

# How to Live in the Last Hour

1 John 2:18-29

Hollywood seems to be obsessed with the end of the world. There has been a steady stream of films coming out lately around the theme of end time events and takeoffs on the book of Revelation. Films like "End of Days," "Armageddon," "The Day After Tomorrow" and now "2012" are just some examples.

The Bible promises us that life as we know it on Planet Earth will one day come to an end. And it could be soon. I heard about an old farmer that had a grandfather clock that went haywire and chimed fourteen times one midnight. He jumped up and said, "Wake up, Nellie, it's later than it's ever been before."

It is true. It is later than it's ever been before. 1 John 2:18 tells us that even now we live in "**the last hour.**" Now John doesn't give us any clues as to when the end will come but he does tell us how to live our lives in the mean time. Let's examine three keys to living a life of spiritual maturity even in the "**last hour.**"

## I. Watch Out for Wolves (vv.18-23).

### A. Children need Warnings (v.18a).

1. John writes to "**little children.**" "**Children**" is from *paidion* as in v.13 and refers to "a child under instruction." In this context it refers to those who are immature Christians, spiritual babies.
2. You may be a spiritual baby for one of two reasons. You may be a brand new believer or you may have been a believer for a long time but you've never matured spiritually.
3. Spiritual children, like physical children need to be warned of danger. Because I love my children, I warn them of danger.
4. The duty of the pastor-teacher is not only to teach the truth, but also to expose lies. As we fall in love with Jesus and His church it is easy to forget that danger exists. We need warnings.

### B. Satan sends Wolves into God's Flock (v.18b).

Verse 18 begins, "**Little children, it is the last hour.**" That was over 1900 years ago. John tells his readers that they live in "**the last hour.**" He repeats this at the end of the verse. What does he mean? He does not mean the last 60 minutes of life on earth but rather the end times or what the Bible elsewhere refers to as the "**last days,**" the final era of human history.

The message of the New Testament is that when Christ came we entered the "**last days**", and nobody but God knows how long they will last. Listen to these verses that describe the "last days."

Peter spoke on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:16-17, "**This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: `And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.'**"

In 1 Corinthians 10:11 Paul spoke about the Old Testament stories saying, "**Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.**" (1 Cor 10:11 NKJV)

The beginning of the book of Hebrews says, "**In many and various ways**

**God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son."** (Hebrews 1:1-2).

And again Hebrews 9:26 says, "**He has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.**"

Peter says about Christ, "**He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.**" (1 Pet 1:20 NKJV)

From these texts, the main characteristic of the last hour is that the Son of God has come and the Holy Spirit is being poured out in a new measure. John was living in the last hour and we are living in the last hour. The "**last hour**" began at Jesus' birth, the First Advent, and will conclude when He returns again at the Second Advent.

But 1 John 2:18 points out another characteristic of the last hour: "**you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour.**" The last hour is an hour in which the spirit of antichrist will be increasingly active.

He says that they "**have heard that the Antichrist is coming.**" John's view of the endtimes seems to be that there is a singular antichrist coming but that the spirit of antichrist is already in the world and that it produces many preliminary lesser forms of the antichrist. John is the only writer in the New Testament that uses this term, "**Antichrist.**" He uses it three times in 1 John 2, once in 1 John 4:3 and once in 2 John 7.

The title "**Antichrist**" has two meanings. First, it can mean *INSTEAD of Christ*. The "**beast**" will set himself up as Satan's Messiah in the last day. However, the term can also mean *IN OPPOSITION to Christ*. That's what John has in mind when he says, "**even now many antichrist have come.**" In other words there are many that stand in opposition to Christ even today.

John calls such people "**antichrists.**" Jesus called them wolves. He told His disciples watch out for them. We all need to be warned to watch out for wolves. He said in Matthew 7:15, "**Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.**" And in Matthew 24:5,24 Jesus says, "**For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray... For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.**"

Paul saw this coming also as he warned the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:29, "**For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.**"

We've all seen the cartoon where the devious coyote disguises himself with a sheepskin in order to sneak into the flock and carry off the sheep. There will be people who come into the church that look like Christians, talk like Christians and even seem to act like Christians but ultimately Satan uses them to wreck havoc on the sheep. Keep a watch out for wolves.

