

1 John 2:18-29

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[0 : 00] God, please pray with me. God, give us again this morning an increase of your grace. We may meekly hear your word, receive you with pure affection,!

and bear forth the fruit of your spirit and the very character of Christ, as we also exercise the gifts of the same spirit for your glory and our good.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Please be seated. Please be seated, all you, with me, that are little children.

As John in this letter addresses the church to whom he writes, and of course in that psalm that we read, the psalm addresses us as children as well.

We're all adult children. We may have smaller children in our life. It's great to be thought of in those kind of affectionate terms, I think, though. But this morning we come to a pretty serious subject that you would have noted.

[1 : 10] As Sam read 1 John 2, beginning at the 18th verse, and feel free to turn back to page 1021 if you wish, starting at the bottom where you do see that word, first children.

But you may have noticed just how serious this subject is. Not that all our sermons at St. John's aren't serious.

They are. But the main word in this begins with anti. And of course the title there on that page above verse 18 is The Warning Concerning Antichrists.

So when you hear anti, no, it's not your mom or dad's sister. Nor a pet insect. But it's the antichrists. And we live in a world filled with antis, don't we? Anti-theft, antibacterial, antithesis, anticlimax. Of course, the popular one over the past five years were the anti-vax.

[2 : 15] My favorite was the antifreeze before moving to the West Coast. Well, in all seriousness, though, the apostle was concerned with the antichrist.

And why not? Since his Lord and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, fully God, fully human, made possible through unique love and a unique fellowship with the Father.

And that unique relationship is the basis of our fellowship with one another. So he's taking very seriously the, or as he says, multiple, many antichrists.

So unique is Christ and consequently our love and life, our ministry and message, because of Christ's death and resurrection, his ascension and anointing of us with the Spirit.

Therefore, of course, the apostle John would take seriously anything that was adverse and opposed to Christ. So our theme this morning is the antichrist.

[3 : 18] But let me say this also. I'm not just going to talk or preach about the antichrist. How could you preach the antichrist? We need an antidote. So there's another, anti. That's my favorite.

The antidote. So first, about the antichrist. What are the marks of an antichrist? We mostly focus on the gospel of the kingdom and not the anti-gospel or the anti-kingdom God here at St. John's.

John is warning us, as the title of this section states, about an antichrist. And there are not just one antichrist, but many.

And the readers of this letter are put on alert. Verse 18 reads, And after Jesus' life, his love, his ministry, his message, his death, his resurrection, his ascension, which we're going to celebrate in about 10 days.

Yes, the antichrists have come. And of course they have. To come against Christ. And so what are the marks of the antichrist? Well, the first one is to cut off.

[4 : 46] These individuals cut themselves off or free themselves, or so they think, from the children of God or the fellowship of believers. And not everyone who cuts them off or frees themselves from the church, hear me, are the antichrists.

But to be clear, an antichrist, separate themselves or cut themselves off from the church. They have no use of fellowship with the father's children or brothers and sisters in Christ.

And so John writes this. 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 are not of us. So the mark of these figures were with us, but not of us.

And so they went from us. They cut themselves off. In other words, they were not sent, nor were they of us, but they went their own way.

[5 : 55] So not sent, but went. With us, but not of us anymore. And I know we may not like the us and them frame or construct, but the apostle is speaking this way.

These teachers in going from or against the believers create this dynamic. And so John is merely naming what he notices as a mark of the antichrist. The mark of these ones is not to be sent like an apostle, but those who went as antichrists.

So that's mark one. It's the first mark of the antichrist. Brings us to the second mark of the antichrist, mark two, which is deception. Now this may seem like common sense since there is a Christ and then there is an antichrist.

And the way Christ's nemesis worked when the Lord was incarnate here on earth was to deceive. Satan opted for many ways to undermine Christ's message and the means of that.

And primarily the antichrist way is by deceiving our Lord's followers and the fellowship with them and among them. So John writes this in verse 22.

[7 : 10] I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. And our first reading by Sam from Luke chapter 12 about those who grieve the Holy Spirit is about deception as well.

And this verse in 25 is parallel to the one in 21, giving actually the purpose of John's writing this letter or one of them as he says, I write these things. Verse 21, he says, then 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.

And so the mark of the antichrist is to deceive those who know the truth. They knew the truth too and no longer received that, but rejected it and didn't continue to kind of hold on to it.

And so then sought to deceive. So that's a mark of deception or the mark of the antichrist, which is deception from the truth. And it's slithery like the snake from which it comes.

Deception is tempting and it appeals to our pride, I think. Some translate this word deception to seduce. It's like erotic because deception comes with a kind of transcendent power.

[8 : 31] And the effect is deadly, as some translate this word, to lead astray because separation actually is the result and even the goal of the antichrist.

And it makes sense that those who separate themselves will do the same as they deceive others. This word isn't used as much as you might think in the Gospels, even though the idea of deception is pervasive.

And at one point, the Pharisees in John chapter 7 actually accused Jesus of being the deceiver.

And how ironic at best and diabolical at worst to accuse the one true and living God as the deceiver. But that's how deception works. It confuses and obfuscates the truth with the pretense of reality. So deception is the second mark of the antichrist.

Mark number three is denial. This is the full out assault and not quite as slithery as mark number two, but sleek is the mark of the antichrist when it comes to denial.

