

(1 John #15) Anti-Christ's Exposed

by J. Glyn Owen

J. Glyn Owen's sermon exposes the dangers of heretical beliefs and emphasizes the importance of perseverance in the faith as outlined in 1 John.

Duration: 40:10

Scripture: Hebrews 3:6, Hebrews 3:12

Topics: "Anti-Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the concept of departure and its significance in the lives of believers. He emphasizes that God allows certain things and does certain things in our lives when He sees that we are trying to distance ourselves from Him. The speaker also highlights the role of God in initiating and completing the work of salvation in our lives, including illuminating our minds and regenerating our souls. He emphasizes that sooner or later, the truth about our faith will be revealed, and our lives and character will be tested by the fire of God's judgment. The speaker references various Bible verses, including Colossians 1:21-23 and the confession of Peter in Matthew 16:16, to support his points.

Transcript

To refer to Mr. Lowe's imagery, I wonder whether the Apostle John ever thought that his epistle would be expounded to skaters. However, it's good to see so many of you having been able to join us this morning, and we turn again to St. John's First Epistle and to the passage that begins with the 18th verse in the second chapter. Now this passage is rather a long one.

It continues to the end of the chapter, and we indicated last Lord's Day that there are three main threads of thought that are interwoven here. We dealt with one last Sunday morning, namely, the Apostle's understanding of the times. He starts with that in verse 18.

Little children, he says, it is the last time, or literally the last hour. Looking at a time, not from the viewpoint of creatures upon earth with calendars and clocks and watches, but rather as God judges and reckons time, John said 2,000 years ago that the world had moved into the last hour in God's purpose. Time has ticked since then.

How much nearer the consummation of the age we must therefore be at this time. In a day that you think not, the Son of Man shall come. I think it is necessary that all of us coming to this passage this morning should come in the realization that at any moment our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of glory, can return.

May there be an echo in our hearts of the words uttered by John in another place, even so come Lord Jesus. It is the last hour, the Apostle's understanding of the times. Now this morning we come to the second main strand interwoven into the pattern of things in this paragraph, namely his unmasking of the heretics.

One remains, one main strand, namely this, his undergirding of the saints. He tells them about terrible things that have already begun to happen and will happen as the great Antichrist himself comes, but he doesn't leave them there. The Apostle will undergird their faith.

He will comfort, he will solace, he will encourage them and he will tell them what to depend upon as they move into the closing moments of this age of grace. Now this morning then we turn again to this particular theme before us, John's unmasking of the heretics. Do keep your New Testament open because I think you will find it helpful to turn to it from time to time as we proceed.

One thing that needs to be said by way of introduction is this. We must not think of the Apostle John here in terms of a heresy hunter. I don't know whether you have that breed here in Canada at all, but I have met them from time to time in other places.

You know, the kind of person that's always on the lookout for something that's wrong in another one's belief. Rarely looks in the mirror, but very often at other people. Heresy hunter, a kind of McCarthy in the church.

Don't say that too loud. But you know, there have been people of that order. Now John doesn't fit into that category at all.

Let us be quite clear about that. That's not what we have here. In chapter 1, verses 3 and 4, John has already told us what his motive is in writing this epistle.

And that motive precludes this kind of spirit, that is, the heresy hunting approach. He told us there, may I quote, that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.

John's purpose was to bind people together, not to separate them. Not to split the fellowship up into odd little groups and drive a wedge between man and his brother, or man and his sister. John's goal, John's motive was to bind the community together into a fellowship.

Now if that is your motive, you will not become a heresy hunter. At the same time, this is where the balance of truth is so necessary, at the same time. There are certain doctrinal aberrations that we must never allow to go unchallenged.

Howsoever timid we may be, however much it may hurt us temperamentally to do so, it is our bounden duty to stand and to speak and to challenge those who would undermine the fabric of the Christian church and the doctrines of our Christian gospel. Now that's what John is doing here. The heretics abroad are not just referring to something that is incidental.

On the contrary, they're attacking the very person of our Lord Jesus Christ. At a time like this, John, a parcel of love that he was, becomes the aggressor. The glory of his Savior is at stake.

When the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ is at stake, it behoves every Christian man to become defroze at the mouth and to speak and to stand and to be counted among those who are loyal to the Son of God and to the gospel of His grace. It needs to be noted, therefore, I think, that the motivating spirit behind the exposure of the heretics is not hatred, not even the hatred of heretics, but love for God and love for His Son and love for the fellowship and love for the truth that it is revealed in Jesus Christ. And it is because of that, because of his passionate concern for the glory of God and for the truth revealed and for the excellent name of His Savior, John becomes embroiled in controversy and uses very strong language, albeit under the reticence of Christian grace.

