

SESSION FOUR

The Last Hour

1 John 2:18-27

PART ONE · LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim: Participants discover that "antichrist" in John names anyone who denies the Son and breaks communion, that departure from the community reveals a rupture that already existed (2:19), and that the anointing (*chrisma*) of the Spirit keeps believers abiding in what they heard from the beginning, within the teaching Church rather than against her.

Catholic Touchstone: The visible Church and the *sensus fidei*. The Spirit's interior anointing and the apostolic teaching office are one gift working together, not rivals; the Catechism cites 1 John 2:20, 27 for exactly this point (CCC 91-93).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

"Children, it is the last hour" (2:18). John is not making a failed timing prediction. The apostolic Church understood that with the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, the final age of the world had begun: "in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son" (Hebrews 1:2); Peter at Pentecost declares Joel's "last days" arrived (Acts 2:17). The Church has lived in the last hour since then, however long the hour runs (CCC 670). Say this plainly; young adults have often only heard the ticking-clock caricature.

Antichristos appears in Scripture only in John's letters (2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7). Notice what John does with the word his readers had evidently been taught to expect: "you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come." His emphasis is plural and present: anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ. At the same time, the Church continues to expect a final trial and a supreme deception before the Lord returns (CCC 675-677), reading John alongside St. Paul's "man of lawlessness" (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). Hold both without flattening either; the Church has not defined the details, so keep the language hedged.

Verse 19 is the letter's key to the whole crisis, and one of its most quietly devastating sentences: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us." The departure did not create the rupture; it revealed it. Handle this with pastoral care: John is diagnosing heresiarch teachers who denied the Incarnation, not performing an autopsy on every wounded friend who has drifted from the Church. Most of your group knows and loves someone who has left. Do not let the verse become a club.

The wordplay of 2:20-22 is the session's hidden engine: *Christos* (the Anointed One), *antichristos* (the one against the Anointed), *chrisma* (the anointing). Those who share Christ's anointing stand against those who stand against the Anointed. "You have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all know" (2:20). The *chrisma* is the gift of the Holy Spirit received in baptism and sealed in confirmation, which is why the oil of that sacrament is called chrism.

"You have no need that any one should teach you" (2:27) is the classic proof text hurled against the Magisterium, and it deserves its full strength before it is answered. Note the delicious irony first: John writes the sentence inside a letter that is teaching them. Taken absolutely, verse 27 would forbid reading verse 27. The anointing is the Spirit-given capacity of the whole body of the faithful to recognize the voice of Christ and reject novelty, what the Catechism calls the *sensus fidei*, and it cites these very verses for it (CCC 91-93). The interior Teacher and the apostolic teachers are the same Spirit at work.

The specific denial in view: "Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?" (2:22). For John's opponents this was likely not a denial that a Messiah exists but a severing of the man Jesus from the divine Christ, a fleshless Christ who only seemed to suffer. The confession that holds Jesus and Christ in one person, and the Father and the Son together (2:23), is the hinge of everything.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Exodus 30:22-33 and 1 Samuel 16:13. Priests and kings entered office by anointing, and when Samuel anointed David, "the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward." In David's case the anointing is no mere ceremony; the oil and the Spirit arrive together, for a mission. That is the freight *chrisma* carries in 2:20, 27.

1 Kings 19:16. Prophets too were anointed. Priest, prophet, and king: the three anointed offices converge on the *Christos*, the Anointed One, and through him on all who share his anointing (CCC 783-786).

Jeremiah 31:33-34. The New Covenant promise: "I will put my law within them... and no longer shall each man teach his neighbor... for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest." John's "you all know" (2:20) announces this promise arrived. Tonight's live discovery; guard it until Build 7.

