

The Antichrist(s)

1 John 2:18-27

Introduction: 1) One of the earliest and most important lessons we teach our children is how to tell time. Atomic clocks allow us to be accurate, and a digital world has greatly simplified our task. We do live in a time conscious culture. Being early is not fashionable. Being late can often be costly.

2) The apostle John was concerned that we know how to tell time. However, it was not chronological time-telling that concerned him. It was spiritual clock-watching that he deemed of first importance. His interest was not time as man measures it, but time as God measures it. How God reckons time is an important theological issue that should concern the heart and occupy the mind of every follower of Jesus Christ. You see as God keeps time, “it is the last hour” (v. 18). Time is running out. Midnight is almost here. How do we know? John says unmistakable evidence has appeared: the antichrists have come on the scene!

3) The word “antichrist” (Gr. *antichristos*) has a way of striking a sense of wonder, amazement and even fear in our hearts. And, in one sense it should. Further, given all the strange and wild speculations that surfaces when antichrist is mentioned, it is absolutely essential that we have a biblically balanced understanding of who the antichrists are and what the antichrists do.

4) In our text John will place before us 3 important lessons that will equip us to both recognize and defeat these archenemies of the true Christ, our Savior the Lord Jesus. It is time to get armed for the battle. Spiritual conflict is inevitable.

I. Antichrists attack Christ 2:18

- The apostle John did not go looking for a fight. However, he would not run from one when those he loved and cared for were in danger of being lied to (v. 22) and deceived (v. 26).
- Once again he addresses his readers as “children” (cf. 2:1, 12, 13). It is a term of endearment and tender affection. It is also a literary device John uses to introduce a new subject. Here that subject is “the last hour” and the appearance of “many antichrists.”
- The word antichrist means “against Christ” or “in the place of Christ.” Here “against Christ” is the primary idea. Only John uses this striking term and only in 4 places in his letters (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7). John appears to have coined the word. Daniel calls this rival Christ the “prince who is to come” (Dan. 9:27). Paul calls him the “man of lawlessness” in 2 Thess. 2:3. John will refer to him as the beast from the sea in Rev. 13:1-10. Here John notes several important truths of this spiritual nemesis.

1) Antichrist has a period

- John says at the beginning and the end of verse 18 “it is the last hour.” It is crucial that we understand what this term means. It is critically important in developing a proper eschatology.
- Note that John said it was the last hour almost 2000 years ago. The phrase signifies the entire period of time between the 1st and 2nd coming of Christ. This is a consistent teaching of the New Testament. Note the following:

Acts 2:16-17: “But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: And in the last days it shall be God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.”

1 Corinthians 10:11: “Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.”

2 Timothy 3:1: “ But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty.”

Hebrews 1:1-2: “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.”

Hebrews 9:26: “For then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”

1 Peter 1:20: “He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you.”

- The last hour rings the bell of imminency and urgency in which those who follow Christ must live in any and every age. We live in a time when antichrists (plural) are active. This activity will increase until “the Antichrist” comes at the end of the last hour. Jesus Himself warned us of all of this in Matthew 24:4-5, 24-25. As the gospel spreads so will false teaching. As Christ’s missionaries go out to the nations so will Satan’s missionaries called antichrists! We are engaged in a global conflict for the souls of men. Interestingly, there could be no antichrists if there was not a true Christ. Even their coming is a witness of His coming!

2) Antichrist is a principle of spiritual error (cf. 2:22; 4:3)

- In 1 John 4:3 the apostle speaks of “the spirit of the antichrist.” In our text in v. 22 he makes plain what the spirit of antichrist is all about: they are liars who deny “that Jesus is the Christ.” And, there strategy is deceptive and seductive. They do not directly oppose Jesus Christ. They redefine Him. They re-imagine Him. He is good they say, but He is not

God. He may be a son of God like we can be sons and daughters of God they teach, but He is not the Son of God. He may have died on the cross as a martyr they affirm, but He did not die as a Savior.

