



This morning we continue in our series in 1 John. Today we’re in **2:18-29**, and we’re going to dive right into the passage, and read the whole thing in one shot today. This is God’s word to you and me today...

So, there are a few things about these verses I want to note for you, and give some application around them as we go along. He continues the very fatherly language that we’ve seen several times already, “Dear Children...” And then he says something that might cause us to raise our eyebrows just a bit, especially if you’re a newer Christian or even a skeptic of the gospel. **John writes that they are “in the last hour.”** Sometimes people read this, or similar language in other places in the New Testament that sound like the writer, and other early Christians, expected the return of Jesus and the end of things as we know them at any moment...and yet here we are, 2,000 years later and we can be pretty certain that Jesus has not returned. Some people might wonder what he means, or is he wrong, or what.

Let me see if I can help us with this. We have to remember that 2,000 years is literally a blink of the eye in creation history. For instance, scientists believe the universe is about 13.7 billion years old – though recently, thanks to the James Webb Space Telescope, that number is being questioned, with a new possible age of 26.7 billion years. But let’s go with 13.7 billion – it’s smaller and therefore easier math. ☺ 2,000 years out of that isn’t much time, and we *are* living in the “last hour.” In fact, 2,000 out of 13.7 billion is a lot less than the last hour of a day. If you do the math, the last 2,000 years is actually like being in the last .0126 seconds of a 24-hour day.¹ Literally, it’s the blink of an eye. So, we, with John and these first Christians, are in the last hour together.

Then John uses a strong word when speaking about these people who are giving a false gospel: that they are “antichrists.” We think of “Anti-Christ” as a title and another name for Satan, but here John is using it to speak of others who stand against Jesus. The prefix, “anti,” in the Greek can mean against or opposite of, just like in English. But it also can be used in a

slightly different way, to mean “instead of” almost like the prefix “pseudo” – like pseudonym. So, we are contending with the problem of an adversary, but also a counterfeit, a substitute, a pseudo-Christ. This second meaning is actually more dangerous, because it’s less obviously leading us astray. **A wolf in sheep’s clothing is more difficult to spot than a wolf as itself.** Sometimes, as John indicates here, they even start out in the church as faithful Christians, which makes them especially difficult to discern. Let me give a couple illustrations.

I will occasionally send emails from my phone. And I have a signature line that goes out with every email, but the salutation right before it I always type in with my thumbs, and my most common is “In Christ, Pastor Brian”. Occasionally, however, my thumbs type “Im” instead of “In.” Fortunately, there’s auto-correct. And so to correct the mistake, it adds an apostrophe so I end up signing the email, “I’m Christ.” That’s an especially terrible thing for a pastor (!) to sign off with. Fortunately, I believe I’ve noticed each time this has happened and I think I’ve never actually sent an email with that. Anyone who says “I’m Christ” is a wolf in sheep’s clothing, a pseudo-Christ, an anti-Christ: Run for the hills...unless it’s an email from me, in which case you are welcome to reply with laughing emojis.

On a more serious note, I remember a few years ago a friend of mine was reading some writings from a guy who said he was Christian. The stuff he was putting out was really influencing this friend of mine and she was getting more and more drawn into what he had to say. She was (is) a Christian with pretty deep roots. But as she talked about what she was learning, I had some concerns. I asked if I could take a look at some of what the guy’s writing. And what I discovered is that he was taking Bible verses, and sort of re-arranging key words in a subtle way, to draw people in with a seductive message that *sounded* Biblical, but in the end was very *non*-Biblical. But because he was supposedly quoting Scripture, it was difficult to realize the change unless you actually knew precisely what the verses were to begin with. I pointed out the subtle change that led to a completely opposite meaning of what the Scripture says, and she was so thankful. She immediately stopped reading his stuff, because it was twisting the gospel to become very self-centered and self-promotional.

Paul speaks to this same issue in more than one of his letters, including in Colossians where he writes, **“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ (Colossians 2:6-8).** Notice the emphasis on staying connected to Jesus, and not being taken “captive” through other teaching that is not centered on Jesus.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.” (Mt. 7:15). This is literally where we get the idiom “wolf in sheep’s clothing.” And with it, Jesus himself warns us with stern language about people who would lead us astray.

You see, there are people who would lead you astray away from Jesus, and they can look so inviting. We all know to beware of scammers who promise love, or financial gain, or some other reward, if we will only meet them here or there, or provide a bank account number, or transfer money into another bank account...but they’re scammers; they never show up, or they take your money and run – either a little at a time as they try and get you to trust them more and more, or a big chunk all at once. There was a huge article in the Seattle Times about scammers on Friday that probably everyone should read, even if you think you’re pretty alert.²

Spiritual scammers do the same thing. They’re looking to pull you away from the truth. They’re looking to entice you with promises of peace, joy, happiness, contentment, bliss, fulfillment, and so forth. That stuff is attractive! So, you’ll see things like “be one with the universe.” “Find your higher self.” “Manifest...” and then fill in the blank with whatever it is you want to manifest. You see, they aren’t going to look or sound or preach like a wolf. They’re going to be very seductive, attractive, and most concerning: authoritative. They will sound like they are the real deal. But they’re leaving out Jesus, and leading us away from him.

