that at all. He says, "Who's the liar?" That's pretty straightforward. It's the person who denies that Jesus is the Christ—that Jesus is the Anointed One.

The false teachers, the antichrists, whom we believe to be the Gnostics in the first century, believed in Jesus. They believed that Jesus was a person who was born, lived, and died and that He had this big following. And they couldn't deny that, because they were living in the same time period as people who walked with Jesus. But what they denied was that Jesus is the Christ—that He is the Anointed One; that's He's the second person of the Trinity; that's He's the Creator of the universe. They said, "He just isn't." But they were also claiming to be the spiritually-enlightened. They claimed to be those who were closest to God and had access to these mysterious teachings from God. They claimed to be more godly than the rest.

But John comes back and makes a very emphatic statement. He says that if they deny the Son, they have no access to the Father and have no relationship with God. What John says is very important in the culture in which we live. One of the foundational belief systems in our culture is what's called pluralism. It's a belief that all roads basically lead to God. It's a belief that you can go through a spiritual buffet, pick and choose whatever you like, and put together your own religion. It's the concept that we have our God, and the Muslims have their god, and the Hindus have their god, and the Buddhists have their god. Everyone has their own version of God and they all have their own way to God, but eventually they all end up there together. That's pluralism, and John is saying that is a lie. He says, "Those are the liars." John says that there is only one way to God and that is through the Son; those who deny the Son have no access to the Father.

Sometimes I hear people say, "You know, when you really study it, all the world religions are basically the same. They all kind of say the same thing and try to accomplish the same thing." That's not only a statement of ignorance—it's just flat untrue. There is one thing that distinguishes Christianity from every other religion that is the very core, the very essence of our belief system. Every other world religion denies the person and work of Jesus Christ. That's what makes them distinct. John says they are liars and they have no access to God. John is simply reaffirming what Jesus said in John's presence, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father *but through Me*." I don't know how he could get any more clear than this. If you don't go through the Son, you have no access to the Father. You have no relationship with God, because there's only one way.

Verses 24-25: "As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life." We've seen that phrase before: "that which you have heard from the beginning." John is really just talking here about the basic truths of God—what we would call the Bible.

He's contrasting that with the Gnostics who were claiming some mysterious revelation that only they had. They felt they were the enlightened, the knowledgeable, and that's what made them so spiritual. That's what they were trying to lead these believers away with. John is saying, "You don't need that. You just need the truth that you've had from the beginning, and to abide in that truth.

To "abide" doesn't mean to know it intellectually. This is that word abide that we saw in verse 19, which means to live with, to dwell with, to immerse yourself in. It means to make it a part of your life to the extent that it's your motivation and passion for living. It's to be completely immersed in this truth. He says, "Abide in that, and if you do, then you'll abide in the Son and in the Father."

I find it interesting in that verse that John so ties in the truth of God with abiding in the Son and the Father, that you can't even separate them out. To immerse yourself in God's truth is to immerse yourself in a relationship with the Son and the Father. To not have that passionate commitment to the truth is to not have that commitment to the Son and to the Father and to the Spirit. In other words, they're all just together in such a way that they can't even be separated. Sometimes people say, "I really love Jesus; I just don't get too hung up on what the Bible teaches." John would say you can't do that. Others say, "I really love Jesus; I just don't have time to read the Bible." John would say it doesn't work that way. You can't separate them out that way. If you love Jesus, then you love His truth. If you love His truth, then you love Him. It's all mixed together, and if you're going to abide with Him, then you're going to abide with His truth.

Sometimes people say, "I'm just too busy to read the Bible." Let's not even go down that path, because all of us have time for what we think is important. If we don't have time for it, then we just don't think it's important. That raises an interesting question, because John says this is the way to experience eternal life. Eternal life isn't just a duration of life; it's a *quality* of life. It's what Jesus called the abundant life. In other words, the only way to really experience the abundant life is to abide in the truth. And when you abide in the truth then you abide with the Son and the Father and the Spirit. That's how we experience the abundant life. It would be interesting to look at our daytimers from the past week and ask ourselves: How much time did we spend trying to pursue the abundant life in things other than the truth and this relationship with the Son and the Father, through which this abundant life flows?

