

# 1 John 2:18-27

## Introduction

It doesn't matter how sincerely we hold a belief if it isn't true.

I could climb up to the top of a tree and launch myself from its highest branches in the sincere belief that I can fly. Gravity would soon teach me that I was sincerely wrong.

It doesn't matter how sincere we are in what we believe. If we can't distinguish between what is true and what is false, then we are likely to come to harm.

John's writing this letter to help us recognise what is true and what is not. In this passage, for the first time, he specifically warns us against those who would lead us astray from Christ. They've been in the background the whole time, but like a photographer adjusting his lens, John now brings them into clear focus. And what he writes is as relevant to us today as it was to the original recipients of his letter.

That's because, like them, we're living in, what John calls: **the last hour**.

That's our first heading: Living in the last hour.

## Living in the last hour

Please look down again with me at verses 18 to 23. John writes:

**Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.**

**But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. I do not write to because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. 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.**

This talk of **the antichrist** and of **many antichrists** may seem a bit unsettling. It might conjure up images of demonic figures from horror films, who wield supernatural powers and cause chaos and destruction. That's not what John's referring to. He's the only New Testament writer who uses the word 'antichrist'. Nonetheless, it's clear that the other apostles also taught about the coming of a powerful end-time figure who is opposed to Jesus and sets himself up in the place of Jesus. Paul spoke of a coming man of lawlessness. Likewise, Jesus himself warned of the coming of many false teachers. These are all figures

who will try to deceive God's people and lead them away from faith in Jesus. In that sense, they are all antichrists. They are *against* Christ.

We shouldn't be too quick to identify specific individuals as 'the antichrist' as some have done in the past. But it's clear that history is full of people who have set themselves against Christ and have taught what's false. In that sense, history is full of false teachers, or antichrists.

And that's how we know that we're living in the last hour, John says.

He has already stated that the world is passing away. And now he says we are in the last hour.

That doesn't mean John believed that Jesus would return imminently. Rather, it means that the return of Jesus is the only climactic event still to come in God's diary. The last hour is the time between the day of Pentecost and the return of Jesus. Elsewhere, the Bible calls this time 'the last days'.

And Jesus warned his followers that this whole period would be characterised by hostility. You will be hated, he said. You will be persecuted. And, he said, false teachers will try to deceive you and lead you astray. If you were designing a publicity campaign to promote the Christian faith those might not be the kind of things you'd want to include!

But Jesus warned us in advance so that we be ready for it and stand firm.

And that's why John's writing.

Does it matter whether we can distinguish what's true from what's false? You bet it does! To use John's language, we are surrounded by antichrists. We are surrounded by false teachers who would deceive us and lead us away from the one person who can save us.

And the surprise is that the people John's warning about had come from within the church community. They had turned their backs on the true gospel message. They had gone their own way with a false gospel of their own making. And they were seeking to take others with them.

False teaching is divisive. And it's destructive. We need to be able to tell a lie when we hear one.

And that means paying attention to what someone makes of Jesus.

Look again at verse 22.

**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.**

To deny that Jesus is the Christ is to deny the apostles' message about him. It's to be against him.

The person who denies that Jesus is God himself in the flesh is not a Christian.

The person who denies that Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins is not a Christian.

The person who denies that Jesus rose from the grave and is now enthroned in heaven as the King of all is not a Christian.

And the God of the Bible is a Trinity. You cannot have one without the other.

So, if you deny the Son, John says, then you have no fellowship with the Father.

Likewise, he says, if you acknowledge the Son, then you have fellowship with the Father also.

John's simply repeating what Jesus himself said. He said this: **'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'** (John 14:6)

If you come along to our church for a while, you may hear people talking about the church tower and the stunning views of Hastings and the English Channel that you can see from roof.

"That's interesting," you might think, "I wonder how I can go up there?"

And someone might tell you that you need to go through these big doors to my right.

"That's interesting," you might think. But then, as you look at these big doors, you might think you don't like the look of them very much. And you might begin to doubt whether they really do lead to the tower roof.

Perhaps you might see the door behind me to my left, and think, "That's a much nicer door. I like that one. Surely, that must be the door that leads to the tower roof."

Or perhaps you might go to the back of the church and see the staircase next to the toilets. And you might say to yourself, "Thinking logically and rationally, if I'm going to get to the tower roof, then I'm going to have to go up some steps. *This* must be the way."

As you look around at all the doors in the church, you might think, "You know what, I don't think it really matters which one I choose. I'm sure that all of them lead to the roof eventually."

Or you might think, "Actually, I don't think *any* of the doors lead to the roof." And that's because you don't really believe there *is* a tower roof. You suspect it's just wishful thinking. An old folk tale that people keep repeating.

Or perhaps you might throw your hands in the air and say, “I give up! How can I possibly know which door leads to the roof? It’s impossible to tell.”

Well, I’ve been up to the roof. For safety reasons, it was necessary to be accompanied by a churchwarden. But I can tell you that it does exist. And I can confirm that the views are, indeed, stunning. I can also tell you that there’s only one way to get there. It’s through the door to my right. Whatever else you might believe, no matter how sincerely you believe it, you won’t get to the roof unless you go that way.

