

Antichrists in the Church

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[0 : 00] As you're finding your way there, let me just preface it by saying that 1 John was actually, well 1 John, 2 John and 3 John was actually written for new believers.

But most Bible teachers would agree it's actually one of the most complicated books of the Bible to actually teach on it, the way John writes and what he has to say.

Some of it takes a lot of time in prayer and for it to come to a point of clarity, or at least many have found it to be so.

We're only going to be focusing on 1 John 2 verse 19, but in order to understand why verse 19 is there, I'd like us to read from verse 18 through to 25.

Well, we'll read actually through to 27. Now hear God's word. Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard, that Antichrist is coming.

[1 : 13] So now many Antichrists have come. Therefore 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 it might become plain that they are not all of us.

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

Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the Antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father.

Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. 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.

[2 : 23] And this is the promise that he made to us eternal life. I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you.

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. Well, let's ask God's blessing upon our understanding for this.

Father, we come to you tonight recognizing that we have darkened minds and cloudy minds at best, and we need your help all the time to understand your word, but we need it so that there wouldn't be a gap between what we believe and what we practice.

But so often, Father God, we know the truth, we understand it, we believe it, but then there's a big gap, and quite a few gaps, between knowing and doing.

[3 : 31] Father, we pray that those gaps would be shut closed tonight. That what we know as a believer, we would do as a believer. But we cannot do this without you. And so we ask for you to do it for us, through us, in us, as we obey your commands.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Our focus this evening, as I said, is going to be primarily on verse 19, but verse 19 has to be understood in the context of all the other verses.

This is our fifth message on perseverance, and we begin to understand already that perseverance is not a small subject in the Bible. It's actually one of the largest subjects of the Bible.

And not only that, it's crucial to understand the definition or what real salvation is. This is part of what it is to be really saved, what it is to be finally alive in Christ, truly alive in Christ, truly set free from sin and death, and found in the body of Christ.

And hopefully you have seen that we've made a careful progression so far, that they have all been linked together quite carefully, or at least if you go back through, you would hopefully see that.

[4 : 49] There's one more message to come after this, which we will get to next week. But before we get there, we have to make our way through this.

The only reason for teaching on this is because verse 19 is crucial for understanding the difference between or why it matters so much that believers are to continue in their faith rather than stop continuing.

It's absolutely crucial to understand that the definition of all true saving faith is that you continue in it.

Now, when we actually get to hear the word antichrist, I wonder what you think of. Well, it all depends on what type of upbringing you have had, because the antichrist in some churches is one person in particular that just happens to be so particularly evil and so easily spotted.

John, however, says it's actually the complete reverse. And the reason for addressing it in the context of perseverance is because such people exist in the church.

[6 : 02] J.C. Ryle, who was the first bishop of Liverpool, an Anglican bishop, said that you'll never have a pure church. The wheat and the tares always grow together.

The joy, however, is that the tares can be converted, and that's what we pray for, that tares can be converted. It's not as if the wheat and the tares, and there's that constant separation.

It could be that way. But there is also the wonderful hope that if you are a tares, you can be converted to become the wheat. It's a wonderful promise that God makes.

Well, last time we saw that to continue in your faith is difficult when it comes to family ties. To persevere in your faith in family ties is extremely difficult, especially when perhaps members of your family are not believers, and they don't like the fact that you're a believer, and they don't want you to be a believer.

In fact, they actually want you to deny the fact that you're a believer by saying things like, well, if we have a meal tonight, can you please not speak about anything to do with Jesus? And we learned, this is why we spent so much time on what true denial is, we learned that Peter denied Jesus, not by saying, I deny you, Jesus, but by simply saying he was not a follower, by simply saying he was not a disciple, by simply not living or speaking or acting like a disciple.

[7 : 28] And Jesus says, you'll deny me three times. And when you actually look at how Peter denied Jesus, he never said, I deny Jesus once. What he denied was, is that he denied that he was in the garden with Jesus, he denied that he was a follower of Jesus, that he denied that he was a disciple of Jesus.

So this link between denying Jesus is very closely linked to our own identity. If we deny our identity in Christ, we deny Christ because our identity is in him.

A little bit complicated, I understand, but nevertheless, hopefully it's clear. Last week, we finished up by understanding that if divisions happen in the family because Jesus is not first, in the household family, then you can expect exactly the same thing in the family of God, the church, that if Jesus is not first in each of our lives in the church, then the church is going to be divided.

Because some of you love Jesus first, and some of you don't. And that's the cause for division. That's the cause for upset.

That's where it actually comes from, because we're all what we love. We are what we think, but we are what we love, more importantly.