So, you've got to know the truth. As Jesus says, "the truth will set you free." And so, knowing the truth of Scripture is so important. Knowing the centrality of Jesus to our faith, of Christ crucified and resurrected, knowing that we're called to be Christ-like in all facets of our lives and any temptation or invitation to live otherwise is a slippery slope leading away from Jesus. This takes discernment. Scripture tells us to "test the spirits." In other words: look into claims people make and see if what they're pushing, selling, promoting, inviting you into lines up with Scripture. Ask, "Does this line up with what the Bible says?"

We see that in this passage, too. The antichrists teaching was a reduction of, or even elimination of, Jesus. Verses 22 and 23 are the key verses for this: **"Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist—denying the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also"** (1 John 2:22-23). In other words, apart from Jesus you can't actually know God your Creator. That seemed to be the message that was being taught by the antichrists: that Jesus wasn't necessary. So, we need discernment to help us understand more clearly what's aligned with Jesus, and leading us toward him, and what isn't.

So: How do we set ourselves up to have the discernment that we need? How can we tell what's of Jesus and what isn't? Let's use the analogy of maintaining good physical health. The best protection against bad health is to stay healthy. Brilliant, right? You're welcome. ☺ But: staying healthy doesn't just happen automatically. You have to work at it. Eat right, get enough sleep, exercise, and so forth is all needed in order to stay healthy. Illnesses will still come, but your body can fight them off better, the healthier you are to begin with. Similarly, the best protection against cults, bad theology, spirituality that isn't centered on Jesus, the seductiveness of worldly messages... **The best protection against spiritual disease is through maintaining our spiritual health. That happens when we practice good spiritual habits.**

Let me suggest a few; these may be review for some of us, but it never hurts to be reminded and encouraged. First, go to Sunday worship service. Between the songs, the scripture readings, the sermons, the prayers, and other facets of worship, Sunday services help keep you spiritually healthy. Second, be involved in a smaller group at the church – whether that’s Sunday classes (easy one – you’re already here), home-based small groups and Bible studies or prayer groups, even joining in with a group that merges our Christian faith with an activity such as quilting or basketball or gardening...or whatever. These things keep us connected to Jesus and to each other. We need that. In fact, being in even smaller Christian community – like with just one or two others, where there’s a high degree of safety, and we can be open and vulnerable about what’s tempting us or where our struggles are – those are places where our roots in Jesus can grow especially deep. And then lastly, your own individual, regular, personal Bible reading/reflection/prayer time. All of these things keep us rooted in God and his word. His word remains in us and we remain in him, and helps us to grow spiritually healthy.

And this is what verse 24 through 27 is largely about. “...see that **what you have heard from the beginning remains in you**. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father...the anointing you received from him remains in you...just as that anointing has taught you, remain in him” (1 John 2:24-27 selections). Three times in the last few verses here, he uses this word, “anointing.” The Greek word is “chrisma.” Literally, it means, “smear, spread, or rub over” and so is often translated as “anoint.” It’s actually the same word that “Christ” comes from – just in a slightly different form. So, as many of you know, “Christ” is not Jesus’ last name, it’s a title that means “the anointed” or “the anointed one.”

So, when we “remain in him (in Christ)” as he writes here...we are anointed. We are in his anointing, the anointing of Jesus, through his Holy Spirit. That anointing, as he writes in verse 27, is real, it’s not counterfeit. We don’t need the anointing of anyone else; just Jesus. He is enough. When you’re in relationship with God through faith in Jesus, when he is not just your savior but your Lord...when you’ve been baptized – which is a physical anointing that represents God’s spiritual anointing...when you have the word of truth planted in you and you study God’s word, and know his word, and are

growing in Jesus...then the false teachers and false claims of the world will be far less likely to entice you, because you'll be in good health in Jesus and in his word, and therefore have the tools needed to discern in the rest of life, what is of Jesus and what isn't.

And then in verse 28, he continues this theme with the reminder to “continue” in him. A little more literally, the word “meno” means “abide.” “Abide” in Jesus. In John’s gospel account, it’s the word Jesus uses in his teaching about the branches – you and me – being connected to the vine, which is Jesus. The branches are to “abide” in the vine. It’s the same word, an important one in all of John’s writings. And so: **When we remain/abide in Jesus through engagement with Scripture and other believers, it helps us stay spiritually healthy and gives us the discernment we need to keep on the path of following Jesus out in the world.** I hope and pray you have that kind of discernment, rooted in Jesus and God’s Word. We have a myriad of ministries here at Rose Hill to help you do exactly that. So, let’s remain in him, living into his anointing we each have through faith in him, so that in this last hour you would live for Jesus each and every day, wherever you go, following him all the way into eternity. Let’s pray...Amen.

¹ Thank you to Syd France for confirming my math on this!

² <https://www.seattletimes.com/pacific-nw-magazine/scammed-your-stories-of-trust-betrayed-and-tips-to-avoid-being-taken/>. This might take a subscription to read, though I’m not sure. Try it, at least. It’s worth it.