- The spirit of antichrist always diminishes the person and work of Christ. It chips away at his deity and rejects His work of atonement. The antichrist spirit thinks and then teaches incorrectly, wrongly, concerning who Jesus Christ is and what Jesus Christ has done.
- The “hub” of Christianity is the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth, the eternal and divine Son of God. If you get it wrong here you will get it wrong almost everywhere else. The spirit of the antichrists will attempt to lead you down the road of spiritual error that is a theological dead end.

3) Antichrist is a person of deception

- John makes an important distinction between many antichrists who are already here and the Antichrist who is coming at the end of the age. Satan’s superman will appear someday. The devil’s darling will make a grand entrance sometime in the future. This counterfeit Christ will come on the scene of world history and, amazingly, the whole earth will marvel and follow him. Satan will indwell him and give him power, his throne and great authority (Rev. 13:2-3). The Bible teaches the nations will even worship him as God (Rev. 13:4).

- Now you may ask, “When is he coming? Could he be alive right now?” Several years ago *Newsweek* report that 19% of all Americans and 50% of those who accept biblical prophecy believe the antichrist is alive today (11-1-99, p. 69). Whether he is alive I cannot, will not, and should not speculate and neither should you. That is God’s business. What I do know is he will come, and the spirit of antichrist is alive and well. So, be on the lookout for those who attack the biblical teachings about Christ. They will do you no good.

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

- The greatest dangers to the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ are always from within, not from without. Satan is a master deceiver and strategist who knows the deployment of a spiritual Trojan Horse can do serious, if not irreparable damage, to the body of Christ.
- However, once the damage is done, the antichrists will leave the spiritual battlefield taking with them what captives they can. Eventually they reveal their true colors and allegiance.
- Their departure will almost always be painful and the occasion for tremendous grief. But, their exit is essential for the health and vitality of the church. My friend Alistair Begg says it well, “There are some who share [for while] our earthly company who do not share our heavenly birth.” You

see, their leaving us is a clear sign and certain signal they were really never a part of us to begin with.

1) Physically they desert the fellowship 2:19

- Perseverance is the proof of possession. Defection from the fellowship gives evidence of a defective faith. That was certainly John's perspective.
- The contrast between "they" and "us" in verse 19 is striking. In the original text both words appear five times. There are two spiritual teams as John sees it. There is us and there is them (they). Several observations can be made about each team.
- The "they team" did not last. They left, "they went out from us." Most likely this was a voluntary departure not an excommunication though both are certainly possible. Second, their departure proves they were never really a part of us regardless of what they once professed. In other words they were never truly saved, they never truly experienced the new birth of regeneration (cf 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:4, 9, 10, 18). They were and are lost.
- The "us team" in contrast remains in the fellowship and perseveres. As tragic as this verse is on one hand, it is glorious and comforting on the other. Why? Because it is a wonderful affirmation of what we

call “eternal security” or “perseverance of the saints.” Those who truly belong to Christ will stay with Christ because as Jude 1 says, “we are kept for Jesus Christ.” Jesus addressed this wonderful truth in John 10:27-29 where He says, “My sheep here my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.” I love what the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* says of this doctrine in Article V on “God’s Purpose of Grace”: “All true believers endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end. Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ and temporal judgments on themselves; yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.”

2) Spiritually they deny the Faith 2:22-23

- The physical desertion of the false teachers and their disciples was grounded in their defection from and denial of the faith. They left the

church because they had left Christ. They no longer believed what the apostles, those who had been with Him, taught. They denied the incarnation and deity of Christ, that Jesus was the One sent by the Father.

- And, their rejection of the biblical/apostolic witness to Jesus was personally tragic and spiritually disastrous. You see to deny the Son is to deny His Father who sent Him. This is a package deal as vs. 22-23 make crystal clear. Indeed, “No one who denies the Son has the Father.” But, and this is good news: “Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.”
- Once again we see the Christological test is the crucial test. What do you think and believe about Jesus Christ?
- To these heretics, and that is what they were, 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)

- 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 who became 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, p. 12).

- Sadly, many of these modern false teachers and others like them have left the faith but have sought to remain in the fellowship. Their deadly poison continues to infect the body of Christ with its lies. John has given us a way to identify them. We must have the courage to expose them, even though it hurts to do so. It is always better to be divided by truth than united by error.