Joel 2:28. "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh." The democratization of the Spirit that Israel awaited is the reality John's readers already possess.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Irenaeus of Lyons *Against Heresies, Book III*

Irenaeus, disciple of St. Polycarp who himself knew John, quotes this very passage against teachers who split the man Jesus from the divine Christ. Those who deny that the Christ has come in the flesh, he writes, are the ones the apostle warned of, and the Church's answer is the faith received from the apostles and guarded in unbroken succession.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Cyprian of Carthage *On the Unity of the Catholic Church*

Cyprian applies "they went out from us" to the schismatics of his own century and distills the lesson into his famous maxim: he cannot have God for his Father who does not have the Church for his mother. For Cyprian, unity is not optional equipment for the Christian life; it is the life itself, and tearing it is the devil's oldest countermove against the Gospel.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine *Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of John, Homily 3*

Augustine preaches that there are many antichrists because everyone who denies Christ by his manner of life contradicts the Anointed One. And on the anointing he turns inward: the sound of a teacher's words strikes the ear from outside, he says, but the Master who makes those words live is within, the Spirit himself teaching the heart what no human voice alone could.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 91-93 teaches that all the faithful share in understanding and handing on revealed truth, having received the anointing of the Holy Spirit who instructs and guides them, and it cites 1 John 2:20, 27 directly. This supernatural sense of the faith (*sensus fidei*) operates under the guidance of the Magisterium, one Spirit in both.

CCC 675-677 describes the Church's ultimate trial: before Christ's coming the Church must pass through a final persecution and a supreme religious deception. The mystery of lawlessness is already at work, and John's "many antichrists" names its ordinary form.

CCC 695 unfolds the symbolism of anointing: the baptized are anointed with the Holy Spirit, and the very name Christian means sharing the anointing of the Christ.

THREAD WATCH

The Abiding and Antichrist thread plants tonight. The word *antichrist* returns at 4:1-6 (Session Seven) as "the spirit of antichrist" and again at 2 John 7 (Session Eleven), where the definition sharpens. Tell the group to watch for it; do not say where it lands.

Abide (menō) becomes the letter's great verb here: "let what you heard from the beginning abide in you" (2:24), "abide in him" (2:27). Underline every occurrence with the group; the verb will carry Sessions Five through Nine.

The Knowing thread advances: "you all know... you know the truth" (2:20-21). The secessionists likely claimed a superior knowledge; John insists it is the ordinary faithful who truly know. Session Ten still waits.

SESSION GOALS

1.

Correct the pop-culture picture of "antichrist" from the text itself, holding John's many antichrists together with the Church's expectation of a final trial, in properly hedged language.

2.

Read 2:19 with both clarity and pastoral gentleness, distinguishing heresiarchs from wounded drifters.

3.

Discover the *christos*, *antichristos*, *chrisma* wordplay and connect the anointing to baptism and confirmation through 1 Samuel 16:13.

4.

Steelman and answer the "no teacher needed" reading of 2:27 with Jeremiah 31 and the *sensus fidei*.

TIME NOTE

75 to 90 minutes. If time runs short, cut Build 8 and the Dig Deeper box, and compress Build 1 to a five-minute exchange. Protect Builds 3 and 7; the steelman chains are the doctrinal spine of the night.

PART TWO · DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit. You anointed the Christ, and in baptism you anointed us. Guard in us what we heard from the beginning. Keep us abiding when others go out, and keep our hold on the Son, that we may have the Father also. Teach us from within tonight, as you have always taught your Church. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN · OPENING QUESTIONS

1.

Quick gut check: when you hear the word "antichrist," what images come to mind, and where did you get them? Movies, novels, a billboard, a great-aunt?

2.

Have you ever watched someone you love walk away from the faith? Without telling their story, what did it stir up in you?

BUILD · INTO THE TEXT

1.

Read 1 John 2:18-19. How is John's use of "antichrist" different from the pop-culture version most of us just described? Count carefully: how many antichrists does John see, and when do they show up?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Many, and now. "You have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come." John takes the expected future figure his readers had been taught about and points at the present: those who deny that Jesus is the Christ, the test John will state outright in 2:22, are antichrists already at work.

Honesty requires both halves: Scripture elsewhere speaks of a final "man of lawlessness" (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4), and the Church continues to expect a final trial and supreme deception before the Lord returns (CCC 675-677), while defining few details. So the answer to "is the antichrist a future individual or a present spirit?" is yes, held carefully. John's pastoral point is that waiting for a movie villain can blind us to the ordinary antichrists of every age, including ours.

