

1 John 2:18

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[0:00] Our text for today, 1 John chapter 2 beginning in verse 18. 1 John chapter 2 beginning in verse 18.

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yeah, we have an interesting assignment this morning as we work our way through the book of 1 John. Today, handling John's admonitions and warnings regarding many antichrists have come into the world. There's some things I need to do to set the table for you to understand this passage. And the first one is just to let you know that over time, the meaning of anti has changed.

[2:12] The prefix has changed its meaning over time. Now we think of it as something that is opposed, anti this or anti that. But in this original language, as the word anti was used, it didn't mean someone who was opposed to Christ. It meant someone who was attempting to replace Christ or put themselves next to Christ or add something to Christ. You might know if you've ever watched any of these, you know, pyramid documentaries or so on and so forth, you'll have the chamber and the anti chamber. And that's the classical use of the term. And that just means the room next to the room. You know, it's the thing next to the thing is the way that anti was used sometimes to refer to replacing, but a lot of times just referring to sort of co-locating, you know, you'd have anti columns in Greek architecture, and it would be two columns that are, you know, kind of next to each other and so forth. So this is going to come, I'll explain why that's important as we progress through the passage.

But just so you know, the word anti doesn't mean against in the way that John's using. It means replacing or beside. Okay, the next thing I want you to know regarding the kind of table setting for this passage is that there are only three texts in the whole Bible that use the phrase antichrist. There are only three texts in the whole Bible that use the term antichrist, and they are all in first John.

You do not have the term antichrist in the book of Revelation. This may surprise some of you. You do not have the term antichrist in Daniel, or in first Thessalonians, or in Matthew 24.

This is it. These three places are the places where this text appears, where this word appears in the text we just read, and also in first John 4. I want to read that to you. First John chapter 4, verses 1 through 3. Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God. For many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the spirit of God.

Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and is now in the world already. And the third instance where this word appears is in 2 John, John's second letter to the local churches of Ephesus. In 2 John, verse 7, for many deceivers have gone out into the world. Those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh, such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. So I have a couple things I want you to know. The word anti means replacing or next to, and there's only three places in the whole Bible where this word appears, and they're all in John's writings, and we get from this pretty clear understanding of what John's trying to do.

[4:55] And that's the third thing I want you to see before we dive into the text, and that is, is that all of this language about antichrist is far more concerned about the spirit or the ethos behind this than a particular individual. For those of you that maybe don't hear the word ethos that much, let me just let you know, ethos means a characteristic spirit, a moral nature, or a set of guiding beliefs.

That's, that's what ethos means. And what I want you to see is that when John's talking about antichrist, he's not doing this sensationalized Nicholas Carpathia kind of nonsense. He's like seeking out the individual. He's actually not really concerned about the individual antichrist, which seems to be all you hear about when this, this subject is discussed in most churches.

He's concerned about the spirit behind that, and he's really saying that there are many antichrists, not just one. What you'll notice in these texts is that he moves from the plural. For instance, in 2 John 7, he moves from the plural, many deceivers have gone out, to a singular, such a one is the deceiver in the antichrist. This grammatical move is not accidental, it's theological. He begins by describing the plural phenomenon, this plural problem. There are many antichrists in the world, all tied to a singular spirit. And as you dive into the Greek, it becomes even more evident in these verses that really what John's trying to get us to pay attention to is a vibe, is a spirit, is an ethos, not a particular individual. Now, look at, I think it's important for a number of reasons, but let me just see if I can illustrate this. So as many of you know, I was in the Philippines a couple months ago, and I was in the jungle. And I was in this beautiful area that had been kind of carved out of the jungle over 40 years, and it was just beautiful. This man had done all of this ruling and subduing work in the heart of the jungle. It was just so impressive. But there were some issues, you know, because it is the jungle, and one of them is, is I like to take walks, and they had a mile walking path around this retreat center. But the problem is, is that if you walk in the middle of the night, these giant spiders about this big, they build webs across the paths. And so you just know better than to walk in the middle of the night or, you know, when you can't see, because you're going to get a spider in your face for sure. And now, you know, so when I've been there before, and so I would warn all my fellow walkers, hey, just don't go out. Don't walk when you can't see. Wear a headlamp or something. And now, there's one spider on the retreat that I've noticed that is, all the spiders are about this big, okay? But there was one that was basically like my face. Like, it was, it was very large. It was, it was very large and handsome, like my face. It's a very large and handsome spider.

