

Antichrists in the Assembly

Letters from John, Part 8

1 John 2:18-25

Since the church began at Pentecost, some 1900 years ago, the prophecies of a coming Antichrist have captured the fascination of just about everybody.

We're told in scripture that the coming time of Tribulation, when the wrath of God is poured out on the earth during 7 years of horror and cataclysmic disaster. That seven year period is meant to not only judge the world, and prepare Israel as a nation for Christ's return, but also allow Satan to carry out his evil agenda in and through the person of the Antichrist whom he will personally inhabit.

I'm going to spend time in our Chapel Hour tonight describing demon possession, but this person – the Antichrist – will be uniquely and personally inhabited by Satan himself.

The Antichrist will revive the Roman Empire of old – rebuild Babylon to its former greatness and literally deceive untold nations and millions of people into believing that he is the incarnation of God on earth . . . and he will attempt to wipe out Israel, thus nullifying the potential fulfillment of a literal kingdom on earth with Christ on David's throne.

The Antichrist will fail and Christ will succeed, in case you haven't read ahead.

We're given a few clues as to this coming world dictator – he will survive a mortal wound to his head; he will rise to great political power, his acceptance by world religions, including both Muslims and Jews will be something short of miraculous; even the clue that the numerical equivalents to the letters in his name add up to 666.

People have made arguments for Adolf Hitler, Nero, Caligula, Napoleon, Lenin, Bill Clinton and Gorbachev fulfilling the role of Antichrist. I've lived long enough to hear people wonder out loud about leaders like Saddam Hussein – who was, in fact, rebuilding Nebuchadnezzar's palace in the ancient city of Babylon; I've heard reference to Tony Blair, because of his desires for a one world system;

Some warned that Ronald Wilson Reagan was the antichrist because of his charisma and, coincidentally, there were 6 letters in each of his

three names – Ronald Wilson Reagan – that somehow could represent 666.

You remember he survived a mortal wound – although it wasn't to his head, but let's not be too picky about the location.

Oh, and the clincher is the fact that when he retired his home address 666 St. Cloud Road.

John F. Kennedy was considered by many to be the Antichrist. He was the nation's first Roman Catholic President, and it was believed that he was the pope's puppet to secretly resurrect the Roman Empire. At the 1956 Democratic convention, he received 666 votes. When Kennedy was shot in Dallas, many people waited for his deadly wound to heal and for him to be revealed as the antichrist they believed he was.

Prince Charles of Wales has been referred to as a possible candidate for antichrist status. Charles name also adds up to 666. It's rumored that his ancestors are linked to the Roman Empire. He's also a vegetarian, which explains why the Antichrist will stop the daily animal sacrifices in the Jewish Temple during the tribulation.

That explains it, doesn't it?

Barack Obama has even generated a great deal of interest as the antichrist. And listen to this evidence – the day after the election, the daily pick-three lottery number in Obama's home state of Illinois was "6-6-6." How clear can it be?

But then another author I came across pointed out that the name Bill Gates III also equals 666 and so does the phrase, Windows 95.

"I knew that computer program was possessed!"

According to the Apostle John, who coined this title, antichrist, he actually has some rather interesting news for the believer on this subject.

Let's rejoin our study through his first letter at *verse 18 of chapter 2*.

1 John 2:18 where John begins to give both warnings and encouragement to the church.

He's going to give a number of facts about this subject of antichrist.

1. Fact number 1: **The term ‘antichrist’ is used specifically for the coming son of perdition.**

Which is how Paul names the Antichrist in **2 Thessalonians 2 (verse 3)** – *perdition meaning utter lawlessness* – like any world dictator or cult leader, they create the law, but don’t apply it to themselves.ⁱ

Notice, **verse 18, Children, it is the last hour** – literally, these are the last days.

By the way, **the last hour** – or **the last days** – began at the first coming of Christ and will end when He returns.ⁱⁱ

What a privilege we have to have been able to live in this dispensation – this epoch of time introduced by the life of Christ on earth – the creation of the church at Pentecost following His ascension to Heaven and the descent of the Holy Spirit – and every day to be able to benefit and grow by means of the revelation of the New Testament given to us through His Apostles.