There are many people doing the bidding of Satan in local churches all around the world. They are the agents of hell. They cause disruption, breed contention and destroy fellowship. Some are very aware of what they are doing. Some are witless pawns who have no idea of the damage they inflict.

Wolves almost always attack the younger and the weaker. Wolves attack the lambs, the spiritual children. The "**antichrists**" who come into the church attach themselves to the spiritual babies. They promote the doctrine of wolves, what 1 Tim.4:1 calls "**doctrines of demons**." Babies don't know doctrine.

The reason we must watch out for wolves is that they are often hard to spot. They blend in so well. Satan had agents in the first century church. He has his plants in most churches. He even had a wolf in the original local church. His name was Judas, one of the original twelve disciples. No one knew Judas was a secret agent of Satan except Jesus. He blended perfectly with the other 11 disciples. They lived with him for three years and never got wise to him. When Jesus revealed that one of them would betray Him, the other 11 each asked, "**Lord, is it I?**" (Mt.26:22; cf. Mk.14:19).

Because the wolves wear sheep disguises, we don't often recognize them by sight. That's why 1 John 4:1 says, "**...test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.**"

John doesn't want to leave us hanging. Next, he gives us a test for spotting the wolves in the flock.

### C. Loyalty to Jesus is the Test (vv.19-23).

One chief mark of a wolf is that he will not stay with the flock. He will defect from the church. He will leave the biblical teaching and return to His love, the world (ie.vv.15-17). John says in v.19, "**they went out from us**" because "**they were not of us.**" Two dominant themes run side by side throughout the NT. One is the perseverance of the genuine Christian and the other is the defection of the counterfeit Christian.

Counterfeit Christians will eventually reject the strong doctrine of the church and return to the world. Folks, this is why strong teaching is so important. The wolves hate it! When you have a church that skims over the Word of God, the wolves penetrate deeply into the flock. They get comfortable.

Those who are genuinely saved are being changed inwardly by the power of God's Spirit. That is what v.20 means when it says we have "**an anointing from the Holy One.**" Paul talks about this anointing also in 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, "**Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.**" The anointing is God's Holy Spirit. And John says that all true Christians, all who have truly been saved, have this anointing.

The wolves, the "**antichrists**," the apostates or heretics "**went out from us**" because they were never truly saved. They didn't have salvation and lose it, they never had salvation at all.

In *The Parable of the Sower*, Jesus spoke of the seed planted in stony ground that "**had no root they withered away**" (Mt.13:6). In *The Parable of the Wheat and Tares*, we saw that the enemy sowed tares with the wheat. In *The Parable of the Dragnet*, both good fish and bad were harvested and divided.

Judas looked and acted like the other 11 disciples, yet his betrayal of Jesus proved he was a wolf.

John says of such people that if they had been "**of us**" they would have "**continued with us**," but because they were not genuine believers "**they went out**

**that they might be made manifest that none of them were of us."** Genuine believers "**continue**" with the flock. They "stay, abide" or "settle down" in the church.

Now I know that people leave churches all the time. Some move to a new city. Some seek a new ministry. Some move because of problems. Moving to a new church is not the same as leaving the faith. Understand that everyone who leaves this church does not necessarily leave Christ or His church, His body. Just because someone may leave us does not mean they have departed from the faith.

In vv.20-23, John reminds his "**little children**" that they have genuine faith because they "**know the truth**" and have "**the anointing from the Holy One.**" However, "**antichrist**" or wolf "**denies the Father and the Son.**" He may or may not deny God with his words, but he will certainly do so with His actions.

There is no relationship with God that bypasses Jesus. If you want intimate fellowship with the Lord and His people, watch out for the wolves, don't believe their doctrine. Don't follow their example. As children we need strong warnings.

## **II. Hold Tight to Jesus (vv.24-27).**

### **A. We hold to Jesus by ABIDING in His Truth (vv.24-25).**

How does the anointing of the Spirit enable the saints to know the truth and protect them from deception?