Anyway, think about what would, what would be the, a bad friend move is if I had these new guys that were with me and I said, hey, just watch out. There's this one spider. I call him Spike. And he's like the size of my face. And like, just watch out for that spider. Well, the problem with that is, is that, you know, there may or may not be ever an encounter with that one spider. And the problem isn't that that one spider. The problem is like, there's 30 of them. They're all a problem. They're all scary. You're not going to like any of them touching your face and so on and so forth. And so, so much of the preaching about antichrist focuses on the individual, which I just think is pastoral malpractice. I think that the text is actually not saying, watch out for this one guy who emerges from this one place at this one time, and he's this ethnicity, and he's going to have this appeal, and so on and so forth. The pastoral approach that's happening in this letter is there are spiders all over the place. I want to help you to have a general strategy to avoid getting bit in the face by any of them. And so that's how we're going to, you know, go through this text. It's really more about an ethos than an individual. Now, just as an aside, you may say, well, Chris, are you saying there is no kind of final boss antichrist? And I'm telling you, as a reader of church history, a couple things. One, if you would like to say that the beast in Revelation or the man of lawlessness is the antichrist or the little horn in Daniel, you could do that, but that is not just a clear, simple reading of the text.

You're doing hermeneutic things. You're doing interpretive things to get there. You may be right. You may not be right, but you are engaging in some speculation even to get there. Secondly, you need to understand that plenty of people throughout church history have believed that all of these things are the same guy and that there is this one massive sort of final boss. But many people in church history believe that that was something that happened in the first century. And there are good textual reasons for believing that, that the antichrist appeared in the first century. And that's a legitimate, consistent belief throughout the ages. And so even if you were to say, yes, there is an individual extra big spider, a lot of theologians believe that happened in the first century. And some believe it will happen in the future. My point is, is that you could go down all of these lines of speculation if you wanted to, but pastorally, as I preach the passage, I can see what John's doing. Pretty simple.

[10:24] He's not trying to warn you about some figure that either emerged in the past or in the future. He's just trying to warn you about a particular spirit, a particular set of beliefs that are dangerous to the believer. And that he wants to make sure that his people who he loves, he calls them his little children, are not deceived. And so that's what I'm going to do this morning. I'm just going to, I've got four points. And the first three are about kind of the spiritual ethos behind antichrist.

The first point is, is the location of the antichrist. It's not Eastern Europe or Israel or anything like that. It's different. The second is the lie of the antichrist. What is it that they're saying, the antichrist ethos? What's wrong with it? What's it saying that's untrue?

And then the love of the antichrist ethos. Location is simply the first point. And that is, location is within Christendom. This ethos, this spirit emerges from within the church, or at least with, from within Christian presuppositions. We usually think of the antichrist when we get into this final boss kind of thinking and the individual thinking.

We usually think of him as a predator lurking outside the church. But all of the texts that deal with this error, this issue really describe antichrist as more of a parasite within the church than a predator on the outside. You guys ever watch those, those simulations on Discovery Channel where it's like bear versus tiger and things like that. And they show these animals like shark versus, you know, pterodactyl or whatever. And, you know, don't take me literally there. That's not, that's not a real one. That was just my weird brain. But anyway, they have these, and they talk about which animal is the most dangerous and so forth. And one of the things that they always do is they talk about, well, you know, over 50 people in the last five years died from grizzly bear attacks or whatever, you know.