And that’s something like what Jesus is saying.

He has come down from the Father to make the Father known and to open the way into his Father’s presence. He not only tells us how to find the way. He *is* the way. He has opened the way through his death and resurrection. And, he says, there are no other ways to the Father. No matter how sincerely we might believe otherwise, we are mistaken.

That’s why John’s warning us not to be led astray from faith in Jesus.

The moment we abandon the faith passed on by the apostles, we abandon fellowship with the Father and the Son.

Remember what John said as he started this letter: **We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.** (1 John 1:3)

It’s faith in Jesus, through the message passed on by the apostles, that bring us into fellowship with God. And that alone. That’s the message that we have believed. So, in the verses that follow, John’s attention switches from the false teachers to us. He tells us how to stay safe as we live today in fellowship with the Father and the Son, and in the light of eternity.

And that’s our next heading: Living in the light of eternity.

### Living in the light of eternity

Please look down at verses 24 to 27.

**As for you, 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. And this is what he promised us - eternal life.**

**I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit - just as it has taught you, remain in him.**

John's saying that you and I have a relationship with God that is real. We are *in* the Son and *in* the Father. Our fellowship with them is genuine. And he identifies this fellowship with eternal life.

Again, he's repeating what Jesus said. As Jesus prayed with his disciples before his arrest and crucifixion, he said: **'Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.'** (John 17:3)

To know God the Father through faith in his Son is to possess eternal life. The term 'eternal life' doesn't merely refer to the quantity of life it's also about the quality of life. It's to be in a personal and loving relationship with God that begins the moment we believe and will continue forever in the joy of the new creation.

Perhaps, with all the talk of antichrists and liars and being led astray, John's aware that we might be feeling slightly anxious. But he wants us to know that we don't need to be. We are secure. And John speaks here of two things we have inside us that will keep us safe for eternity.

The first is the gospel. It's the message that has been preached by the apostles and heard from the beginning. Verse 24: **As for you, see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you.** It's the gospel. It's inside us because we have received it and believed it. And it's by standing firm on the gospel that we enjoy the promise of eternal life.

Christians should always be conservative. We shouldn't be found chasing after the latest fad or new doctrines. We're to be like the anchor-man at the end of a tug-of-war rope. We're to dig our heels in and stand firm on what we have already received. Our faith is anchored in the gospel message passed on to us by the apostles.

We have the gospel inside us. And we also have the Holy Spirit. Verse 27. **As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you.**

John probably speaks of an anointing because this is what the false teachers claimed to have. They claimed to have a special anointing, which meant they were specially qualified to speak for God. But John will have none of it. The only true anointing is the Holy Spirit. And *all* believers have the Holy Spirit dwelling within them.

So, he wrote in verse 20: **But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.** It's the indwelling Holy Spirit who takes the truth of the gospel and enables us to understand it and believe it. The very fact that we believe the gospel is evidence that the Holy Spirit is in us. And as we read God's word, he teaches us **about all things.**

So, we don't need anyone else to teach us, John says.

That might seem like an odd comment coming in the middle of a letter that's crammed full of teaching. What it means is that we don't need anything beyond what we already have in the Bible. Of course, we can all benefit from faithful Bible teachers who remind us of the truth of scripture and help us to understand it. But we don't need new teachings from people who claim to be specially qualified but who are only promoting lies. We already have what we need for a relationship with God that is real and growing. We have God's Word. And we have God's Spirit.

We are gospel people. And all the while we remain gospel people, we can be confident that our relationship with God is genuine, and that we possess eternal life through faith in Jesus.

That means we must never tire of the gospel. We will never outgrow the need to feed on God's word any more than we will outgrow the need to eat food each day. That's why Bible reading notes like Explore can be so helpful. It's also why it's so helpful to go to conferences like the Southern Women's Convention that's coming up in June, and Bible by the Beach that's just been. They help us to keep feeding on God's word.

And we must weigh everything we hear against the teaching of scripture with the discernment that comes from the Holy Spirit. That's why we have Bibles in the pews, so that we can check everything we hear against scripture. It's why it's also helpful to be in the practice of memorising Bible verses.

And it's how to spot the lies of false teachers and resist their attempts to lead us astray.

## Conclusion

This last hour in which we live is a perilous time. The spirit of the antichrist is all around us. It's wherever Jesus is opposed as our God and King, and wherever something or someone else takes his place.

But with the gospel in our hearts and the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, we are safe and secure.

So, John says, stand firm. Don't budge an inch.

Let's pray.

Loving Father, thank you for the relationship we can enjoy with you, today, through faith in your Son, Jesus Christ. Thank you for the glorious future you have in store for us in eternity. And thank you for the security we have in your hands. As we wait for Jesus to return, please help each of us to keep trusting in the gospel, passed down to us from the apostles. By your Spirit, teach us how to build our lives upon it. And keep us from going astray. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.