Now, that needs to be said. But against that background, let us come to what we have before us today. There are three key words here, I think.

I know there are some young folk who are taking notes. Well, now, these three key words may be helpful if you want the main divisions of the message this morning. The first word is the word departure.

You don't find that word precisely in our English version, not in the King James Version anyway. You may find it in another. They went out from us, the departure.

Then the next key word is denial. They're denying that Jesus is the Christ. And then the last key word this morning is the word deception.

I write, says John, at the end of the passage to you, concerning those who would deceive you or lead you astray. That is the pattern that we are going to follow briefly this morning. First of all, then, we turn to the departure from the Christian Church, of those whom John is here branding as antichrists.

The departure from the Church. Let's read verse 19. They went out from us, says John, 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 be plain that all are not of us. Now the historical fact is very briefly stated there.

I like the reticence of John. He simply says they went out from us. Now you use your imagination.

You use your imagination for just a moment. They went out from us. Is that all? Not on your life.

Behind that simple fact there lay an awful lot of wrangling and an awful lot of arguing, of heart-breaking and heart-searching and what-not. But John doesn't refer to it. He buries it all in the sea of oblivion.

He forgets about that. He doesn't go into the details. He doesn't exacerbate the wounds.

He doesn't open up the wounds again. But on the contrary, he says they went out from us. That's the historical fact.

Now this needs to be qualified a little. These folk to whom John is referring didn't simply absent themselves from Church. Neither, indeed, did they leave one Church in order to start another Church.

It's not what they did. What they did was this. They broke rank from the Christian Church in order to found an opposing group with doctrines that were inconsistent with the Christian faith.

So then, this is a very sinister thing. They went out from us, not just to be absent and keep themselves aloof. They went out from us, says John, in order to do something wholly contrary to the revelation which we have of God in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Now the next thing I want you to notice here, still looking at this first point, still looking at their departure from the Church, I want you to notice a theological principle that comes out in verse 19. A biblical principle, if you like. They went out from us, says John, but they were not of us.

Why, John? Well, he says, this is the reason. If they had been of us, they would have continued with us. Now, have we got the force of that? Following his reference to the departure of these people from the fellowship of the Christian Church, John proceeds to enunciate what is a vital biblical and theological principle.

That principle can be simply stated in this way. Those who are truly Christian belong to the people of God, and because they belong to the people of God, to the fellowship of the Church, to the Church of Jesus Christ, they will not secede from it in order to establish something that is contrary to it. Now, this is a principle.

Had they been of us, says John, had they been Christian at all, they would never have gone out to establish something that is contrary to the Christian Church. Now, the great doctrine, if I may so speak, that is referred to here is the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. And it is a most important doctrine that they who are Christ will endure to the end of the road.

Salvation is essentially a work of God, a work of God in the souls of men. God is responsible for your salvation, Christian. He started it off.

He continues it, and he alone can consummate it. If we were left to ourselves, if the Spirit of God had not come to convince us of our sin and to lead us to the wounds of the Lord Jesus and to apply the merits of the Savior to us, we would still be dead in trespasses and sins. We loved our sins.

I loved my sins, didn't you? But the Spirit of God comes and convicts and drives a wedge between us and our sins, and he uproots us from the world, and he separates us. This is salvation. It is something that God began by his Word, by his servant, by his Spirit, however, whatever agent he used.

Sometimes there are a number, sometimes largely one or two, but God began the Word. Paul speaks of it in 1 Corinthians 2 as God revealing to us certain things. The natural man, he says, can't receive the things of the Spirit of God because they're foolishness to him, but God has revealed them unto us as unto bed.

Jesus said to Simon Peter at Caesarea Philippi, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, flesh and blood does not reveal these things to you, but my Father which is in heaven. What hath Peter seen? Oh, that which is revealed and disclosed in his confession. Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

How did you get that, Peter? How do you know when others don't? Ah, says the Lord Jesus, it's my Father who revealed that. My dear friends, let us be quite sure of this. It is God who begins the work by illuminating the mind, convincing the conscience, and so forth.

But he does more than that. He regenerates the soul. He brings new life.

He quickens us when we were dead. He gives us a sensitivity to spiritual things. He incorporates his redeemed into the body of Christ.

