

Clear And Present Danger

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[0 : 00] Well, we're going to turn back to 1 John 2, and we'll focus our thoughts around verses 18 and 19.

We visited this passage not so long ago, and in Providence we've come back to it. 1 John 2, 18-19 Read it, 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.

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.

Well, it's fairly straightforward to see that he is talking about something that pertains to the Church and within the Church, rather than what is outside it.

And the definition of Antichrist we look at. But clearly he's concerned, as he was then, for the Church to be on its guard, to be alert.

[1 : 31] And so I want to entitle this, and those of good memories will remember some years ago we looked at this in a whole series. But I want to entitle it, Clear and Present Danger.

Antichrists, many of them have come. They went out from us, but they were not of us. Clear and Present Danger.

The film buffs among us will know that this is the title of a film. It was a 1994 film in which Harrison Ford starred as, I think he was the Deputy Director of the CIA.

He was sent out to Colombia to attempt to deal with the drug barons and the cartels that were bringing huge stocks of drugs into the US.

Which, of course, still goes on. But anyway, that film was about that subject, and it was entitled Clear and Present Danger. And when he got out there, he discovered that there was a covert American group of crack troops in there, trying to suss out where the drugs would be made and destroy them.

[2 : 54] But when he got out there to deal with, or to help to deal with the problem, he discovered that the problem was not in Colombia simply, but in the heart of American government.

That's what the story is about. In other words, the clear and present danger wasn't out there, but it was within. And that's why he had chosen this topic, this heading for our sermon.

In fact, he found out, if you know the story, that it was high in the American government and touched the president himself. Here is the warning that John gives us.

And it was through in his day, and it's been through down through the ages. He gives a warning to Christians of this danger. And the warning, as I say, applies to our own day too.

That there are those who for a time work from within the church to destabilize it.

[4 : 04] They are working for themselves, and they are called anti-Christ. Because they're not working for him. They're promoting their own agenda.

And they're encouraging lawlessness. And what we might call nowadays a neo-antinomianism. That is, a new form of lawlessness against the law.

Antinomian means simply against the law. Against the law of God. And it seems to me that we need, therefore, to understand the reality of this as it was then, and how it applies in our own day to be alert, to be on our guard, to hold fast and to fight the good fight of faith.

The clear and present danger is as clear and present today as it was when John wrote by the Holy Spirit these words. Now, I agree, of course, that we're not to be obsessed with the subject of the anti-Christ.

But, that said, we're to recognize that they pose a clear and present danger to the church of Christ, to those who endeavor to be loyal to Christ and to his word.

[5 : 26] And if you know anything about modern trends, you will know that the trend is always to shape people's faith in the word of God.

To cast doubts on it. To do what was done in the garden by Satan of old. Has God really said this? Clear and present danger.

To those who would be loyal to Christ and to his word. Let's consider then, first of all, the last hour. We read it there, in verse 18, at the beginning.

Little children, it is the last hour. It is the last hour. Now, it's a fact that this expression, the last hour, appears here in the whole of the New Testament.

It's not anywhere else. It is just in this passage. It is the last hour. Now, I almost need to hardly say this, but it needs to be said.

[6 : 32] The expression, the last hour, clearly doesn't mean literally it's the last hour, as from half past ten to half past eleven a.m.

He's not saying that. Two thousand years or more have passed since John penned this letter. John said, it is the last hour, and obviously the expression means something to do with shortness of time, but not literally an hour.

The expression, the last hour, gives us reason to think that in terms of the whole of the period of history, of the history of planet Earth, we're thinking about a period that is relatively short.

But short in relation to what? Well, before we answer that properly, I just want to observe that our Lord Jesus Christ talked in this kind of language, too.

It's not simply John, a one-off. Although Jesus doesn't use the expression, it is the last hour.

Nevertheless, he does talk in language close to that.

[7 : 53] And I want just to use a favourite passage in the sense that almost all of us, I think, will have heard a sermon on the Samaritan woman.

John 4. And in John chapter 4 and verse 23, Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, Woman, the hour is coming, and has now come.

