

## The Antichrist(s)

1 John 2:18-28

### Introduction

1. One of the important lessons we teach our children is how to tell time. With the creation of atomic clocks our accuracy is precise, and with the invention of digital watches our task has been made much easier. Still, in our time conscious culture, the ability to tell time, and tell it correctly, is of crucial importance.
2. The apostle John faced a similar challenge in the first century with respect to his spiritual children. It was essential that they be able to tell time, and tell it correctly. However, John's task was even more imperative and important. The time that concerned him was not chronological, but theological, it was not time as man measures it, but time as God keeps it. You see, it was, it is, the last hour, as God reckons time.
3. John teaches us the clock is about to strike 12. The sand in the hourglass is almost gone. Time, as we know it, is about to run out. Midnight is almost here. How do we know? John says unmistakable evidence has appeared: the antichrists have come.
4. The word antichrist has a way of striking a sense of wonder, even fear, in our hearts and well it should. Given all the wild speculation and outrageous ideas that surface when antichrist is mentioned, it is essential that we have a balanced, biblical understanding about who he is and what he does. In these verses John teaches us 3 important lessons we must learn if we are to stand strong against the archenemy of our Savior.

### I. Antichrists attack Christ. 2:18

Dear children – both a term of 1) endearment and a means whereby John 2) introduces a new subject. emp. fatherly authority.

#### 1. Antichrist has a period.

- Last hour – theological term which begins and concludes v. 18 (*inclusio*) signifying the entire period of time between Christ's 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. The Bible speaks of last days, last times and a last hour. This term rings the bell of urgency and imminency.
- We are certainly in the latter minutes of the last hour. Time is almost gone.
- We are in that time when antichrists are active because Christ has acted. Without Christ there would be no antichrists. Even their coming gives witness to His coming.

#### 2. Antichrist is a principle. (cf. 4:3)

- John is the only writer in the Bible to use the term antichrist. The evidence is overwhelming that he coined it. It appears only in 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7. It is a word that John infuses with multiple but compatible meanings.
- Antichrist – *anti christos* – one who is against Christ and/or one who seeks to replace Christ, a rival Christ, a counterfeit Christ.
- In 1 and 2 John the emphasis is on those (plural) who oppose Christ, especially in their teaching. The antichrists think wrongly, believe incorrectly concerning who Jesus is and what Jesus has done. They get it wrong both concerning His person and also concerning His work.

- We are given helpful instruction in 1 John 4:3 as well as here in 2:18 in 2 ways: 1) Many antichrists (little “a”) have already come and 2) There is a spirit of antichrist that is presently operative in the world right now.
- Illustration: in his book, the bestseller Conversations With God, new-ager Donald Walsch writes, “Many have achieved ‘Christ spirit consciousness, self-actualization of one’s own deity.’ Many have been Christed, not just Jesus of Nazareth.” (in On Mission, Mar.-Apr. 2000, p. 101) This is the principle, the spirit of antichrist.

### 3. Antichrist is a person.

- John distinguishes between antichrists who have come and the antichrist who will come.
- This one who will come is the prince who is to come in Daniel 9:27. This is Paul’s man of lawlessness in 2 Thess. 2:3. This is John’s beast out of the sea in Rev. 13:1-10.
- Satan’s superman is on the way. The devil’s darling will someday make his entrance.
- Illustration: 19% of Americans, and nearly 50% of all those who accept biblical prophecy believe the antichrist is alive right now (Newsweek, 11-1-99; p. 69). Whether he himself is alive, I cannot, will not, and should not speculate. That the spirit of antichrist is alive and well we can all be certain.

#### Transition

Antichrist attacks Christ. He has a period. It is a principle. He is a person.

## II. Antichrists abandon the Church. 2:19,22,23

Satan is a master deceiver and strategist and he knows that the best place to launch an attack is from the inside. However, once the damage is done, antichrists leave the field of battle, taking what captives they can, but also revealing their true colors, who they really are.

### 1. Physically they desert the fellowship. 2:19

- This is no excommunication but a voluntary exit.
- Note how John contrasts “they” and “us” – they (5x) / us (5x)
- Note what conclusion John draws spiritually / theologically: 1) They are lost; 2) True believers persevere (affirmation of the perseverance of the saints / eternal security).

### 2. Spiritually they deny the faith. 2:22-23, 26

- Their physical desertion was decisive and essential, painful but positive. Their spiritual denial is disastrous and heretical, tragic and terrible.
- Liar (*pseustes*) – one who opposes the truth. What truth? The truth about Jesus. Def. Article before liar. If such a person is not a liar, then there are no liars. Verse 26: they seduce, mislead. Seduction (pre.) is a full time occupation.