And you're like, that's, that's too many, of course. But let's compare that to cancer, which is something not lurking on the outside of you that could maybe grab you and bite you, but something that's lurking on the inside of you that, that is far more deadly. A lot more people die of cancer, of viruses, of cells gone wrong, of parasites than they do from predators.

[12 : 46] And I think it's very important if I'm going to fulfill John's mission here of warning you and keeping you from being deceived to just help you to understand that when this ethos emerges, it's not outside the church coming in. It's, it's happening from within the, within the church, within Christendom. You can see that in verse 18. Children, it is the last hour. As you have heard that Antichrist is coming, so now many Antichrists have come. Therefore, we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us. 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. Really, when you scan all of the New Testament literature about deception, about false prophets, and so forth, one of the things you've got to say is, is that locatively, they are far more like parasites than predators. They, they, they, they exist within the church. Acts 20, verse 30, Paul warns that, that some from your own number will arise and distort the truth. Jude, which we read as our call to worship, there are hidden reefs in your, in your church. Hidden reefs that are at your love feast. Shepherds feeding themselves. The best passage I know that explains this phenomenon is 2 Peter 2, but false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift, swift destruction, and many will follow their sensuality, and because of them, the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed, they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle. Their destruction is not asleep. So, first L, first point, Antichrist, location, where does this ethos come from? It's parasitic. It comes from within. Number two, what is the lie that this Antichrist ethos is telling? Well, I've already given you that point, really, when I said that the word anti doesn't mean against, it means in replacement of, or in addition to. So, what is the main lie of this Antichrist ethos? It is simply that

Jesus plus something else is necessary for salvation. That's the Antichrist ethos. Everybody wants to get into incarnation and this and that, and we'll get to those texts when we get to them, but I'm just telling you that the name is intentional. It tells you all you need to know. What the Antichrist spirit is, is a diminishment of Jesus's sufficiency as Savior, a deficient, a diminishment of Jesus's authority as Lord, and the addition of something else that is necessary for a person to obtain eternal life. In the early church, that came from the Jews. There were a group of people called the Judaizers who went back into the Gentile churches in order to get those Gentiles to add adherence to the ceremonial law to the gospel in order that they might be saved. In the second, third, and fourth centuries, that was the season of dualities. A lot of theologies emerged in Manichaeism and Gnosticism and Platonism, and these are duality philosophies that believe, you know, that materiality is bad, and what this one would say, this season of error in the church would have been like, Jesus plus secret knowledge is what you need. And then in the fourth century, Islam comes onto the scene. Chesterton rightly says that Islam is a Christian heresy. It is essentially monotheism without the God-man, and there they honor

Christ as a prophet, but honor Muhammad alongside of him. So you can see the anti in the classical appearing in all of these things, right? So you've got the first wave, which is the Antichrist, which would be the ceremonial law plus Jesus, and then you've got this second wave through the next three or four centuries, and that would be Jesus plus secret Gnostic knowledge. And then you've got Islam emerging as Jesus plus Muhammad and the Quran, and then you, right around that same time, you begin to see shifts in the church where you begin to see something like Roman Catholic theology that we know today, and now you've got Jesus plus Mary plus the Mass plus the sacraments, and you've got that whole season. And then, of course, in the 16th century, you get the Reformation, faith alone, grace alone, Christ alone, His glory alone, and something called Arminianism emerges, which is you need Jesus plus your free will to be saved.

And after that, spiritualism, which began to be you need Jesus plus spiritual experiences, and this was the age of seances, and many don't realize that this age of spiritualism and seances is actually from whence feminism emerged amongst other things. But this is also where you get Mormonism and Jehovah's Witness and toxic charismatic theology. It's Jesus plus personal experience, Jesus plus spiritual experience. And so, really, there's an Antichrist for every century, and sometimes we put them away, and sometimes they linger, and sometimes they come back and circle back. I think you could see a lot of overlaps if we wanted to spend the time talking about it. You could see a lot of overlaps between Mormonism and Islam, for instance, right? But both have secret books. Both were discovered by dudes alone when they probably shouldn't have been alone. Secret visions, second books, Jesus is less than. So you could just see, like, this spirit, this ethos, it's just going to keep coming. I think the thing that you need to really appreciate about what John's doing here is he's saying this is essentially the last legitimate play the enemy has to run. They tried to keep Jesus from being born. That's the Old Testament all the way through the infanticide of Herod. They tried to kill him on the cross. They tried to kill all of his believers.