When the true worshippers of God will worship him in spirit and in truth. Now, note that. Woman, the hour is coming, and has now come.

Well, it's continuing, isn't it? The true worshippers of God are worshipping in spirit and in truth all over the world. So, the last expression, the woman heard Jesus saying, The hour is coming, the hour is coming, and has now come.

That is, it's arrived, and it's continuing. When the true worshippers of God will worship him in spirit and in truth. And I want to say then, in answering the question, or in part answering the question, This time is short.

[9 : 13] Short before what? The hour, the last hour. The last hour before what? Well, first thing we want to say is, and interpreters are generally agreed on this, that the last hour refers to the last days, or specifically the latter days of the last days.

The time before the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. The whole period, the last days, is a period that refers to the period from our Savior's ascension into heaven, and his return to judge the world in righteousness.

And the last hour, therefore, refers to the period just prior to his return.

You remember that in the book of Acts, Peter at Pentecost, at that day, Pentecost following Jesus' ascension, Peter in Acts 2.17 says, when he's referring to that great outpouring of the Holy Spirit, when all those tens of thousands of pilgrims who had come up for the feast, Shavuot, Pentecost, they were there in Jerusalem.

And when the Spirit came down in power, Peter tells them, this is all about what Joel the prophet referred to in his prophecy, that in the last days, the people, I would pour out my Spirit on all flesh.

[10 : 56] And he describes how people would be prophesying, they would be proclaiming the wonders of the Lord. This is that which was spoken of by the prophet Joel, that in the last days I will pour out my Spirit.

And therefore, it seems to me that John was thinking here, as I've said already, about the final stage of the period we call the last days, the period from Christ's ascension to his return.

Towards the end of that period, we have the last hour. And if you turn to the Apostle Paul on this, his thinking is not dissimilar.

In 1 Timothy 4.1 and in 2 Timothy 3.1, he talks about people departing from the faith. Notice that the concern is not simply about the world out there, although the Lord has a concern for the world out

there.

But he's talking about things from the point of view, looking at the church. And he's saying in the last days, people shall depart from the faith, and lawlessness will abound.

[12 : 21] He talks about perilous times, terrible times, in which there will be a throwing off of authority. And it's not hard to see such things happening, not only in the UK, but all over the world.

James has a similar instruction about the coming of the Lord draws nigh. Chapter 5 and verse 3. The judge stands at the door. He says earlier on. And so then I want to emphasize here that this expression, the last tower, is here to create for us a sense of urgency.

To enable us to switch on to the clear and present danger that confronts the church, not from outwith, but from within.

That's not to say it has problems outside itself. Of course not. It is persecuted in the world today. In many countries, somebody was telling me just recently about the family, a Christian family whose daughter there in Pakistan made a mistake in spelling and was interpreted as blasphemy against the God of Islam and the Prophet.

[13 : 50] And persecutions are going on apace the world over. And we have a concern about that. And we see it, and should see it, as dangerous.

But the concern of the apostle and the apostles is the danger that occurs from within the church. And we are to be alert to it.

We are to see it as clear and present. And that therefore takes us from the last hour. The idea is conveyed to us, be urgent, be watchful, be active.

Don't let things happen. The Christian is not to be sliding along with the case or attitude.

What will be, you'll be. What can I do about it? No, we are to be proactive. We are to be seeking to assert, maintain and defend the truth and to seek to contend against those who would throw off the yoke of Christ.

[15 : 03] So that brings us then, secondly, to those antichrists. Now, of course, in this very passage, we have a distinction made between the antichrist, singular, and the plural many antichrists.

And the New Testament makes that distinction. In 2 Thessalonians 2, verses 3 and 4, the antichrist is called the man of sin.

And, of course, those who have studied their Westminster Confession or subordinate standard will know that, rightly or wrongly, the Pope of Rome is seen as that antichrist, that man of sin who takes honour to himself that is not fitting, and so on.

But as Principal John MacLeod said in days gone by, his view was that until there arises someone who is manifestly more the man of sin than the Pope of Rome will stick with that.

And the Church has more or less seen that there is that particular manifestation which Paul calls the man of sin.