#### A. They reject the Savior.

- The christological test is the crucial test. What do you think and believe about Jesus?
- These antichrists denied the reality of the incarnation.

- They continually denied that the man Jesus was God’s Christ in a genuine and abiding reality.
- Cerinthus – the Christ descended upon the man Jesus at His baptism and left Him again before He suffered and died on the cross. Hence the man Jesus was born and the man Jesus died. For a brief time (3 years) the Christ Spirit was in or upon Him. Here is a denial both of His person as God and His work of atonement.
- Jesus was important but not preeminent. He was significant but not the Savior. However, the New Testament scholar I. H. Marshall is right on target when he says, “to deny that Jesus is the Christ is to deny that He is the Son of God” (1 John, p. 158). He further notes, “to reduce Jesus to the status of a mere man, or to allow no more than a temporary indwelling of some divine power in Him is to strike at the root of Christianity. Modern thinkers may have more refined ways of stating similar denials of the reality of the incarnation. It may be doubted whether they are any more immune to John’s perception that they take the heart out of Christianity” (p. 159).
- And what of these modern refined reformulations of Jesus of Nazareth?
- Fredrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), the father of modern liberal theology, offered an adoptionist understanding of Jesus, dismissing as outrageous the idea that Jesus was the eternal Son of God become human. What distinguished Jesus from other humans was “the constant potency of His God-consciousness, which was a veritable existence of God in Him.” Jesus was a God-filled man, a God-intoxicated man, but not the God-man. (F. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 1976, p. 97)
- Liberal theologian John Macquarrie says, “Jesus Christ pre-existed in the mind and purpose of God, and I doubt if one should look for any other kind of pre-existence” ( J. Macquarrie, *Jesus Christ In Modern Thought*, 1990, p. 57).
- Religious pluralist John Hick says, “we see in Jesus a human being extraordinarily open to God’s influence and thus living to an extraordinary extent as God’s agent on earth, ‘incarnating’ the divine purpose for human life. He thus embodied...the ideal of humanity living in openness and response to God, and in doing so He ‘incarnated’ a love that reflects the divine love” (J. Hick, *The Metaphor Of God Incarnate: Christology In A Pluralistic Age*, 1993, 0. 12).
- Timed to coincide with the 1998 Easter season, (its date for public release was April 10, 1998) the Jesus Seminar published *The Acts Of Jesus: The Search For The Authentic Deeds Of Jesus*. Led by Robert Funk, its founder and the director of the Westar Institute in Santa Rosa, Ca., the group confidently asserts:
  - “Jesus was not born of a virgin; Jesus’ father was either Joseph or some unknown male who either seduced or raped the young Mary.
  - Jesus was an itinerant sage and a social deviant. Wandering about from place to place, teaching and healing and living on handouts – He regularly infringed the social codes in force in His society.
  - Jesus was considered a healer during his lifetime. From today’s perspective, Jesus’ cures are related to psychosomatic maladies. Jesus did not walk on water, feed the multitudes with loaves and fishes, change water into wine, or raise Lazarus from the dead.

- The body of Jesus probably decayed as do all corpses. The resurrection of Jesus was not something that happened on the first Easter Sunday; it was not an event that could have been captured by a video camera.”
- How do these scholarly skeptics’ summations stack up against the convictions of the church throughout its history? Listen to just one voice, the voice of the Council of Nicea in AD 325 for a much different judgment:
- What has the church believed about Jesus throughout its history?

We believe in one God, the Father all-sovereign, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible: and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all the ages, light of light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried, and rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures, and ascended into the heavens, and sits on the right hand of the Father, and comes again with glory to judge living and dead, of whose kingdom there shall be no end.

- Here is a confession John would recognize; here is a Christology he would affirm.

#### **B. They reject the Father.**

- John makes an amazing affirmation in v. 22-23. The exclusivity of his theology and the relationship, which he sees existing between the Father and the Son, is striking. No Son, no Father. If you do not come to the Son as Savior, you cannot come to God as Father (cf. 1 Tim. 2:5).
- As narrow and exclusivistic as it may sound, the Word is absolutely crystal clear: you cannot have God without believing in Jesus. Sincerity is not the issue: the Son is. Conviction is not the issue: Christ is.
- Deny Christ and you deny the one true God.