[8 : 50] So I don't know what comes to your mind when you read this passage about the Antichrist, but what John is saying is that these people who do not put Jesus first, who do not love Jesus first, in fact, they are Antichrist, is one of those words that needs explaining.

For a long time, I thought stainless steel couldn't rust, until it was pointed out to me that it only said stainless. It stained less.

Not that it wouldn't stain at all, but that it would stain less. And so an Antichrist is someone who is not pro-Jesus.

They are anti-Jesus. Was Peter anti-Jesus when he told Jesus that he couldn't go to the cross? Well, Jesus turned around and said to him, get behind me, Satan.

So I don't know what comes to your mind when you think about what is an Antichrist, but we're going to let John explain to us what an Antichrist is, lest you come up with some weird and wonderful idea based on your imagination.

[10 : 07] And unfortunately, that's where most ideas come from when you talk about subjects like this. I mean, you've got a wonderful imagination. You could be a science fiction writer. But it's much

better if we allow the Word of God to determine what the words of God means.

And so we're going to understand this evening what exactly is an Antichrist and why it matters to our understanding of perseverance in the faith or persevering in the faith.

We don't want to be left to our imaginations. We want God to instruct us. I don't know if you've ever noticed how often the Bible speaks of leaving rather than joining.

When you look at conversion and you actually look at the type of relationships that we're to have with God and not to have with the world, it speaks about what we leave.

In other words, repentance is leaving the world for Jesus. You're effectively saying to the world, I'm leaving you for him. And the world's going to try everything to get you back.

[11:16] It'll sweet-talk you. It'll buy you flowers. It'll take you out for dinner. It'll try and get you back. But repentance is saying, I'm leaving you for him.

It is a legitimate leaving to follow. Okay, you're not doing anything wrong. That is the definition of repentance. But John says in the book of Revelation to one of the churches that they have left or in danger of leaving their first love.

You're leaving your first love. In other words, if you're leaving Jesus, then what are you leaving Jesus for? Because you can't just leave Jesus just like you can't just leave the world.

You can't leave the world and then be somewhere else. You're still in the world. So you either leave the world for Jesus and if you leave this for something else, then if John is saying to the church, you're leaving your first love, what are you leaving your first love for?

Well, whatever it is, it's not Jesus. You're leaving. That's the danger. Paul explains to the church in Thessalonica that they have turned to God, but how have they turned to God?

[12:33] They've done it by leaving idols. In other words, the way that this particular group of people have actually turned to God is by leaving their idols.

That's how it's been demonstrated because of what they have left behind. And then Paul says about Demas that he has left, he's left him, he's left the faith because he loves this world.

So quite often throughout the whole of the New Testament, you hear this constant phrase, you're leaving, or to leave, or have you left?

The question is, is if you leave A, you leave A for something else. You can't just leave and not have anything here. You leave for something.

It could just be that you, if for instance, that you're a Christian, but you begin to start loving the world in the way that we shouldn't, and it is difficult, and we leave the world, we're not leaving the world for Jesus again, we've already got Jesus, but we're leaving the world and having the right relationship with Jesus.

[13:48] So we're leaving that for this. Now at this point, you think, that's fairly simple. Repentance is leaving the world for Jesus. The trouble is, however, is John wants to complicate things, and John does this quite a lot.

And just when you think that Christianity is nice and easy to understand, just when you think that everything is black and white, or even if it's colorful, it's easy to understand, John throws a spanner in the works, or rather Jesus, as recorded by John, throws a spanner in the works.

Not because he's got it wrong, but because we are so used to thinking in black and white terms, that when Jesus says something, hang on a minute, that can't be true. The first thing that John says here is that the Antichrists are in the church.

They're in the church before they leave the church. We're not used to that. We tend to think that we're the goodies on the inside, and the baddies must be on the outside. But John is quite clear that the Antichrist, verse 19, are actually in the church.

It gets even more complicated because John, over in the Gospel of John, chapter 15, records Jesus saying, I am the vine, and you are the branches.

[15:08] Okay? And then he says, any branch in me, okay, in me, listen to the words of Jesus, any branch of me that does not bear fruit is cut away. So here you have a whole collection of people that are somehow in Jesus, in some capacity, but then can also be cut away.

How can you be in Jesus and not produce fruit? And then be cut away? How can you be in Jesus and not in Jesus at the same time?

Do you see how complicated it is? How can you be in the church and not in the church at the same time? And so John wants us to understand that there's a way of understanding in without being truly in.