[16 : 33] But the reference here is not there. Although he acknowledges we have heard that the antichrist is coming, he immediately goes on, even now many antichrists have come.

This is what we are looking at chiefly here. Many antichrists have come. And clearly from verse 19, that first clause, they went out from us.

Means that they were within. Which is what we have been saying. The plural is there to tell us that there are many.

Many who are antichrist. And you don't need to know the Greek language behind this English to know the meaning of antichrist.

It simply means they are against him. One way or another that are against him. Those who by their words and works deny Christ his rightful place in God's scheme of things.

[17 : 45] And the thing with this is that it's easy to spot those that are glaringly antichrist. Christ. It's easy to spot those who make no secret of it.

They deny him full godhood. They deny him his deity. They deny that he is the eternal son of the eternal God. It's easy to spot that.

Relatively easy. There are those who deny him his true humanity who will say that he only seemed to be human.

That he was really not truly human at all. And it is easy to spot these folk from what they say. They don't make a secret of it.

They suggest that he didn't come in the way that Matthew's birth narrative suggests or Luke's birth narrative suggests in other words they deny the reality of the virgin conception and birth.

[18:57] That he didn't take a true human nature without sin. And they either openly deny him his godhood or his manhood.

It's easy enough to hear what they have to say and to recognize that they are denying him that. It's easy to spot people who deny to him the death he died.

To evacuate it of its real meaning and content. That he died as an example of suffering for God's sake.

rather than that he died in the room and in the stead of sinners that he bore their sins in his own body and the tree, that it was vicarious suffering on the behalf of others.

That our condemnation is dealt with there in Christ. They deny that. And it's relatively easy to assess that out if you simply ask people what they think about his death.

[20:15] And you can see that it's anti-Christ. By definition, it is against his person and work. But the really difficult and dangerous to spot are those who, as professed teachers of Christ, are subtle workers who lower the standards of Christians, who take away from the importance of living as those who love the law of God and who delight in it.

They are the people who do real damage because they undermine the authority of Christ. Christ said this, but I say that.

Christ was a man of his time. Have you heard that one? I heard it recently by a professor of New Testament. We have to understand that Jesus was a man of his time.

And therefore he was conditioned by the Jewish upbringing he had, by the Jewish law he was under, and so on and so on. Think about it.

Jesus was a controversialist among the Jews, and with regard to Jewish teaching, you say but I say. they called him a Sabbath breaker, because they said this is the way to keep the Sabbath.

[21:54] No, no, no, no, no. I'm paraphrasing here. This is how to keep the Sabbath. I will have mercy and not sacrifice. You don't need to deny yourself a walk on the Sabbath day.

What you need to do is do the right things on the Sabbath day. You remember it to keep it holy. And that means not just what you don't do, but what you do do, and what you may have to do out of necessity and mercy and piety.

They said, but he said this, and so on. And you can develop that. And it's all developed around the law of God, summarized in the Ten Commandments.

take the subject of adultery. They were giving out divorce certificates to the men so that they could get rid of the woman and get another one in.

But I say, that's not the way God intended it from the beginning. And then he develops the teaching of Genesis on marriage and so on.

[23:09] I say again, we can develop this on all the commandments, on how they stole from God and encouraged people to steal by shifting the load onto what they required, rather than what God required.

And there are those, as there have been, who have added rules and regulations and who have undermined by doing it the person and the work of Christ.

Galatians, the Judaizers who had come in, that's what they were doing. We read in Revelation there were those in the churches chapter 2 Thyatira, was a corrupt church.

They started their own brand of Christianity which took away from the life that was to be lived by the followers of Christ.

And Paul warned the elders that the problem, you'll find it in Acts 20, 29 to 31. Paul warned the elders at Ephesus, where was the seat of the worship of Diana, of Artemis, of the Ephesians, with all its sexual immorality and so on.

[24:47] He warned the elders, grievous wolves will come up from within the flock and harm the flock of God. Take heed to watch over the flock of God, of whom the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.