2.

Verse 19 may be the most quietly devastating sentence in the New Testament. Read it again slowly. What does John say their leaving *revealed*? And what does he pointedly not say it did?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

"They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us." The departure did not create the rupture; it exposed one already there. Their going out "made it plain." Communion, for John, is not a membership card but a shared life, and the schism was a revelation of hearts.

A leader's caution belongs in the open: John is diagnosing the secessionist teachers who denied the Incarnation, not autopsying every friend who has drifted from Mass. Most people who leave today are not heresiarchs; they are wounded, bored, catechetically starved, or scandalized. The verse gives us clarity about false teachers, not a verdict to pronounce over people we love. We will pray for them by name this week.

3.

Steelman chain. An Evangelical friend says: "2:19 proves eternal security: the ones who left were never really saved in the first place, so true believers can never fall away." Give the reading its full strength first. What is it seeing correctly?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

It sees something real: John does teach that persevering communion is evidence of genuine belonging, and the Church agrees that final perseverance is a gift of God, not a human achievement we could ever boast of (CCC 2016). It also takes God's faithfulness seriously, which is always the right instinct.

Now press, but honestly. A thoughtful Calvinist will not say the imperatives are pointless; he will say warnings like "let what you heard from the beginning abide in you" (2:24) are the very means God uses to keep the elect, and that the ones who left had belonged only outwardly. Grant that this is his real position. Then notice what the passage still assumes: the departed shared a visible communion with a door, real preaching, real sacraments, a common life, and John treats their leaving as a genuine loss, not the shedding of a costume. The Catholic answer works from there: baptism really incorporates a person into Christ, not merely outwardly; freedom remains after baptism, and grave sin can kill the life of grace in someone truly reborn; so perseverance is both a pure gift we could never boast of (CCC 2016) and a task the commands of 2:24 and 2:27-28 lay on us. John's verse describes a real departure from a real communion, not proof that nothing real was ever there.

4.

Read 2:20-23 hunting for a wordplay. Three Greek words hide in these verses: *Christos*, *antichristos*, *chrisma*. What is John doing, and what is the actual battle line he draws in verse 22?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

The Anointed One, those against the Anointed, and the anointing. John is drawing up two camps by a single root word: everyone who shares the *chrisma* of the *Christos* stands opposite everyone who is *anti* the *Christos*. There is no third camp of the mildly interested.

And the battle line is Christological: "Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?" For John's opponents this meant severing the human Jesus from the divine Christ, a spiritual Christ too clean for a cross. Every generation redraws the same line: Jesus the guru, the moralist, the symbol, anything but the Anointed One come in the flesh. Deny the Son and you lose the Father too (2:23); confess the Son and you have both.

5.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Someone find and read 1 Samuel 16:13. When Samuel anointed David, what happened, and what happened *from that day forward*? What does that tell us the *chrisma* means for us?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

"The Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward." Priests and kings were consecrated by anointing, and prophets could be too (1 Kings 19:16); with David, Scripture shows what the oil signifies: the Spirit himself conferred for an office and a mission.

So when John says "you have been anointed by the Holy One" (2:20), he is saying the Spirit himself has been conferred on you, which happened at your baptism and was sealed at your confirmation, with oil the Church literally calls chrism. To be a Christian is to be a little anointed one of the Anointed One (CCC 695). The group should feel the weight: David's anointing is closer to your confirmation than you were ever told.

6.

Read 2:24-25. What exactly must "abide" in us, where did it come from, and what does John attach to it?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

"Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you." Not the newest insight, the original apostolic preaching: the message heard at their first catechesis. Abiding, John's great verb, here means fidelity to what was received rather than appetite for novelty. The secessionists were the innovators; the faithful were the conservators.

And the promise attached is total: "if what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he has promised us, eternal life." Handing on the deposit intact is not stodginess; it is how eternal life stays connected to its source. This is Tradition, seen from the inside.

7.

