

I John 2:18-28 ▪ Dealing with Departures and Deception in the Church

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Antichrist; Second Coming

Intro: When I was getting ready to start my first ministry, an older pastor took me out to coffee and imparted a few words of wisdom and guidance. I'll never forget one part of the conversation.

The senior, seasoned saint said something along these lines:

“Don't be surprised that probably within the first 6 months of your ministry, you will likely face some sort of crisis you've never faced before. It may be intense enough that you might question your calling in ministry. Don't panic. Pray, trust the Lord, persevere and remember it's not the end of the world.”

His words were true—within those first 6 months I faced two major issues in our small, struggling church plant. One core family left; another individual came to light as being very deceptive in character.

Departures and Deception—those are things that tend to keep me from sleeping well.

Church drama, complaints, criticism, grumbling can be handled somewhat well.

But departures and deception...those hit hard. Really hard.

- The early church was also hit hard with these, which prompted John to write this short letter.

How do we (the church) deal with departures and deception?

The Credible Threat (18-26)

- This part of the letter takes on a sobering tone: “This is the Last Hour”
- Last hour seems to match another phrase we see in the Bible: “last days”.

When?

—If someone were to ask me, “Are we living in the last days?” I can tell this “yes”.

That's also the same answer that you would have been given in the days of the early church.

Acts 2:17 ESV

“ ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares,

that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,

and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,

and your young men shall see visions,

and your old men shall dream dreams;

Hebrews 1:1–2 ESV

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

Last day (broadly speaking) =the time the world entered in after the resurrection and pouring out of the Spirit that continues until Jesus returns.

- There is obviously some final last days—at the end of the present age right before Jesus returns (last of last days); but generally we are living in the last days. So was Charles Spurgeon, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Augustine, the Apostle John and Paul .
- The credible threat is this: *The Antichrist is coming.* (v18)

Antichrist

- First, American Christians especially have often been fixated on the Antichrist. Andrew said that the topic generated the most discussion in a youth small group.

We should observe our enemy, but not obsess over him.

- The name Antichrist is only found in John’s letters. Here and in 2 John.
- Note that there is a difference between Antichrist (singular), and plural (Antichrists)—one is a future figure, the others presently exist.
- Now for a long time in church history since the reformation, many have held that the Pope was the Antichrist (E.G. Luther, Calvin, Westminster and London Baptist Confession 1689)

The Church (1689 Confession 26.4)

26:4 The Lord Jesus Christ is the head of the church. By the Father’s appointment, all authority is conferred on Him in a supreme and sovereign manner to call, institute, order and govern the church. The Pope of Roman Catholicism cannot in any sense be head of the church; rather, he is

the antichrist, the man of lawlessness, and the son of destruction, who exalts himself in the church against Christ and all that is called God. The Lord will destroy him with the brightness of His coming.

- I'm not necessarily convinced that the Pope is the Antichrist—but at least these Bible-believing men took the credible threat seriously.
- But this statement does link the Antichrist with the Man of Lawlessness ([2 Thess 2:3-4](#))

2 Thessalonians 2:3–4 ESV

Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.

- God warns us in his Word that there will be a final, end-time enemy of God who brings massive deception and leads a widespread rebellion against the church.

Oh, in case that starts to scare you—let's not forget the rest of the story.

2 Thessalonians 2:8 ESV

And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.

That's why the call to take Christ and his truth seriously is all the more urgent. This is a credible threat.

But...we also have a Lord and Savior who has the whole situation under control...and He will conquer!

- Before this final, end-time Antichrist comes, there has been, are, and will be many antichrists (lower case a). (18b)
- They are likely the group Jesus identified in.

Matthew 24:11–12 ESV

And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.

- their presence always brings false teaching and is accompanied by:
 1. [Departures \(v19\)](#)
- In this single verse, we get the why of the entire letter.

- This letter was written because a group had left the church—it's a painful circumstance when a group makes a mass exodus.