In these last days, God has spoken to us in and through His son (Hebrews 1:2).

Christ appeared to us in these last times (1 Peter 1:20)

And how here, John reminds the church that we are living in **the last hour**.

One New Testament Greek scholar translated this phrase from John’s letter, “My children, it is the final age of the world.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Now obviously the Apostles John and Paul and Peter had no idea how long the last days would be . . . but if they thought it was the last days then, how much closer can they be to us now?

Now notice what John says next – **you have heard that Antichrist is coming** – that should be a capital A – by the way – John uses a singular noun here.^{iv}

He’s pointing to an individual – the coming Antichrist.^v

And you’d think that John would stop right there and discuss this coming, satanically empowered Antichrist.

But instead, he goes on to warn the church that they’ve actually got some pretty big challenges on their hands right now.

And that’s the second fact here.

2. Not only is the term antichrist used specifically for the coming son of perdition; **secondly, the term antichrist is used generally for all who deny the Son of God.**

Notice **verse 18 again** – ***And just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know it is the last hour.***

In other words, we know we’re living in these last days because of the proliferation of false teaching and false christs and demonic deception.

The word antichrist is a compound word – **anti** – or against; instead of – and **Christos** – a reference to Christ.

So those who are antichrist are literally those who are opposed to Christ, against Christ, opposed to the things of Christ – the gospel of Christ – the church of Christ.

Or, they are cult leaders and false teachers who present themselves to you instead of Christ – that is, they seek to replace Christ.

John actually gives us four characteristics of these individuals who have this spirit and attitude of antichrist.

- a. **First, they’ve actually been around since the beginning of the church**

Did you catch it in **verse 18** – ***even now, many antichrists have appeared.***

Those who oppose Christ and His truth showed up as soon as the church was born.

- So in the Galatian church, Paul warned of false teachers who had already begun to preach a distorted gospel to the congregation (***Galatians 1:9***);
- Paul warned the believers in the Philippian church that they were in danger of imitating men who were actually enemies of the cross, walking and ministering for personal pleasures and glory (***Philippians 3:17-19***);
- Even the Colossian church was warned of internal heresies regarding issues of legalism and ceremonialism that they needed to repudiate (***Colossians 2:8 & 16***);
- Paul warned Timothy –
 - about those who would depart from the faith (***1 Timothy 4:1***);
 - about those who only had an outward show of godliness, but no internal power or desire to walk with God (***2 Timothy 3:5***)
 - and Paul even used a current scandal as an illustration regarding a

Christian leader named Demas who had finally come out with his decision to reject the faith and pursue the world – Paul said, **“Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me.”** (2 Timothy 4:10).

In other words, this spirit of antichrist isn't just a 1st century phenomenon.

They've been around since the beginning of the church.

- b. Secondly, not only have they been around since the beginning of the church, John will add, **they've even become members of the church**

Look at *verse 19. They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us.*

It is a fact of church that false cults and anti-Christian religious systems in the world today have founders and leaders who started out in a local church.^{vi}

And it is also a fact of church history that cult leaders have not openly denied the Bible, they have simply added more stuff to it.

They weren't people with horns and tails – they were members of the church – and they weren't wearing name tags around church that said, “I'm one of the antichrists and I'm here to lead you astray.”

They professed to be Christians for a time – they sang the hymns and listened to the preaching of the word and put some money in the offering plate and joined in with the ordinances.^{vii}

They participated with the people of God for a time, but never belonged to the people of God.^{viii}

And that's John point here.

These aren't Christians who lost their salvation when they left the church – John makes it clear that they were never Christians to begin with.

Now does that mean if I skip church for a few Sunday's I'm in trouble?

You'd better believe it!

No . . . John isn't talking about backsliding – growing cold and in need of revival; John is talking about apostasy.

Antichrists are those who walk away from the church and say, “I never believed any of that stuff anyway.”

But in making this comment John does in fact imply that the mark of a true believer is their desire for the assembly, right?