All of these are relatively ineffective or completely ineffective. The one that's really effective is just the parasitic move. It's the reason why so many people die of one particular thing. The stuff that grows on the inside of you, the viruses that need your biology to live and yet are intent on killing you at the right time after they've manifested to extent, the same with cancer cells. And so you can see that this is probably the main strategy to take Christianity off the rails. It's essentially like this. You can imagine, just imagine with me, a couch full of people, like, you know, it's a long couch, and a very large man comes in, and he just goes right to the middle of the couch, kind of wedges himself in, plops down. Well, the whole couch is disturbed now. No one is comfortable anymore.

[20:02] Everybody is sort of, like, accommodating this massive figure in the middle of the couch. Friends, God came to earth, took on flesh so that that flesh could be crucified, and in that crucifixion make atonement for the sins of those whom he called. The massive giant Jesus has plopped down on the couch of the world, and everybody has to reckon with it. Everybody has to respond to it. It's the thing that's changed the world, and all we're living in now are just the ripples of opposition from this massive, mighty victory that took place 2,000 years ago. And so the main strategy seems to essentially be, like, well, we can't do anything about the fact that there's this giant, looming figure who has split history in half, made his enemies, brought his enemies to open shame, reconciling all things to himself. We can't do anything about the mighty Jesus plopping down on the timeline of earth, so maybe we could just, like, say that his mom is also necessary to be saved.

Or maybe we could say, like, well, you know, Jesus is a good guy, but, like, we've got to have these other things, too. See, you can't do anything about the fact that he's arrived. So you've got to figure out a new strategy, and that strategy seems to be something like parasitic. So that's the location.

This usually happens within the church, the lie, Jesus plus something, and the love. It's like, why are these people doing this? Well, they're just in love with the world. There's a reason, I won't get into this too much, but there's a reason that John moves from the love of the world to the Antichrist.

If you were to just scan all of the false teacher materials in the New Testament, you'd see that the motivations are always worldly ambitions. There's always some effort to sort of make much of themselves.

I think it's just, it's kind of funny in a way. The Antichrist ethos is always something like this. Jesus isn't enough. You need something else, and I just so happen to be the guy who has all the something else. It's Joseph Smith. It's Muhammad. It's the Pope. It's always the same deal. Jesus isn't enough. You need something else, and by the way, I have a lot of something else in stock right here. It's always to make much of self. It's as if you've got these religious people within the local church, and they are thinking, how can I make this about me? And that's really the spirit of the Antichrist. How can I make this about me? How can I somehow turn the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ into something that advances my own personal agenda? Okay, so those are the three points.

[23:01] Location, lie, love, and the fourth point is like, well, what do we do about this? How do we respond to the spiders everywhere kind of problem, which gives us a lot more focus than like, and a lot more protection than there's this one thing? So how do we respond to this? And the fourth point is, we respond with loyalty to Christ. This is the least sensational sermon on the Antichrist you'll ever hear.

Everything I've said is so boring. It's the least interesting Antichrist sermon you'll ever hear. The application point of an Antichrist sermon is not to avoid barcodes or AI or to watch out for black helicopters or to go through the Obama letters and make sure, you know, like, it's none of that.

It's just like, stay loyal to Christ, and you will successfully navigate the problems associated with this intended parasitic deception. You know, since we're so close to Halloween, we might as well, you know, we might as well do the trifecta and invoke a little screw tape letters in this conversation as well. One of the things that Lewis, for those of you that don't know, Screw Tape Letters is a book written by C.S. Lewis where he imagines what it must be like for demons to communicate to each other and form their strategies to keep people deceived. That's the book.