Quite complicated, I know. No. But Jesus makes it quite clear that those who are in him and are then cut away were not really in him even though they were in him.

How does that make any sense? Well, I explain as we go. John's quite clear here that the Antichrists are in the church even though they're not technically in the church.

[16:22] And why does it matter? Well, I think we need to be able to tell the difference. And here's one of the reasons why I think we need to be able to tell the difference. because when children grow up in a church family, I'm not talking about in their home family.

You could address that if you want. I'm talking about here you have children growing up in the church. Some Christians will look for a conversion date. I think that's a big mistake.

Personally, others will rightly be concerned with the fact of whether or not that child is continuing in the faith. Because a conversion date doesn't tell you much.

In fact, I don't think it tells you anything. It may be nice to remember, it may be a point of testimony, but I think we're misguided over what a conversion date actually says at all.

And we'll get to understand why in a minute. Here's why. Because those who were in Christ in John 15 were also cut away by Jesus in John 15 for not producing any fruit.

[17:34] But those who are saved are saved eternally. So now you've got to wrestle with this whole idea that there's a group of Christians who can somehow be in Christ, but then still cut away while there's this other group of believers who are in Christ who can never be cut away.

And so this idea of putting a conversion date on someone as a sign and seal of their redemption I think is just a false idea.

The Antichrists leave. False believers love the world more than they do Jesus. And so what John is saying here is that in the church there are people in it who are not actually in it.

There are people in the church who are not really in in the same way you and I are in. Meaning that you cannot rely on a conversion date to determine whether or not someone is saved.

and secondly the church can never ever portray to the world this holy state because of the mess we're in.

[18:52] We're never going to be a pure church. Our witness is never going to be perfect because we are a mixture of wheat and tares. We are never going to portray to the world exactly what we are meant to be because we can't even be sure who we really are in the church as it is.

So it's right that we have a good witness try to have one without spot or blemish but we can't tell who's genuine and who are not until those who aren't leave.

And that's what John says here. You can't actually tell that the Antichrist is an Antichrist until he has left the church. Well what we'll see is we're going to focus on 1 John 2 verse 19.

We're going to spend most of our time if not all of our time on this. And what I want us to do is to follow it through carefully in such a way that we don't make up what it believes but allow John to explain to us exactly what he means when he talks about an Antichrist.

The surrounding verses say this. Verse 18 is that there are many Antichrists. There's not just one but there are many Antichrists. Not just one person although you could argue the man of lawlessness over in 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians that whole argument.

[20:13] He also says that the church knows the truth verse 21 and he knows it because they've heard it and they are to abide in Jesus. Verse 19 is the verse that separates the wheat from the chaff but it does it over a period of time in truth.

In other words time and truth go hand in hand. I'm not too bothered if people tell lies about me too much if other people believe them you can't do anything about that but time and truth go hand in hand that given enough time the truth will always come out and so I'm not really too bothered about defending myself but given enough time the truth will always come out and you get to see it every now and then but sometimes it takes a little bit longer and that's the kind of patience you need to have.

Verse 19 the first phrase that we learn is that these antichrists went out from us. They by using the word they he's referring to the antichrist when he says went out he means that they have left the church as in they've left the church not for another church but they have just left the church they've left the faith and then he says from us in us when he says the word us he's referring to the church in other words John understands that to continue in the faith is to continue in the church okay to continue in the faith is to continue in the church there's no separation there well I've been a Christian at home for the last 18 years there's a church just down the road yeah I know but this is

the way I think my Christian that's not Christianity you've gone out there's a big danger there you should not be comfortable there and if you are comfortable there it's because God is leaving you alone and that's even a worse condition to be in because God always disciplines those who are his okay that's how it works so these antichrists were somehow in the church but not in the church because they've gone out from us verse 19 the next phrase they went out from us because they were not of us and so what

John is doing here is he is describing the difference between who is genuine and who is not genuine and the way that he tells that they are not genuine is by the fact that they're not gathering with God's people they want to be somewhere else they want to do something else and so they were not of them and it's defined by the fact or explained by the fact that they have gone out they were not they went out from us but they were not of us they don't belong they were not part of the church but how do you know this John well verse 19 for if they had been of us the next phrase second half of verse 19 for here's the reason for if they had been of us they would have continued with us so what John is saying here is that if they really were part of the church they would still be in the church today if they really were part of the fellowship of faith they would still be with us today but by the very fact that they have gone out from us they are only proving one thing and the one thing that they are proving is that they are not of us and hopefully you'll be able to see that you can draw quite a few conclusions from this that those who go out from us and don't continue with us actually say who they are by their very actions and then he says the very last bit of verse 19 but they went out from us or rather they went out that it might become plain that they are not of us so here we have the