Now, it is God's work that you cannot forget yourself to be born again. None of us could extricate ourselves from our sins. We wouldn't want to.

Paul in writing to the Philippians says this, against the background of what I've said, listen to Paul's words. Now he says, He who began a good work in you will continue it to completion until he completes it at the day of Jesus Christ. Isn't that wonderful? He who began it will finish it.

I suppose we all know, do we not, it isn't a matter of age. We all know what it is to start things and leave them half done. Whether we like it or not, it speaks of our immaturity.

You have some people, even in the Christian church, they love to start things. You watch them, they're like butterflies. But they never see a thing through.

God is not like that. He never starts building a universe, but he finishes the job. He never begins anything, but he finishes.

He sees it through. As sure as there's an alpha in God's will, there's an omega to complement it and complete it. God sees the thing through.

Now, that is true as far as salvation is concerned. He who began his good, saving work in your heart, Christian, however weak you are this morning, he will see it through to his core. He'll finish it.

That means this. You will not be able to make a complete break from the people of God. You will never be able, ultimately, to separate from the truth of God.

You will never, ultimately, be able to get away from the shepherd God has given for his flock. He'll keep you. He'll keep you in the fellowship.

He'll keep you in the truth. He'll keep you in the hands of the Son as he keeps you in his own hands. He will persevere with his people, and therefore his people will persevere by his grace.

That's why John says, you see, they went out from us, but they were not of us. How do you know, John, for this reason? If they had gone out from us, it means they didn't really belong. God let them go, and God perseveres with his own.

By his providence, by his Word, by his Holy Spirit, by the work and the testimony of his people, God perseveres. Don't you know that, good Christian? I hope you do. When you try to sin, when you try to disbelieve, when you try to doubt, when you go this way, the Lord may allow you to go so far, and then someone comes across your way.

Something happens in your life. God sends a thunderbolt across your path, and back you go in penitence. That's true of God's people all along the way.

He perseveres, and because he perseveres with us, we persevere because of him. They couldn't have gone out, says John, if they'd really belonged. And this is most important.

It's important for us to understand our own experience. It's important for us to understand the providence of God. Why does God do certain things in our lives? Sometimes, now this is not the only explanation, sometimes he allows certain things and he does certain things because he sees that we're trying to get away from him.

Paul puts it in this way, writing to the Colossians, chapter 1, verses 21 to 23. Let me read. You, he says, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him, provided that, and I'm reading from the RSV, provided that you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard.

Turn to the epistle to the Hebrews. I can only refer to one or two passages. In chapter 3 and verse 6, I read these words, Christ was faithful over God's house as a son, Moses as a servant, so we read in the context.

Christ was faithful over God's house as a son. And we, says the writer, are his house, Christ's house, Christ's family. If we hold fast our confidence and pride in our hope.

Did you get that? We are the people of Christ if we hold fast the confidence of our hope. Can I give you one other passage from the epistle to the Hebrews which is vital and very eloquent? It's in chapter 3, verses 12 to 14. Take care, brethren, writes the author, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.

But exhort one another every day as long as it is called today. Do we do that? That none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Why should we do that? Well, that none of us should be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, but why should we worry about that for this reason? For we share in Christ if only we hold our first confidence firm unto the end.

What does that mean? It means this, the ability to persevere by the grace of God is given us in salvation. Perseverance is a characteristic of eternal life. As sure as a man has eternal life, he has eternal life, not spasmodic life, not the kind of life that blossoms today and withers tomorrow, not the kind of life that is here now but is gone.

By their severance from the church, then, and their setting up of a rival to it, these heretics proved that they never really belonged. They did not persevere, therefore they did not belong. They were simply members of the external institution.

It says Paul in writing of Israel in Romans chapter 9 and verse 6, he says, They are not all Israel, but are of Israel. My good people, we have to say that about the institutional church. External membership is no proof of inward union with the body of Christ.

Some of us were members of the visible church long before we were regenerate. They went out from us, they'd been partaking of the sacraments, they'd been listening to the exposition of the word, they'd been singing the praises of the church, they'd been part and parcel of the institution under apostolic leadership. And they were not of us, they didn't belong.

But now I want you to notice, and I can only refer to this very briefly, behind all this there was a purposeful providence. Notice the second part of verse 19, they went out that it might be plain that they all are not of us. Now literally that reads like this, they went out from among us that it might, in order that it might be

manifest, that they all are not of us.