[9 : 45] And just like the deceiver in Genesis 3 and the same in Jesus' temptation, denial is another mark of the antichrist. It is casting doubt for the sake of destruction because denial, seduction, and leading astray is, as Jesus related in John 10, to steal, and to kill, and to destroy.

So truth about the Christ is a matter of life and death. And so John writes in verses 22, who is the liar, but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ.

This is the antichrist who denies the father and the son. No one who denies the son has the father. The deceiver then is a denier of the truth.

But as John iterates, this is a big lie. And we live and breathe this culture that makes this hard to see, I think.

The denial of a truth claim is kind of an absolute in our culture. And Christians believe there is a truth, and even more, that Christ is the way and the truth and the life.

[11 : 04] So the mark of the antichrist is to deny not only the claim, but the Christ. And this denial, rather than a confession, which John is actually calling forth from us, is the mark of the antichrist.

And so these are the three marks of the antichrist. To cut off, to deceive, and to deny. But now the antidote. We kind of just stop about preaching about the antichrist. Preach about Christ, who calls us and who wants us to abide in him and to be anointed by his spirit.

So abiding is of essence if the children of Christ's fellowship are to withstand the assaults of the devil and the antichrist. It's clearly important to the apostle because he uses the word abide six times here in four verses.

What comes to your mind when you hear the word abide? Certainly, for me, the hymn, Abide With Me, by Henry Francis Light, comes to mind. Light wrote the hymn after a visit to his dying friend. It was important to Light years later when he was dying of tuberculosis. And to be found abiding with Christ from start to finish in life is a grace.

[12 : 24] So hard, actually, that the antichrist couldn't remain abiding in Christ. But John's calling forth for us to abide in Christ. And maybe something else, though, comes to mind when you think of this word abide.

I wonder if Luke chapter 24, verse 29 comes to mind when you hear this. Maybe not, but just a few weeks ago on Easter Sunday, we heard this word, though not abide. But on Easter Sunday, the word was stay with us.

The two disciples that were walking with Jesus, when Jesus pointed out to them from the Old Testament how everything actually pointed to him.

So this idea of staying with is this abiding word. But also remain is another word that captures the essence of this antidote to the antichrist.

And this is precisely what the antichrist cannot do. Instead of remaining with Christ, he runs after other ideas and idols. Instead of staying with Christ, he struts ahead with innovative thoughts and theology.

[13 : 33] Instead of abiding with Christ, the antichrist, they add to the word like the Pharisees. Or subtract from scripture like the Sadducees. Not so with the children of God.

Unlike Peter, James, and yes, even John, who writes this, the antidote to the antichrist is to remain awake with Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Abiding is watching. It's waiting. It's praying. It's praying. Not with Christ. But as John says, in Christ.

And there is a difference between with and in Christ. As four of these references assert or even command us, we are to be in Christ.

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

[14 : 38] With is good, but in is better. Abiding in Christ equals his word in us and us in his word.

That's how we abide. And this is the antidote to the antichrist. It's the word of the Lord, the word of God abiding in you so that you can abide in him.

But how does this happen? Abiding happens only in Christ, under his word, by grace, and I would suggest from the Holy Spirit, by his anointing.

No, the Holy Spirit actually isn't mentioned here, but it is implied. And friends, we can't abide in Christ by our own will and want and wishing. The Holy Spirit, though not mentioned here, is the key to abiding in Christ.

When the Father and Son anoint us, and this is in verse 20 if you look over, but you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge.

[15 : 43] So the key here to abiding is being kind of anointed. And when the Father and Son anoint us with the Holy Spirit, then we don't waver or wander away from Christ.

Why is this? Well, it's so because the anointing of the Holy Spirit not only shows us Christ, but seals us in him, even though he's shy and you can't see him.

Those of us who do not have eyes to see, a heart to attach, and the Spirit to abide will stray from the fellowship, and some will teach and tell a story that's lie and false.

But those who do abide in him do so because we've been anointed with the Spirit. And when we're anointed by the Spirit and abide in Christ, then we have, as John says, this promise of eternal life. But not only that, in verse 28 he says to us, And that's what's happened to the Antichrist.

[17 : 00] They've lacked the confidence. They've shrunk back. For some reason they're ashamed of the gospel. And even at Jesus' coming again. But not those who know the antidotes, or at least hear of abiding and being anointed by the Spirit.

So briefly, in closing, my final word to you this morning is, Not a warning, though that's what John has done, but actually an encouragement. And the encouraging word is this.

Perseverance. The person of the Holy Spirit, in this season that will enter after ascension, 40 days and then 50 days after Jesus' resurrection, called Pentecost, one day after, one week after is the Trinity, but it's about being filled with the Holy Spirit.

If you've been anointed with the Holy Spirit, keep being filled with the Holy Spirit. So that you can persevere in Christ as little Christs, or as John calls us, little children.

Let me end with this quote from our friend and beloved, though deceased, Jim Packer, on the subject of perseverance.

[18 : 14] Listen for the words about encouragement, but also the Spirit. Jim said, Perseverance means persistence under discouragement and contrary pressure.

The assertion that believers persevere in faith and obedience, despite everything, is true. But the reason is that Jesus Christ, through the Spirit, persists in persevering them, sorry, in preserving them, to persevere.

So brothers and children, brothers and sisters, little children, let's persevere. In the face of the Antichrist, who cuts off, who denies, who deceives, but we can abide, because we're anointed by the Holy Spirit.

I speak to you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.