And if you've not read it, everybody who reads it is grateful they read it. It's easy recommended, easily recommended. Anyway, so with Lewis, one of the main themes in the Screw Tape Letters is the demons are like, we got to keep using the love of novelty and the interest in fashions, not like fashions, but like changes and impressiveness, modernity. We've got to keep people kind of titillated for the new thing. That's the best way to keep them deceived.

And I think that all of that is biographical. I think Lewis is actually saying, he's describing why he almost went to hell. Because as an atheist, the final issue that Lewis had to deal with was what his friends called chronological snobbery. Lewis's main reason for not becoming a Christian sooner was because he suffered from something his friends called chronological snobbery. Lewis defines chronological snobbery as this, the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account discredited.

[25:39] J.I. Packer came up with a much better definition later on. He said, the newer is truer and only what is recent is decent. And so one of the reasons that Lewis stayed an atheist for as long as he did was he just automatically assumed that the old stuff was less valuable than the new stuff.

And he had this really illogical, which is crazy, he's such a brilliant mind, he had this illogical blind spot where he assumed that old stuff is less relevant and important and useful than new stuff.

And that will get you deceived every time. You're essentially wandering around a market full of con artists waiting for someone to sell you the Jesus plus something. That's why I told you at the beginning of this series that if you really want to understand the key in terms of John's efforts to keep his people safe, it would just be, do not grow bored with that which you had from the beginning.

If you grow bored with what you had from the beginning, if you begin to be a novelty seeker, you will meet your con artist and they will sell you a bill of goods that is an Antichrist bill of goods. It will be Jesus plus something else. So John's solution to all of this stuff about the Antichrist ethos is really his solution in general is he wants people to be loyal. He wants people to be loyal to one another and he wants people to be loyal to Christ. And that's why he uses the language throughout the entire second chapter of you already know what you need to know. That's the main theme, the main rhetorical theme that carries from the beginning of the chapter to the end. You know this stuff guys. You don't need any new information. You have the information you need. In verse 7 he says, you already know the commandment. In verses 13 through 14 he says, you already know God. In verse 18 he says, you know that the Antichrist is coming. In verse 19 he says, their identity is plain to all.

In verse 21, 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. Verse 24, 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. If you want to keep safe from deception, don't get bored with that which you had from the beginning. When you have spiritual lows, when you have questions that aren't answered, when you have pains that don't seem to come with clear explanations, just stay loyal to Christ. We used to teach our kids, we used to kind of live in a sketchy neighborhood and we used to teach our kids walk with intention. Walk like you know where you're going even if you don't know where you're going. Put the vibes on of someone who is headed somewhere.

[28 : 38] Why? Because there's a certain kind of person out there who picks up on people who are unfulfilled, who are struggling, who have a lot of questions, who have a lot of hurt. And the people who pick up on that, there's a lot of them that are bad. And they feel your uncertainty. They feel your struggle with the same old gospel every week. And they can tell this person is ripe to be sold some snake oil.

So if you want to be free from or safe from deception, the main point is, is that you understand that people are going to constantly come in with their special stock of the thing you need plus Jesus.

And you just have to say, Joseph Smith, no thank you. Bill Johnson, no thank you. Pope Leo, no thank you. I've got what I need. Move on. The main application of this passage is simply to abide in Christ. Look at verse 24. 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. And this is the promise that he made to us, eternal life. You need nothing else to get to heaven. You need nothing else to be right with God. You need nothing else to endure to the end. Verse 26, I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. But the anointing you have received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. This isn't saying that you have no need for a teacher.