Now what I want you to notice is those words, are those words, in order that. They went out, says John, in order that it might be manifested that they didn't belong to us. Who was responsible for that? These people went out of their own volition, yes, exactly.

Well, whose purpose is being fulfilled in all this? Surely they didn't go out in order to show that they were not Christian, because after they'd gone out they still tried to masquerade as Christians, albeit a little different. Satan wouldn't do that, no, no. God fulfills his own purpose.

The hand of God was in this. They did exactly what they wanted to, just as Judas did exactly what he wanted to, when he received the sup from the Savior's hand to indicate that he was going to betray the Son of God. But at the same time, as in the case of Judas, so in the case of these people, the purpose of God was fulfilled, and the hour has come when they must go out in order that it shall be revealed that they're not really Christian people at all.

You know, sooner or later this disclosure, this revelation must come. If I am not a genuine Christian, sooner or later the truth must be told. If not now, then later.

As Paul writes to the Corinthians at the end of chapter three, the day will declare it. The day. It shall be declared, he says, so as by fire, whether or not my life and my character is consistent with and born of the Spirit and the truth and the work and word of God.

I may pass as a Christian here for a while, but if I'm not a Christian, sooner or later it will have to be declared. They went out from us. They were not of us.

Their departure from the church, the next thing is their denial that Jesus is the Christ. Now, here we come to the heart of it, the heart of the issue. Why did they go? What really separated them from the saints? Well, it's this.

They denied that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. Not simply, if you read the whole verses 22 and 23 together, you will find that it's not simply the denial that Jesus, the historical man, was the Messiah of the Old Testament. That's involved.

But read the whole passage and you will find it is also a denial that Jesus was the Son of God. They thought that Jesus was purely a man. Born a man, died a man, but in between, and this is confusing, these Gnostics believed that at his baptism, a divine emanation as they spoke of it.

It's not easy to explain what this means. I'm not sure that they knew themselves. But something different came upon him, something divine came upon him at his baptism, left him before he died, so that the early part of his life was the life of a man and he died as a man.

Now, you notice what this does. It denies the doctrine of the incarnation. If that is true, it is not right to say that God became incarnate in Jesus Christ.

Secondly, it denies the doctrine of redemption. Jesus died as a man only, nothing more to it than that. You see, this heresy is really vital.

It gets at the heart, it gets at the foundation of the Christian faith. It severs the main artery of our faith. And John, of course, proceeds to expound what is involved when you deny that Jesus is the Christ and Jesus

is the Son of God.

He says, John, if you do that, he says, can I read, who is a liar but he 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 as the Father.

He who confesses the Son as the Father also. How can I summarize this? You simply cannot have the Father without the Son, according to the Christian revelation. Neither can you have the Son without having the Father.

Why can't you? Because the Father and the Son are one. And this is a tremendous challenge, you see, and it is a very relevant point today. We are involved with many heresies, and people say we have the Father, we know the Father, we pray to the Father.

Unitarianism is still in vogue. They believe in the Father but not in the Son. They believe in a Father who has no Son.

Mohammedanism and Judaism come into this category. There is so much elevated truth in their respective systems. But they do not believe that Jesus is the Son, and yet they claim that they know God.

Now, Jesus says, and John the Apostle re-echoes what Jesus said, you cannot have the Father when you don't have the Son. Why? Because the Father and the Son are one. I and my Father are one, in this sense, at least.

I can't explore this fully this morning. Jesus said, no man knows the Father except the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him. You can't know the Father save through the Son.

Now, you can know the deity of God and his power. Paul tells us that in Romans 1, even from the creation. Some things are known from the very creation of the world, God's eternal power and Godhead, but you can't know him as Father.

Some things are known from our own consciences, that God is judged, that there's a right and wrong in his estimates, and he makes us uncomfortable when we sin. I can know that God is not pleased with me, but I can't know him as Father that way. If I am to enter into a knowledge of God as Father, I must come to him through the Son, says John in his Gospel, as many as received him.

To them gave he the right to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name, who were born not of water, nor of blood, nor of the will of man, but of the Spirit of God, born of God. You cannot have the Father without the Son, and if you have the Son, you've got the Father also, because Jesus Christ, according to the Gospels, is never, may I say so, a cul-de-sac, or never an end in himself. When Jesus Christ attracts men to himself, he always brings them to the Father.

I am the way, he says, not the end of way. The way leads somewhere. I am the truth, and the truth is about something.

I am the embodiment of the truth concerning the Father. Jesus Christ never simply calls attention to himself. They that have seen me, he says, have seen the Father.