Be vigilant to guard them from those within who will pervert the true way. the history of the seven churches in the book of Revelation is a warning writ large of clear and present danger to those who would not listen to Christ as regards to what they believed and as regards to how they lived.

They disappeared. They disappeared for centuries because he took away from them his presence.

And John is telling us that this happened because they were not really of us. They were in the visible church, but they were not really and truly of it.

And in time that was revealed. And therefore we see the importance of holding fast, of doing the right thing, of not only clinging to the doctrine of Christ, but the practice that he lays before us in his word.

[26 : 34] Not only believing the truth concerning him, but but loving his law and putting it into practice with heart, soul, mind and strength.

And we are to be committed to this. And the more we realize how difficult that is, the more we realize we need to pray to the keeper of his people, Lord, keep me, for I trust in you.

Well, the time has whizzed away. let's finish with those who are for Christ. They are of us, he says. You see, he distinguishes between they went out from us because they were not of us.

For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they were made manifest that none of them were of us.

That expression of us is important here. And what he does here is he shows us that they were antichrists and in time it became absolutely apparent they were not of those who were truly Christ.

[28 : 00] they had gone about in his name, they had said many wonderful things, they had even achieved much and done wonderful works, but at rock bottom, at heart of hearts, they were not of us, says John.

And this presents to ourselves in our own day a clear and present danger of antichrists within the church.

they may be smooth and pleasant in the articulation of what they believe, but we are to assess it on the basis of the Bible and react to it accordingly.

Now, don't think this is encouraging us to be hypercritical. Not at all. We're to use our common sense. The Bible tells us prove all things.

Test them. Put them to the test. See that they're genuine. The idea of the verb there, to prove all things, is like the metal worker who works in silver and gold, and he tests the quality to see if it's the real thing.

[29 : 19] And we're to do that. It's not about being hypercritical. It's about doing the thing Christ's way. Prove all things. Hold fast what is good.

That's what this is about. Because these folks, these antichrists, are manifest in this way, not only by what they teach and how they live, but the fact that they're building for themselves.

They're interested in themselves and not Christ. Christ. They want to make a band of disciples for themselves and not for the Lord Jesus Christ.

And therefore, we're to be on the alert. But you see, that has one practical implication for us here. It is this to say to us, what about you?

Are you really for Christ? Or antichrist? antichrist. If you think about it like that, it helps you. It helps you to see where you are, really.

[30 : 27] You're not antichrist. Well, if you're not antichrist, you're for him. And if you're for him, make it known, tell it, don't be afraid to be out on his side.

See, that's a helpful way to sharpen the division, to see for yourself where you are. I was referring to this just recently, the paraphrase one learned in Sunday school more decades ago than I want to remember.

I'm not ashamed to own my Lord, nor to defend his cause, maintain the glory of his cross, and honour all his laws.

Jesus, my Lord, I know his name, his name is all my votes, nor will he put my soul to shame, nor let my hope be lost. That's what those who are for Christ are to say.

We're for him. We're for him. Let's be out in the open that we're not antichrist at all. We are for Christ.

[31 : 38] And to the secret disciple we say it. Be encouraged by the world and rise to the challenge that you are for Christ. Okay, you may not be all you should be, but who is?

Who is who follows Christ? Only a fool would say that they're everything they should be as a disciple of Christ. Only a fool would say that.

We reflect often on what we're not, and should be, and could be if we would just avail ourselves of the grace of Christ. But you see, being foreign and coming out and saying it and be settled on it helps us enormously.

And, my dear friends, given that it is the last hour, and that there are many antichrists in the world, and sadly in the church, let us be out on the Lord's side.

We are for Christ. Did not Paul say to King Agrippa, do you believe the scriptures? I know you believe them. And he put pressure on them to persuade them to cast his lot in with Christ, and he withdrew for a season.

[33 : 06] But we are not to be of that El Cato. Let us recognize the clear and present danger within that our antichrists are working now.

Let us be committed, my dear friends, to the Christ who died for us and rose again. I am not antichrist, you are saying. I am for Christ.

And with that in mind, don't complicate the thing. Simply come out and say for Christ.

Amen.