And it's possible for that love and desire to grow cold – which is why the writer of Hebrews exhorted the believers to not avoid the assembly (*Hebrews 10:25*).

If I ever meet someone who tells me they're a Christian, I always ask them the same thing, “What church do you belong to?” And if they say to me, “Well, I don't really go to church and I've never really cared about church all that much and you know I can actually do without it.”

I have grave concerns for them.

That's like me saying, “I belong to a family – I've got a wife and children – but I'm never around them and I rarely see them, and it really doesn't bother me – in fact, I can do without them.”

That would reveal my heart wouldn't it?

John effectively describes those who are antichrists – those who are against the gospel of Christ and the church of Christ.

But they didn't start out that way.

John tells us that they were actually members of the church at one time or another.

- c. **But now thirdly, he tells us that they eventually abandon the fellowship of the church**

Notice *verse 19 continues – They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us.*

Don't make a mistaken conclusion that John is telling us that as long as someone stays in church, they'll be saved.

No – church membership is not synonymous with being a Christian.^{ix}

What John is simply saying is that those who are against Christ – antichrist – they might start out by showing interest in the church, but they finally can't stand the church over the long haul and eventually leave it.

In other words, if a church glorifies Christ, if the church expounds on the word of Christ, if a church assembly is dedicated to worshipping Christ – somebody who comes into the church and really doesn't want to glorify or study or worship Christ will eventually slip away.

This is, what one author called, a tourist mentality.

You enter that country, pay the fees, get your passport stamped, exchange currencies for what works in that country; visit a museum or two, sample the cuisine, exchange pleasantries with the natives, purchase a little something to remind you of your visit and then your off to another city or country. Your heart wasn't changed in any significant way by your little visit – but they weren't meant to be changed – you're a tourist.

You were just visiting; you weren't planning on changing your citizenship.

So here's the church – this author went on to write – on any given weekend, tourists can be found in the church; they pop in for an hour – enjoy the scenery, sing a few songs, listen to the natives talk, sample the local coffee, purchase a book or CD to remind them of their visit and then off they go – they're hearts were not changed in any significant way by their little visit – but then again they never intended to be changed – they are tourists.

And then they're off the next Sunday – perhaps it's a different locale – more accessible – more interesting – with shorter lines and less demands on their lives – and they'll visit that site for a while until something else attracts their attention – and they're off and running again.^x

How do you view the church? Are you a tourist or a resident?

John the Apostle adds some positive encouragement to the church that's lost these former members – that hurts too, doesn't it? When anyone leaves the church it pains you – and not just those who leave over doctrine – for whatever reason.

Almost every week, someone tells me they're moving out of town – or they finally sold their home and bought a new one an hour away – or they finally found a new job – or they finally found a good preacher – who preaches longer messages – mine were just too short.

Okay, I made that one up.

For whatever reason, the church body has to recover from the loss.

So, in the case of these apostates, John encourages the Flock – he writes in *verse 19 – the latter part – but they went out so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.*

In other words, God in His grace removes these from the assembly – without the church having to remove them.

They leave on their own – and their departure, John writes here, is a revelation of their unbelief.

And here's the encouragement – they might have remained in the assembly even longer and eventually brought great harm to the flock, by their unbelieving influence, over the lives of those who love Christ.^{xi}

John effectively says, “God protects the flock this way; you didn't know – I mean you would have never imagined that they were unbelievers until they left; but thank God they left on their own – maybe they were convicted about something – maybe they were upset that the church was so narrow – maybe they believed the church took scripture or holy living too seriously – whatever – but now that they've left they can't influence the assembly in the wrong way and in the wrong direction.

One contemporary pastor/author called this loss to the membership, “blessed subtraction.”^{xii}

Now again, is everyone who leaves the church to be considered an apostate? Someone who was never saved to begin with?

No. Otherwise the writer of Hebrews would not have needed to encourage the believer to stay fervent in their commitment to the assembly because the assembly provokes accountability and fervency and good deeds.

To avoid the assembly is to diminish your accountability and cool your affections for the things of Christ.