It's saying you don't need to be out there listening to every Tom, Dick, and Harry that walks in with a new idea. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and it's true, and it's no lie, just that as it has taught you, abide in him. And now little children abide in him, so that when he appears, we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. Now, somebody should count the words abide real quick. I don't know how many there are. I didn't count them. I can't count really well. Not in real time anyway. What is going on here? Why is he using this word abide constantly? Well, two things. One is, is that if you're visiting with us today, one of the things that's going on in 1 John is, is he's just doing a commentary on Jesus's farewell discourse. So from John, the Gospel of John chapter 13 through 17, 1 John is just a commentary on this section of scripture in which Jesus, Jesus does a lot of teaching. And one of the things that happens in, in that farewell discourse is Jesus emphasizes abiding. So one of the things he's doing is he's just bringing up, again, another section from the farewell discourse. But do you guys know what the word abide means? It just means stay put, settle in, reside. All he's saying is, is don't get flaky on me, church. Jesus was enough yesterday.

He's enough tomorrow. And I love that Josh read Galatians 1. If anyone comes in with anything new, selling you anything new, even if it's me or an angel of God, let them be accursed. For the gospel that you have received is the good news, received once and for all for the saints. I think that one of the things I read from Chesterton this week would really help us, and it's, it's more broad than this passage, but I think this is just really helpful. He talks about two visions of progress that are portrayed in the world. And, and I think the worldly vision of progress is something like a road. This is how Chesterton describes it. You, you move down the road. And so the further you move down the road, the more progress you're making, the further away you get from just the basics. And you think eventually like, well, I have to move beyond those things and keep going and keep going. And so the worldly view of progress is very linear. And it's like, I'm all that stuff's in the past, but Chesterton portrays the Christian view of progress like a tree growing out and up and beautifying, but always rooted in the same truth it started in from the very beginning. So I think the world is constantly trying, and this is the screw tape strategy, right? To get you to think about growth as a moving out of moving beyond and so on and so forth. It gets you to almost feel contempt for the former you that thought

[33:24] Jesus was enough. It gets you to almost feel contempt for church history because, oh my goodness, look how sinful those people were. And so like, as if we're not. This other view of progress, however, the Chestertonian view of progress isn't linear in the same sense. It's simply the tree rooted in gospel soil that continues all of its days to continue, to continue, to continue. It's an abiding loyalty to Christ. And the growth emerges out of that abiding loyalty, not because you needed something new.

As a teenager, I really did want to follow the Lord, and I was just so gullible and vulnerable. Thankfully, the Lord protected me. But I would really wanted to follow the Lord. I just didn't feel like I was growing fast enough. And so I started looking at all the other things that are proposed as another option, or this was the missing ingredient. This is why I haven't grown. It's because I haven't had this. It's because I haven't had that. I started just dabbling and looking at all the possible additions to that would make sense of my Christian life. Eventually, thanks just to the Lord's kindness to me, He helped me to realize that all I really needed to do and all I could do is trust Christ every day of my life.

And that eventually, as I just stayed put and stayed loyal to Him, the grace of God would transform me from one degree of glory to the next. So I do have a particular word for some of you who are maybe on the younger side, and you're just thinking, it's just not working.

I'm just not growing. I just say, walk with intention. Don't look as confused as you are. Don't open yourself up to all of these snake oil salesmen who will tell you, oh, but don't you see, this is what you've been missing. And if you just had this, you would be a fulfilled Christian. Nonsense.

Abide in Christ. Take root in Him. Take root in His gospel and let Him grow you according to His faithfulness. Well, as we introduce communion, if you're here today and you're a follower of Jesus Christ, committed to abiding in Him, we want you to partake in communion with us even if you're not a member here. And the gospel ground that we are taking root in is portrayed at this table.

[35 : 49] This week, I've posted an excellent article about just this basic gospel ethos that we see, and one of the key passages is 2 Corinthians 5, 20 through 21. This is the gospel ground I want you to abide in.

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake, He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. Even in the midst of all of the possible antichrists that were rising, just very early on in the church, you had founding fathers of Christendom in some sense say things like the following from the late 300s. Gregory of Nyssa says, for having transferred to Himself the filth of my sins, He communicated His purity to me, making me a partaker of His beauty. So would you come and celebrate this very old, old, old, faithful, true grace that God has given us? Jesus Christ became sin so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.