Verses 26-27: "These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. And as for you, the anointing which you received {*remember, that's the Spirit of Christ living within us*} from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him."

Now, what is he saying here? What he's *not* saying is that we don't need to be taught. John's letter itself was teaching them. When you read through the New Testament, you find that there is a need to be taught. There's even a gift—a calling—for teachers.

What John is saying in the context here is that the antichrists, the false teachers, were saying that they had this mysterious revelation. They said they had this knowledge from God that nobody else had, and the only way to really know was to be taught by them. John is saying that isn't true. He says you have everything that you need. You have the very Spirit of Jesus dwelling in you from the moment of salvation. You have the truth of God—what you have had from the beginning. You have everything you need to know.

My calling is a teacher—that's my giftedness. But it's important to understand that I don't have special revelation and I don't have special access to God. I don't sit in my office and receive some special revelation that I come and present to you each weekend. You have the same access to the truth that I have. You have the same Spirit of God dwelling in you that I have dwelling in me. You don't have to be, and you shouldn't be, dependent upon me. We work together in this discipleship process—you with your giftedness and me with mine. It's important that you understand that you have everything you need to pursue the truth. You have the very Spirit of Christ dwelling within you. You have access to the Word. You can learn; you can grow. God has given you everything you need, and that's the point John is making in verse 27.

Verse 28: “And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.” John says that if we abide in the truth and we abide with the Son and the Father, and the Spirit of truth teaches us what we need to know, then when He returns we’ll be ready for that. We can celebrate His return. But if we don’t know the truth, then we’re going to shrink away in shame, he says, because we’re not going to be living the way we ought to be living. And we’ll find ourselves in shame when He finds us that way.

The last verse says that He is righteous, so we ought to be living righteous lives. In other words, we ought to be like Him. We’ve already said that is the goal of Christian community—that we would be like Christ. Knowing and abiding in the truth is essential for Christian community.

If we were to run a video tape of your last week, could we look at that video tape and identify that you have a passion to know this Book? Would we be able to see by your last week that you really believe the abundant life is found in abiding in the truth, and therefore abiding with the Son, the Father, and the Spirit, from which flows the abundant life?

It really comes down to whether or not you believe what John is saying is true. Earlier in chapter 2, John said that growing Christians draw their strength from the Word. We need the Word to overcome the enemy, because we live in a battlefield.

Friday morning I laid in the grave a 17-year old girl. Tomorrow morning it will be a 5 year-old boy. That’s the way this life is. It’s hard. It’s a battlefield. I’ve been through this with many, many families and it’s always the same. Those who have the faith to draw strength in their moments of tragedy are those who have made it a way of life to abide in the Word. Their faith grows stronger through the most difficult situations of life. But those who really haven’t made an emphasis on the truth, who find themselves in a crisis of faith, find themselves doubting and struggling just to keep their head above water. In your moment of crisis, what matters most is what you believe to be true.

Do you realize that, before this day is over, you may experience the most devastating event of your life? Are you ready for that? When that happens, you won’t have time to run to the library and do a little research. You won’t have time to call the pastor and say, “I’ve got a few questions here I’d like to talk about.” The only way we’re going to have strength in those moments is if we have made it a way of life to abide in the truth. We have to immerse ourselves in what God says is true—to believe that and to allow it to guide our living. In the process, then we abide with the Son and the Father and the Spirit. There is nothing more essential to Christian community than an all-out passionate commitment to the truth.

*Father, we’re thankful for the truth of your Word that you’ve given us. We don’t have to guess; we don’t have to doubt. Lord, you’ve also given us your Spirit within us—the anointing—to lead us to truth. You’ve given us everything we need to know about what is true, to expose the antichrists, the false teachers. Lord, remind us anew and afresh how important it is that we are people who have dedicated ourselves to knowing and living out the truth of your Word. In Jesus Name, Amen.*