I've always loved that telling incident in the ministry of F. B. Meyer – a British pastor from the late 1800's – who once visited one of his church members who'd since stopped coming regularly to church. Meyer was concerned for him and stopped in one cold night to see him. They both sat by the fireplace to keep warm and they talked of different subjects – just small talk.

Meyer had prayed that he could communicate his concern to this wayward sheep, and then the thought occurred to him. He simply reached for the tongs, took them and removed a hot coal from the bed of coals that lay simmering in the heat – he took one coal, pulled it out of the fire and onto the hearth. Then, without saying a word, settled back in his chair.

For several minutes he and this man sat there watching . . . just watching as the coals in the fireplace continued to burn bright red and hot, this solitary coal quickly grew cold and dark.

The silence was finally broken by this man who recognized the analogy, looked over at his pastor and simply said, “I'll be seeing you this Sunday.”

The backslider was reclaimed.

Here's the critical distinction to keep in mind; if you were to dig into the heart of a backslider, you would find Christ – and they are miserable in their sinful rebellion against Him; but dig into the heart of an apostate and you will never find Christ – and they are truly glad they've abandoned the Lord and the church along with Him.^{xiii}

You need to know that who John is talking about here, are apostate unbelievers – they're not backslidden, they've never truly believed.

Notice the distinguishing marks – even the digression of their abandonment of Christ;

- First, have been around since the beginning of the church;
- Secondly, they've even joined the membership of the church;
- Thirdly, they eventually abandon the fellowship of the church;

And now, fourthly,

d. **They ultimately reject core doctrines of the church**

Look down at *verse 22*. ***Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ?***

These antichrists deny that Jesus is the Christ.

The term Christ – christos – is the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew word for Messiah. Both words mean, 'anointed one.'

In the Old Testament, prophets were anointed by God to speak for God; priests were anointed to offer sacrifices for the sins of the people; kings were anointed to rule over God's people. Jesus is the Christ – what does that mean? It means He's the last prophet who speaks for God; He is the last priest who offers sacrifice for the sins of the people; and He will be the last King – the King of Kings to rule over the world.^{xiv}

To deny that Jesus is the Christ – the anointed one – is to deny that Jesus is God's final prophet, priest and King.

The angels must have been mistaken when they chanted in the sky above the shepherds, "***For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord!***" (Luke 2:11)

A Gnostic false teacher named Cerinthus was teaching during the days of John that Jesus was an ordinary man upon whom the Christ – this spirit of anointing – descended at His baptism. And the Christ spirit empowered Jesus until Jesus was crucified, upon which time the Christ spirit left him.^{xv}

John is more than likely attacking this heretical teacher directly and he just about names him – but doesn't – when he says, with quite a bit of passion and fire and righteous indignation, by the way – ***Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ.***

And everyone would have known that one of the liars John was referring to was Cerinthus.

They not only deny that Jesus is the Christ – but watch this in verse 22 - ***This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.***

In other words, they not only deny that deity of Christ as Messiah, they deny the divine equality between God the Father and God the Son.

And isn't this the very rejection that underpins so many false religions today – from Islam to Judaism to Mormonism to Jehovah's Witnesses and on and on.

They reject this core doctrine – that Jesus is equally divine with Father and Spirit.

And John makes it very clear, did you notice? You can't have God the Father without God the Son? Look at verse 23. ***Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.***

In other words, you can't belong to God the Father if you reject God the Son as the anointed, sovereign Messiah, prophet, priest and king.

Maybe you've noticed that there are a lot of people in the world who want God but don't want Jesus.

They want to pretend to worship the same God as we do, but they will say to you, "We only differ from you in your views about Jesus."^{xvi}

John says here, You reject Jesus as Divine Messiah and you don't get God the Father either.

So go ahead and invite your world to pray to God whenever there a bomb explosion or a natural disaster or a tragedy – we all need to pray to God. Just don't pray in whose name?

Jesus! Just leave Him on the curb.