So that the Father and the Son are inextricably bound up together. You have the one, you have the other. You cannot deny the one and not dishonor the other.

Just think of it in a simple illustration. You are a father and you have a child. If I came around and I said, this is not your child, who am I insulting? You may say the child, insulting the father too.

If I insult the child, I insult the father. If I insult the father, I insult the child. You cannot dishonor the one without the other, because they're bound together in terms of father and son.

Says John, they deny that Jesus is the Son of God, the Christ, the Messiah, therefore they can't have the Father, they haven't got him. And so John calls them, who is the liar? Not a liar, but the liar with a death in a darkened tomb. The arch-liar declaring the life, our excellence.

What is that? That Jesus is not the Son of God, Messiah. You can get away with many things. You can't get away with this.

By getting away, I mean this. You may make many errors, primarily, and yet in due course you may come back into the way, the right way. All of us have had wrong notions at some time or another.

But in the grace of God, he kept us within the fellowship and we learned a little better. But my friend, if you deny that Jesus is the Son of God, there is no way in. And so he speaks of the deception of Christians in verse 26.

I write to you, he says, about those who would deceive you, in other words, who lead you astray from the historic Christ-centered faith, from the richness of the Christ-exalting Christian fellowship, and from the Christ-sending, world-loving Heavenly Father. Now what's all this got to say to us? What a dismal story. How very challenging.

This is Satan's master lie, that Jesus is not the Christ. And here we simply cannot strike a bargain with anyone. The doctrine of the person and work of Christ is not up for negotiation.

There are some things in this world that are non-negotiable, and this is one of them. It is the foundation upon which the Christian church is built, and out of which Christian character and Christian experience emerges. What then has this got to say to us practically? I close by just referencing one or two things.

One thing it tells me is this, that I need to study the Scriptures as a Christian, to know exactly what does it say about the Son of God. Are you sure you know what the Scriptures say about the person and work of Jesus Christ? How much time do you give to this subject? How much discipline? My friend, I tell you, you're open to all the spiritual germs in the air if you don't know what the Bible says about the person and work of Jesus Christ. Will you allow me to make a caveat here? Now, I do not mean to disparage anyone or anything when I say that not even the person and work of the Holy Spirit must come before the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

They're not divisible, in the last resort, any more than the Father and the Son can be divided. But you know, we have come into an era in the Christian church when there is a tremendous emphasis upon the ministry of the Spirit, especially in terms of Christian experience, producing experience. Now, we need this.

Our experience must match the glory of God and its demands in a world such as ours. Please don't misunderstand me. Everything that the Bible says about the ministry of the Spirit in producing experience that is valid, I am for.

But wait a moment. It is possible for Christian experience to be simulated, and it is possible for me at last to say, I work miracles in your name, I cast out devils in your name, I did this and I did that in your name, and I believe I have the gift from you, when Jesus has to say to me, I never knew you. He says that.

Depart. It is fundamental that we do not allow any other doctrine to eclipse the doctrine of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the foundation.

He is the giver of the Spirit, and if the Spirit comes, he glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ. We need to know all that Scripture tells us about the Savior. Next thing is this.

We need to learn as Christian people to come to a knowledge of the Father through the Son, to know God as Jesus knew him, as Father, Father, Father. You read through the Gospels and see how often he turned to his Father and said, Father, Father, Father. In all sorts of circumstances, he knew his Father.

We should know him as Jesus knew him, through the Son. We should also learn to make our own calling and election sure by the development of Christian character and the prerequisites of perseverance, and we should test every modern deviation by such tests as these. Does it give its rightful place to Jesus Christ, or does it push him out of the center and have another foundation in his place? Does it lead men to the Father by the Son or simply to Jesus? Does it bear the stamp and the fruit of the Spirit? Does it acknowledge the Church to be the Body and the Bride of Christ from which we must never depart? Does it build on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, or on a foundation laid by a modern apostle or a modern prophet whom we are not sure about? God grant us in these days that demand our total allegiance to Jesus Christ, that we shall not be found lacking.

Oh, may the Spirit of God come afresh upon us, not to create hatred of any man, but love for the Savior and a jealousy for his glory. Such a knowledge of his word as will enable us to minister to him and to represent him amidst all the calamitous things that are said in his name. To his name be the glory.

And the praise. We conclude now by singing our last hymn, which is number 245. O Jesus King most wonderful, thou conqueror renowned, thou sweetness most ineffable, in whom all joys are found.

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