III. Antichrists assault the Christian 2:20-21, 24-27

- The proliferation of the antichrists, these false teachers, could easily discourage us. They are, after all, intellectual heavyweights with persuasive arguments and personalities. And as John makes clear, they are committed to our defeat. However, we should not despair. First John 4:4 promises us, “you are from God and have overcome them [the antichrists], for he who is in you [Christ through the Spirit] is greater than he who is in the world [Satan and the spirit of the antichrist].”
- John reminds us that we have a two-fold arsenal that Satan, the antichrists, the liars and deceivers cannot withstand. One is the

anointing of the Spirit. The other is the Word of God. Word and Spirit was the battle cry of the Reformation as we recaptured the truth of “Justification by faith alone in Christ alone for the glory of God alone.” I believe Word and Spirit must be the battle cry of every generation of those who follow Jesus if we are to abide in the Son and in the Father (v.24). I love the Trinitarian teachings of this text! By God’s grace we will not be moved!

1) We have experienced the anointing of the Spirit 2:20-21, 27

- What has enabled us to remain in the apostles teaching and the community of faith (v.19)? We have been “anointed by the Holy One” (v. 20). “You have” is emphatic and draws a stark contrast with the antichrists of vs. 18-19. This anointing refers to our receiving the Holy Spirit (see John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; I Cor. 1:21). The Holy One who provides this anointing is probably Jesus, who is referred to by this title numerous times in Scripture (Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34; John 6:69; Acts 3:14; Rev. 3:7). However, that the Godhead in general is in views should not be ruled out.
- Consecrated and set apart by God and for God by the Holy Spirit, we now have an internal and abiding teacher who will guide us in

all knowledge and truth (v. 21, 27). And, by abiding in Him, no lie will seduce us, deceive us and lead us astray.

- Now, some have been troubled by these verses, especially v. 27 which seems to imply that having been given the Spirit, we need no human teachers. What are we to make of this? The Bible constantly advocated teaching (Matt. 28:20, 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11; Col. 3:16; I Tim. 4:11; 2 Tim. 2:2, 24). Therefore, John is not ruling out human teacher. The fact that he wrote this letter makes that clear! Here is what he is getting at. At the time he wrote, the antichrists, the false teacher were insisting that the teaching of the apostles was to be supplemented with an additional “higher knowledge” that they (the antichrists as John calls them) claimed to possess. John’s response was that what the readers were taught under the Spirit’s ministry through the apostles was not only adequate, it 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. Let the Holy Spirit be your guide not another spirit.

2) We must embrace the authority of the Scriptures 2:24-26

- John now introduces a concept that is one of his favorites: “abiding.” He will use it 23 times in I John, 7 in 2:18-28. It conveys the ideas of both union and communion. John says abide in the Word you have received in Christ.
- In v. 24 John challenges the believer to simply remain in the teaching of Christ which you receive at the beginning, at conversion, when you were saved. To abide and remain in this teaching is to abide and remain in both the Son and the Father. There is not any additional thing you need. Jesus plus nothing equals everything. Jesus plus something extra equals heresy and the teachings of the antichrist. All you need is Christ, and with Christ comes the Father too.
- Further, it is only in the Son sent by the Father that the gift of eternal life is promised. This is a promise made by God (v. 25), a promise that can never be broken.
- The false teachers will attempt to deceive you into thinking you need something more than Christ or something other than Christ. They are “liars” (v. 22, 27). The Spirit and the apostles teaching (the Word) always agree. If what men teach goes against or

beyond what those who knew Jesus teach, mark them (!), they are not of God. They have a different spirit, the spirit of Antichrist.

Conclusion

- 1) B.B. Warfield was a wonderful theologian and a staunch defender of biblical inerrancy. He also was an insightful teacher concerning the person and work of Christ. In his book by the very title *The Person and Work of Christ*, he simply and concisely said, “Christ is Christianity itself; He stands not outside of it but in its centre; without His name, person and work, there is no Christianity left. In a word, Christ does not point out the way to salvation; He is the Way itself” (p. 319)
- 2) This is what the apostles taught. This is what the Word says. This is what the Spirit affirms. This is what we believe. This is where we abide. This is what we confess. Eternal life is what we are promised!