I'll never forget as a young pastor being invited to pray on the town hall steps with a bunch of other pastors one year during the national day of prayer. I remember getting up on the platform before the service and all these clergymen were deciding that they weren't going to pray in the name of Jesus because that would only offend people. And this was 25 years ago. I can still remember where I was standing at the town hall – and I can still remember the hair on the back of my neck standing up in anger, although I knew this wasn't the moment to pray for

God to send down fire from heaven and consume these false prophets. But I remember deciding, first, that I'd never come back to join such nonsense again and secondly, that when it was my turn to pray, I would mention Jesus as much as I possibly could. And when I got to the end of my prayer to really emphasize, "And it's in the name of Jesus that I pray, Amen."

Listen, you don't get God without Jesus.

Before we leave this paragraph, let me make two applications for the believer.

1. First, live with a sense of spiritual discernment – in other words: be wary of antichrists!

Be on the lookout for untruth . . . that denies the full glory of Christ.

John provides us with two safeguards for discerning those who might lead us astray.

• **The first safeguard is the Holy Spirit**

Go back up to *verse 20*. ***But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know.***

In other words, when it comes to the truth of Jesus Christ as the Messiah and the equally divine Son of God, John says, "You've received an anointing – a chrisma – is the Greek word – literally, an ointment – a figurative reference to the indwelling Holy Spirit – and by means of the indwelling Holy Spirit, you know the truth about Jesus Christ."^{xvii}

You know He was more than a moral man and a good teacher and a good example.

You know the truth about Him.

And by the way, John didn't say that only pastors or preachers or televangelists or charismatic second blessing believers or really mature Christians received the chrisma.

No . . . John writes, ***you all know.***

Every believer has the safeguard within them that confirms in their spirit the genuine message of truth – and the ultimate litmus test is the person of Jesus Christ.

John wrote in his Gospel where Jesus informs His disciples, "But when the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, He will testify about Me." (John 15:26)

Don't ignore that spirit – He's a wonderful safeguard – He'll keep you close to Jesus.

The first safeguard is the Holy Spirit.

• **The second safeguard is the Holy Scriptures.**

John writes further in *verse 21*. ***I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie is of the truth – skip down to verse 24. As for you, let that abide (take up residency) in you which you head from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. 25. This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life.***

In other words, if the word that I've written to you finds a home in you, you will have a home with God the Father and God the Son.

The first application I want to leave you is to live with a sense of spiritual discernment – be wary of antichrists.

2. The second application is to live with a sense of spiritual anticipation – in other words, be ready for Jesus Christ!

The best way to be ready for Jesus to come for us, His bride, is to live for Him . . . stay close to Him . . . talk to Him.

- The antichrists of our world are passionate to deny Christ.
- Are we passionate to obey Christ?
- The antichrists are committed in ignoring the church;
- Are we as eager to worship together as a church?
- The antichrists are determined to dishonor the character of Christ;
- Are we as passionate to honor Christ as our Lord and Savior?
- The antichrists are committed to undermining the belief that Christ will one day return;
- Are we equally as committed to believing and communicating the message that just as He departed from His disciples, He will one day come back for them.

Robby Robins was an Air Force pilot during the first Iraq war.

After his 300th mission, he was surprised to be given permission to immediately pull his crew

together and, ahead of most of the others, fly his plane directly back to the states.

They flew across the ocean to Massachusetts and then had a long drive to western Pennsylvania. They drove all night, and when his buddies dropped him off at his driveway just after sun-up, there was a big banner across the garage—“Welcome Home Dad!”

How did they know? No one had called, and the crew themselves hadn’t expected to leave so quickly.

Robins related in an interview, “When I walked into the house, the kids, about half dressed for school, screamed, ‘Daddy!’ And Susan, my wife, came running down the hall—she looked terrific—

hair fixed, wearing a crisp yellow dress. I asked her, “How did you know?”

Through tears of joy, she responded, “We didn’t know” . . . but once we’d heard the war was over we knew you’d come back one of these days. And we knew you’d try to surprise us, so we were ready every day.”^{xviii}

May the Lord find us as faithful – alert in our discernment and anticipating His soon coming to gather His family to Himself – this One we’ve worshipped again this Lord’s day – our Great Prophet; Our High Priest; Our soon coming King.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 4/21/2013 by Stephen Davey.

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