John 15 and the pruning of the branches okay so what is Jesus saying John 15 any branch in me that does not bear fruit he does what he cuts away he casts away and what we see here in a letter written to a church is how we supposed to understand believers or so-called believers that continue with us for a while and then disappear well what are we to make of that and John says well they go out from us that it might become plain well what might become plain that they've gone out no that it might become plain who they really are that they are anti Christ remember 18 is describing an anti Christ and verse 19 is explaining who that anti Christ is an anti Christ is someone who is anti Jesus is someone who looks as though they're following Jesus looks as though they're praying to [25 : 30] Jesus looks as though they're worshipping Jesus but then after a period of time don't leave and have gone because their life is not bearing fruit and Jesus says any branch in me so they were in him in some sense but have not bared fruit is then cut away and now it's become plain now why is this so crucial to understand well it's crucial to understand for a number of reasons because you have anti Christ in church members meetings you have anti Christ and they make decisions they can vote for or they can vote against okay but they will be defined primarily by not putting Jesus first but you can't really you would never go up to someone engaged I think I've got you nailed I think I know who you are I think you are a you'd never say it one because you could you could never be so sure but after a period of time in hindsight when you look back and go all the signs were there before all the signs were there

I didn't draw the right conclusion but all the signs were there before and so an antichrist is a person who is in the church and then who leaves the church because they are antichrist they're denying the faith they're denying the godhead they're denying the deity of christ so when john says that they went out from us he is describing the church us me and you the church the people of god and they no longer continue with us and so an antichrist is one who simply submits or will not submit to the will of god in other words the reason why we need to be commanded to love god with all our heart soul and mind is because we don't want to we don't actually have the desire to do it and so in the same way to say thou shall not steal explains what god is like because god doesn't steal if we don't have the desire to not steal but we actually have the desire to steal okay what else is going to combat that desire what else is actually going to stop us fulfilling those feelings there's only one thing that can stop us from fulfilling the feelings that we have that are wrong or the wrong feelings that god doesn't approve of and that is a command that clearly says don't do it so are we to obey things that don't feel right yeah most of the time christianity is simply obeying a lot because our whole heart has to be transformed none of us are perfect worshippers in other words if your focus is not on god all the time you're concentrating it to be on god you're going to fail you're going to fail spiritually you're going to fail morally you're going to fail in all these areas it's crucial that you understand this because so many of us are drifted to and throw by our imaginations in conclusion

John finishes the section by reminding us that the promise of eternal life is an eternal life promise in other words we abide in Christ and we've got this but he wants to define this in the context that the way you experience eternal life is by continuing in the faith that's how you experience eternal life this is why it says in Hebrews today if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts it doesn't say do you remember when you did it back in 1978 when you made that confession it doesn't say that neither does it say do it tomorrow when you have time between 12 o'clock and 3 o'clock it doesn't say that either it says today why because the writer to Am I saved today yes am I following Jesus today yes will I follow him tomorrow yes how will I know because if I get up tomorrow morning and I pray and I love him and I want to do his will I'm following him how will I know 20 years from now how do I know that something won't tempt me how do I know that something won't take me well I'm secure in the hands of God but at the same time there are people in the church and in Christ who are not really in in the same sense very difficult for us to understand it first go here's a few conclusions to draw then and this is really where this is leading to hopefully you've understood over the few weeks that persevering in your faith is a necessity because it defines that you're saved in other words how how can I be assured that I belong to Jesus well the only way I can get assurance you can't give me assurance it's something that you can't give me I can't even give you assurance the only way you can be assured is if you wake up tomorrow morning and you're following Jesus and secondly you're doing it because you believe in the promise of God that he will keep you and you're sealed with the spirit until the day of redemption that's how you know by faith and by continuing in the faith daily here's one in particular the conversion date but no confession today I think that if we just think about that for a moment how many people do you know that have a conversion date but are not following Jesus today where there is no confession today where they have a once upon a time confession back when they were a teenager when they were seven or ten or when they were twenty five but today they're not following Jesus at all nowhere in scripture will you find the conversion date a sign of assurance of eternal security in other words or yet many people in the church think that that is a cast iron agreement of eternal security