LIVE DISCOVERY. The big steelman. Your friend reads 2:27: "you have no need that any one should teach you." He says: "There it is. The Spirit teaches me directly. Popes, bishops, catechisms: Scripture says I do not need them." Make his case at full strength, then someone find and read Jeremiah 31:33-34 before we answer.

ANSWER · share after the discussion

His strength is real and biblical. Jeremiah promised a covenant where God writes the law on hearts and "they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest." John announces that promise fulfilled: "you all know" (2:20). Interior knowledge of God is not a clergy monopoly, and any Catholicism that treats laypeople as passive receivers has forgotten its own doctrine. Concede every inch of that.

Now the press, and it starts with a smile: John tells them they need no teacher *in a letter that is teaching them*. Read absolutely, 2:27 forbids reading 2:27. So what is the anointing for? In context, it is the Spirit-given ability of the faithful to recognize the voice of Christ and smell the secessionists' novelty, exercised precisely by holding to "what you heard from the beginning" through the apostolic community. The Catechism has a name for this and cites these exact verses: the *sensus fidei*, the supernatural sense of the faith of the whole people of God, which works with, never against, the Magisterium (CCC 91-93). The Teacher within and the teachers Christ sent are one Spirit. Augustine preached exactly this: words strike the ear outside; the Master within makes them live.

DIG DEEPER · How long is the last hour?

"Last hour" is not a countdown but an era. "In these last days he has spoken to us by a Son" (Hebrews 1:2); Peter declares Joel's last days arrived at Pentecost (Acts 2:17). Since the Ascension, the Church has lived in the final age of the world (CCC 670), which frees us from two errors at once: panic (reading every headline as the end) and complacency (living as if the hour were not late). The saints managed to be calm and urgent at the same time; that is the posture of the last hour.

8.

Bring it home. If John's "many antichrists" are not movie villains but every reduction of Jesus to less than the Christ come in the flesh, where do you see that dynamic today, in the culture, and honestly, in our own hearts?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Let the group work, then gather the shapes: Jesus the life coach, the political mascot of any party, the tolerant teacher who would never make demands, the myth too beautiful to be historical, the private Christ who asks nothing public. Each keeps something of Jesus and denies the Christ.

The interior version deserves the most airtime: whenever we edit Jesus down to the parts that cost us nothing, the spirit John describes is at work in us, not just out there. The remedy is the one John gave: let what you heard from the beginning abide in you, and abide in him.

SEND · TAKING IT WITH US

1.

What is one thing you "heard from the beginning," a truth from your earliest formation, that most needs to abide in you again right now?

2.

Who in your life is quietly deciding whether Jesus is the Christ? What does your communion, or your drift, testify to them?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1.

Pray daily this week, by name, for one person who "went out," with hope and not a verdict. Just their name and mercy.

2.

Renew your confirmation: find the date if you can, thank God for your chrism, and pray "Come, Holy Spirit" every morning this week when your feet hit the floor.

3.

Read the Nicene Creed slowly once this week and underline every phrase John's opponents would have denied. Count them.

Closing Prayer:

Holy One, you have anointed us, and we belong to your Christ. Keep what we heard from the beginning alive in us. Where we have edited you down, restore your full stature in our hearts. For those who have gone out, mercy. For those who remain, perseverance. For all of us, the promise: eternal life. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse: "Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father." (1 John 2:24, RSV2CE)

PART THREE · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in Session Four, in order of use. All references RSV2CE.

PASSAGE WHERE IT IS USED

Main text, read in sections through the Build

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4

Leader background, Build 1: the man of lawlessness

1 Samuel 16:13

Live discovery, Build 5: anointing confers the Spirit

Jeremiah 31:33-34

Live discovery, Build 7: they shall all know me

Exodus 30:22-33; 1 Kings 19:16

Leader background: priestly and prophetic anointing

Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17; Hebrews 1:2

Leader background and Dig Deeper: the last days begun

CCC 91-93; 675-677; 695; 670; 2016; 783-786

Catechism Connection, Builds 1, 3, 5, 7, Dig Deeper