Desertion has typically been labeled apostasy.

But these were not one's church hopping, or shopping.

—These were false disciples.

*The threat is that others follow.

- › The most brutal attacks on the church often come from within.

2. Deception (26)

- We get a clear reason for this letter—some were trying to deceive. These were influencers.

Since the main influence comes from a Satanic root, it makes sense the deception comes with the same M.O.

2 Corinthians 11:3 ESV

But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

Sum: The credible threat remains—the spirit of the Antichrist is the same spirit of our common Ancient Foe who leads our thoughts astray from a pure and sincere devotion to Christ.

Let's not be naive that a credible threat exists; an enemy who wants us to depart and be deceived.

Eyes on the Prize (27-28)

- The final two verses train us how to handle the credible threat.
- If you are a believer, you have *outstanding* resources *In Christ*.

--Anointing (20,27): The Holy Spirit resides

- This is not to deny the proper place of teachers.
- This addressed the deception going on—it's dealing with the credible threat of false teaching.
- That may sound like some crazy eyed charismatic TV preacher—but that's not the idea.

The promise of the new covenant promise in Jer. 31 -

Jeremiah 31:34 ESV

And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

One of the news sources I check sometimes has a feature that if you pay you get the insider, higher level journalism. It's not accessible to the ordinary Joe to enjoy.

For ordinary Joe's like me—not willing to pay for the premium content, I can feel like I'm missing out.

The point is that no one in the church has access to "secret" knowledge" that others need to tap into. The Spirit of the New Covenant Age means that all knowledge of God is available.

- › It's very likely that the end-time Antichrist would come as an "expert" that many flock to?

The anointing means that we have everything we need to know God in His Word and by His Spirit!

No need to seek the expert...pay for premium content.

- › Scripture is sufficient; the Spirit is enough

Also, always be aware and on guard from someone who brings some "new" teaching.

A few years back a man wrote a book *A New Kind of Christianity*.

It was hugely popular. Even won the Christianity Today award of merit in 2002.

The author is still publishing.

From his website (3/7/21)

<https://brianmclaren.net/about-brian/>

"Faith After Doubt (2021) makes the bold proposition that only doubt can save the world (and your faith). And *Do I Stay Christian?* (2022) helps struggling Christians address the questions of whether and how to stay Christian when the term can mean irreconcilable things."

--Abiding:

- A favorite word for John. Found over 20x in this letter.
- It describes our Union with Christ—the main lens we should see through.

John 15:4–5 ESV

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Abiding=staying connected to. It describes our Union with Christ.

Another metaphor we can use is being deeply rooted in Christ.

****This is the key to dealing with the problem of departures and deception: Go Deep in Christ.**

Go Deep in Christ? How deep are your roots in Jesus?

Are you abiding today? Is your desire to go deeper in Christ? I'm afraid that so often too many of us settle for a very shallow relationship with Jesus.

Going deep in Christ takes us out of the *shallow waters of spiritual superficiality*—where we can swim in depths of grace and love.

It guards us from departing and deception; and best yet...

Going deep in Christ also prepares us for his coming.

--Anticipating (28) :

- Continual Abiding keeps us from the shrinking back and being ashamed

Think on it with me. What if today was the Day—the Day when the final prayer of Rev. was answered: Come Lord Jesus?

What if that was today? Where would your heart be? Ashamed? Shrink back?

Or would you be satisfied? Is it what you long for—to see Jesus face to face?

Are you ready to finally meet the One you've called Friend, Savior, Lord, King?

Conclusion— Calvin puts it simply and beautifully well.

“A godly confidence delights to look on God....the godly calmly wait for Christ, nor do they dread his coming.” (*Calvin's Commentary on 1 John*)

That's the goal: no dread, but delight.

May we be a people prepared; prepared to look on God and be satisfied at the coming of Jesus.

May we always keep our eyes on the Prize.