I've got a conversion date so what you're not following Jesus today you've actually gone out from us and John says those who go out from us are not of us doesn't matter if they've got a conversion date back in the seventies or eighties or nineties or whenever it was all true conversions make it into the present day all true conversions make it into the present day in other words if you are truly converted then you'll still be following Jesus now okay if you're truly converted then whenever then was you'll still be following Jesus now now another way of looking at this when you're a pastor of a church and you have to think about other people and also you're in the responsibility where you have to have to administer communion and baptism what type of judgment am I to make well [33 : 30] I'm quite convinced as a minister I shouldn't be making any type of judgments whatsoever other than try to do the word of God as faithfully as I possibly can do it so what does that mean when you come to administrations of the church in terms of communion and baptism and you've got a nine year old that comes along I believe well if you believe you ought to be taking communion I believe well you ought to be baptized yet I've heard it time and time again where there is a judgment made and it's a judgment always based on doubt well let's see how it pans out let's see if you're really serious let's give it a few years and see if you still believe what you're saying you are but if true conversion can only be defined by the fact that you continue until you die at what day are you actually going to decide when they can be baptized and when they can it's very very difficult so what we do is if a seven year old or a nine year old or a 15 year old or a 23 year old says

I believe you treat that belief deadly seriously let God figure out whether or not they're a wheat or a tare you let time and truth figure out whether they're a wheat or a tare but if they're in the church you treat them as the people of God whatever their age and so if they come and they say I want to be baptized or you say you believe you're nine you believe right you need to be baptized why because that's what the bible says you believe well you need to be taking communion and remembering Christ's death why because that's what's expected of believers you know you come and live with me and you right and you say well and you come into the house and say well this is what I'm going to do or say no if you're part of my family this is what the Ralph family does okay the Ralph family doesn't do that and if you want to be part of this family this is what the Ralph family does and the church if we're part of

God's family this is what God's family does it takes communion it baptizes this is what we do so the trouble is is that many in the church I think have got this wrong ministers I think have got it wrong over the years you're going to say well who do you think you are to think you're the only one who's got it right I don't think I'm the only one who's got it right hundreds of ministers believe this I just so happen to believe the same that if someone says they believe you can't determine whether or not they believe after a few years and then give them communion and then give them baptism you just can't do that you just can't do that and so you baptize them you give them communion you let God figure out whether or not they are a wheat or a tare as it says in Hebrew 6 they've tasted the water they've tasted of the things to come they've gone through the waters of baptism they've tasted the spiritual gifts they've had all that and then they departed but they were treated as the church while they were in the church and why is that so important well

I think the church have got it the wrong way round so the way that it goes is like this we're going to withhold baptism from you until we're certain we're going to withhold communion from you because you're just not old enough yet we don't think you know what you're doing in other words what we're saying is that yeah we know God expects us to bring you up in the faith but we're just going to throw in a little bit of doubt by saying we'll just hold your horses and we'll wait and see if you're really certain somewhere down the line but then those same people's children in the church wouldn't say that allow but I think that person or Bobby's son was a little bit too young to be baptized whatever the issue may be those same people will then defend their family member or friend who has converted back in the 80s but hasn't been in the church for 20 years doesn't make any sense they damaged the people of

God by saying well we're not sure about your conversion who are in the church week after week singing and praying and loving God with their heart you know as far as we can determine but then their friend who hasn't been in church for 23 years or whatever it is oh yeah but they were converted I was there at their conversion where are they today why are we so willing to give false assurance to someone who shows no sign of salvation and yet want to cause doubt to younger members in particular because we don't think they're ready yet I think we've got it terribly wrong I think we let God sort it out we treat those who are in the church as in the church and we treat those who went out from us as the way John says if they've gone out from us they are saying who they are by the fact that they have gone out

[39 : 08] I think I begin to understand why so many of the teachers like Paul and John in the early church spent so much time correcting the teachers or correcting false teachers because it seems people with imaginations are great at saying well I think it's this or I think it's that I think we only have one thing to do and that is just read the Bible and pray that you pray that you've understood it correctly and then apply it correctly even though it may seem strange to baptize someone at the age of five or seven or nine even though it may seem strange to give someone communion at the age of seven or eleven even though that may seem strange because we're so used to saying well hang on a minute you're not old enough we're not quite sure think about where you even get that idea from because it doesn't come from the Bible we cannot rely on our imaginations we have to rely on the word of

God to live his church and to persevere carefully and that means not hindering the perseverance of those who are younger in the faith well as we conclude as we are concluding next week we're going to finish this series with those who return lest you think that all hope is lost that once you've gone out you're out for good that's not true either the younger son in the parable that Jesus told after a long period it would seem of even wanting his father dead all of his inheritance wanted what the father had without the father came back but more importantly the father went running for him so even though this message may seem as though it's cut and dry no it ain't over shall we say until it's over prodigals return and the father goes running amen