#### **Application**

This has incredible ramifications for evangelism and missions. It settles the spiritual status of both non-Christian religions and cults. Apart from Jesus as personal Savior and Lord, they are lost. Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Unitarians, New Agers, whatever, they all need to receive, as Savior, the Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth. (John 14:6, Acts 4:12)

### **III. Antichrists assault the Christian. 2:20-21, 24-25, 27-28**

Antichrist and his army is committed to our defeat, devoted to our destruction. Yet, God, in His grace, has given us a three-prong defense that is certain to give us victory as we take advantage of them.

#### **1. Experience the anointing of the Spirit. 2:20-21, 27**

- “you have” is emphatic, drawing stark contrast with the antichrists.
- Anointing (*charisma*) – a word found only here in all of the New Testament. There is a conscious play on antichrist (*antichristos*) and Christ (*christos*). The word is used

- in connection with the reception of the Spirit (cf. John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 2 Cor. 1:21ff).
- It carries the idea of consecration and a setting aside for a sacred purpose. Jesus as advocate and atonement (2:1-2) and the Spirit as anointing: there are the weapons a believer has to withstand the assault of heresy.
  - Paul calls it the baptism in 1 Cor. 12:13.
  - Holy One – Jesus (though God the Father or God as unity cannot be ruled out).
  - Purpose of the anointing: teaching of the truth, in context – the truth about Jesus and the ministry promised of the Spirit in John 14-16.
  - What of v. 27? It is not a denial of the value and benefit of human instruction or John would not have even bothered to write this letter! No, the historical context, the nature of the heresy, and the instruction of John 14-16 helps us put together what John is saying.
  - The Bible constantly advocates teaching (Matt. 28:20; 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11; Col. 3:16; 1 Tim. 4:11; 2 Tim. 2:2, 24). Therefore, John is not ruling out human teachers. At the same time he wrote, Gnostic teachers were insisting that the teaching of the apostles was to be supplemented with “higher knowledge” that they (the Gnostics) claimed to possess. John’s response was that what the readers were taught under the Spirit’s ministry through the apostles not only was adequate but was the only reliable truth. The teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit (what we call illumination) does not involve revelation of new truth. Rather, it is the enablement to appropriate God’s truth already revealed. All things necessary for salvation is ours; we need nothing more.

## 2. **Embrace the authority of the Scriptures. 2:24**

- From the beginning – the apostolic message which they received at conversion (possibly Jesus’ teaching also).
- The Spirit and the Scriptures are an unbeatable tag team. In His work of illumination, the Spirit takes the inspired Scriptures, the Master’s message, and applies it to our life. We need no other word; we need no additional word. The word of the gospel, the Word of God, this is all we need. This is where we should remain, abide.
- Martin Luther: “those who teach new doctrines rarely return” (1 John, 260) if we never move, we need not worry about a return.

## 3. **Enjoy abiding in the Son. 2:24-25, 28**

- “remain, abide” – a favorite of John’s used by him more than all the other New Testament writers combined. (23 in 1 John; 7 in 2:18-28). Includes union and communion.
- When we come to Jesus, we’ve come home, we are where we need to be. John notes three marvelous blessings which we receive: 1) the Father (repeated again, cf. V. 23); 2) eternal life; and 3) confidence at His coming.
- God is Father, Abba, Daddy. He loves us; He cares about us. We belong to Him and He belongs to us.
- Eternal life: quality and quantity of life. It is life now and forever. It is the very life of God.

- And it is His promise to us. Lit. “this is the promise which He promised us, the life, the eternal.”
- And God always keeps His word!!
- Confidence, boldness, all speech when He comes again.

### **Conclusion**

C.S. Lewis, in his classic, Mere Christianity, lays bare what is at stake when we think about and are confronted with Jesus. He writes: “among these Jews there suddenly turns up a man who goes about talking as if he was God...he says he has always existed...among pantheists...anyone might say that he was part of God, or one with God: there would be nothing very odd about it. But this man, since he was a Jew, could not mean that kind of God. God, in their language, meant the being outside the world who had made it and was infinitely different from anything else. And when you have grasped that, you will see that what this man said was, quite simply, the most shocking thing that has ever been uttered by human lips. C. S. Lewis, mere Christianity, pp. 54-55. He then adds: “I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about him. ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.” (ibid).

### **Conclusion:**

The case is clear and the facts are in: either you are pro-Christ or you are anti-Christ; you are for Him or against Him. The choice is yours, the decision of eternal significance. Don’t be led astray. Don’t be deceived. Jesus is the Savior. He will save you. Come to the Son and come today. You’ll not be disappointed.