Verse 24 is the key. What it shows is that the truth which the Holy Spirit enables us to know is a truth that is delivered in the preaching of the apostles. "**Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.**" Twice in that verse John stresses that the truth that should remain in them is truth that came to them through the ear at the beginning of their Christian walk: "**what you heard from the beginning...what you heard from the beginning!**" This was the preaching of the apostles that we now have contained in our Bible.

So John is not saying that the anointing of the Spirit enables us to know the truth of Christ by giving additional information beyond what they heard from the beginning. On the contrary John is intent on telling them they have enough revelation in what they heard from the beginning. He does not want to set them off in pursuit of something new. John makes effort to avoid the saying that what the church needs is new revelation. It does not. It needs to let the original apostolic teaching about Christ abide in them. Abiding in truth is an individual, personal responsibility. No one else can do it for us. "**You**" is emphatic. In v.24 it is used 5 times. We remember that "**abide**" means "to live, to remain, to stay." Don't let Satan or his "**antichrists**" steal your fellowship.

You can come to church, sing the songs, pray the prayers, read the Scriptures and still not abide. Abiding means feeding on the Word for yourself. Abiding means a quiet time with God every day. Abiding means a dedicated specific plan of prayer. Abiding means hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit and obeying His promptings. Abiding is staying in the presence of God.

Every Christian has the same capacity to know God. Back up to verse 20 again. He says, "**But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth.**" We have all been given

the same anointing of the Holy Spirit to understand God's word. Some may have more maturity because they know and apply the Word.

In verse 25 John we have "**the promise**" of "**eternal life**." This does not refer just to the hope of heaven but abiding, abundant life in God right now! What is "**eternal life**?" Jn.17:3 says, "**And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.**"

#### B. We hold to Jesus by the ANNOINTING of His Spirit (vv.26-27).

Note first in v.26 that there are "**those who try to deceive you**" or lead you astray. These are the wolves, the "**antichrists**."

The wolves will "**try to deceive you**" and keep you from abiding in God's truth. How do we overcome them?

We overcome them with "**the anointing which you have received from Him**" (v.27). "**The anointing**" is the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life. When you were saved, Jesus gave you His Spirit to guide you.

When John penned his gospel he recorded Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit in John 14, "**But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.**" (John 14:26). And again in John 16 he says, "**However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.**" (Jn.16:13-14).

The Holy Spirit "**teaches you concerning all things**" and helps you know what is "**true**" and what is a "**lie**." The Holy Spirit is our truth detector. When something doesn't coincide with the truth about Jesus, you know it. You may not know where it is or what it is but you know something is wrong. That's when you need your handheld detector, the Word of God.

You do not "**need anyone to teach you**." You don't need secret knowledge: horoscopes, secret societies, transcendental meditation, dream interpretation, some forms of psychology and psychotherapy, the New Age, spiritualism, etc... 1 Cor.2:10 says, "**But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.**"

So the work of the Holy Spirit is not to take us beyond the teaching of the apostles. It is to help us accept and abide in that teaching. It helps us grow in our understanding of that teaching. It strengthens our power to practice that teaching. It increases our confidence in the truth of that teaching. But it does not change the teaching.

Which leads us to our concluding admonition and third main point:

### III. Live Today Like There's No Tomorrow (vv.28-29).

John tells us to "**abide**" in Jesus because He is coming back. When "**He appears**" we will have "**confidence and not be ashamed**." In Rev.22:20 John says, "**Even so, come, Lord Jesus!**" Do you have the "**confidence**" to say that and mean it? If He returned right now would you be "**ashamed**?"

John says in verse 29 "**If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.**"

How are you living in this last hour? Jesus is coming soon. Are you prepared?

Years ago a man owned a prosperous store in a small town. He ran the business himself with the help of his wife and son. The son hated the store. He hated stocking and sweeping until one day it dawned on him that the store would eventually be his. That changed his perspective. He started stocking and sweeping with pride because he realized he was an heir. Let's live in this last hour going about our Father's business because we too are heirs.