

That You May Know

*And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.
(1 John 2:3 ESV)*

*We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers.
(1 John 3:14 ESV)*

*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God,
that you may know that you have eternal life.
(1 John 5:13 ESV)*

The Spirit Of Antichrist

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The Epistles Of John

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! I hope you brought your Bible with you and that you are able to open it now to 1 John. This morning we are going to be talking about the antichrist, which might not SEEM like an appropriate topic on an Advent Sunday morning, but as we shall soon see, it is very much so.

John refers to the antichrist on 4 different occasions; and having read now all 4 of those references we are well positioned to consider this very important theme. Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at 1 John 2:18-20:

Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. ¹⁹They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. ²⁰But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. (1 John 2:18–20 ESV)

Now before we go on to the next reference we probably need to take a minute in order to understand what John means when he says that this is the LAST HOUR – because apparently, the

fact that it is the LAST HOUR explains to John's mind why it is that we are dealing with this character called the antichrist.

In the same way that John is the only New Testament author to use the phrase "the antichrist" he is also the only New Testament author to use the phrase "the last hour" but most scholars assume that he means roughly what Peter and Paul mean when they speak about the "last days." The Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy chapter 3, for example says:

"But understand this, that in **the last days** there will come times of difficulty." (2 Timothy 3:1 ESV)

The Apostle Peter says something similar in 2 Peter 3:3:

"knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come **in the last days** with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. (2 Peter 3:3 ESV)

Alright, so what do the Apostles mean when they talk about "the last days" or as John even more urgently puts it "the last hours"? What exactly are we talking about here?

That is one of the most complex questions, actually, in all of New Testament theology. On the one hand Jesus seemed to tell his disciples to be READY for his return at any moment. He talked about how he would come like a thief in the night, he talked about how important it was for his disciples to stay awake lest they be caught unawares – on the other hand, he told several parables about the possibility of a LONG DELAY and the likelihood that the kingdom would spread slowly, but surely throughout the world.

So – how does that all go together?

John Henry Newman, writing in the last century, maybe said it better than anyone else. He said:

"though time intervene between Christ's first and second coming, it is not *recognized* (as I may say) in the Gospel scheme, but is, as it were, an accident. For so it was, that up to Christ's coming in the flesh, the course of things ran straight towards that end, nearing it by every step; but now, under the Gospel, that course has (if I may so speak) altered its direction, as regards His second coming, and runs, not toward the end, but along it, and on the brink of it; and is at all times near

that great event, which, did it run towards it, it would at once run into. Christ, then, is ever at our doors.”¹

Do you see that?

In essence, the Apostles seem to be saying that Christ, having finished ALL HIS WORK with respect to our redemption could now return climactically as Judge and King AT ANY SECOND. There is nothing left in the timeline SAVE FOR HIS RETURN. So history, Newman says, now does not run TOWARD a climactic event – as it did in the past – but now runs ALONG a climactic event, ready to TURN and ENCOUNTER IT at any second.

So in that sense, we are right now in the last days. More than that, John says, we are in the last hour.

F.F. Bruce put it this way, he said simply:

“In the Christian era it is always five minutes to midnight.”²

Does that make sense? Thus John is saying in 1 John 2:18 that since it is the last – since the devil’s time is short – we ought to expect FIERCE, WICKED, DESPERATE, DEMONIC opposition ALL ALONG the path that leads to eternal life. And we are experiencing that – that’s how we know that it is the last hour.

The second mention of antichrist comes just a few verses later. Look now at 1 John 2:22. John says:

Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. (1 John 2:22 ESV)

So the antichrist may be identified with anyone who denies or departs from the Apostolic teaching of Christ. Remember John has a WIDER understanding of “antichrist” than we tend to have today. He just said a few verses earlier:

¹ John Henry Newman as cited in F.F. Bruce, *The Gospels & Epistles Of John*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 65.

² F.F. Bruce, *The Gospels & Epistles Of John*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 65.

“many antichrists have come.” (1 John 2:18 ESV)

And then he went on to identify them as the people who had formally separated from these local churches under John’s authority. As the Colin Kruse says, here, that comes as a bit of a surprise. He says:

“Surprisingly, these antichrists are identified as people who were once members of the author’s own Christian community but have seceded from it.”³

And he is right – that does come as a bit of a surprise. Most modern-day evangelicals are looking for some guy working for the United Nations who wants to use the power of the one world state to force Christians to get a tattoo on their forehead – whereas John here identifies the antichrist as anyone who has departed from the Apostolic Gospel. The antichrist is present anywhere you find people believing LESS than or OTHER THAN the Apostolic witness to Jesus Christ.

The third mention of the antichrist comes in chapter 4. 1 John 4:2-3 it says:

By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,³ and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. (1 John 4:2–3 ESV)

So again we see that in John’s understanding, the antichrist is HERE and COMING and his main interest is in deceiving people away from the Apostolic Gospel.

The final mention of the antichrist comes in 2 John verse 7. There the Apostle says:

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. (2 John 1:7 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

³Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 97.

Well, as I mentioned those are all of the references to the antichrist in John's Epistles, so in the time we have left I'd like to ZOOM OUT and attempt a bit of a summary of what we've seen.

Summary Of John's Teaching On The Spirit Of Antichrist:

The first thing we can say with confidence, based on the 4 passages we've just read is that:

1. The Spirit of Antichrist has come and is coming into the world

John said that in 1 John 2:18 – but he also said there:

as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. (1 John 2:18 ESV)

So John did not understand himself as being the originator of this teaching – he understood himself as merely reinforcing something they'd already heard – well many scholars assume that what they had already HEARD was some version of what we have recorded in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 – which was of course written LONG before 1 John. In that Epistle the Apostle Paul said:

“Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers,² not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.³ Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, **and the man of lawlessness** is revealed, the son of destruction,⁴ who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.⁵ Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?⁶ And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time.⁷ **For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work.** Only **he who now restrains it** will do so until he is out of the way.⁸ And **then the lawless one will be revealed**, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.⁹ The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders,¹⁰ and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.¹¹ Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false,¹² in order that all may be

condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” (2 Thessalonians 2:1–12 ESV)

So this teaching was OUT THERE – it was a common topic in Christian conversation in the first century. The early Christians knew that Jesus was coming back – and they knew that he could come back at any moment.

All the work had been done. The great CLIMAX had already happened. Remember, they were readers of the Old Testament, when they talked about “prophecy” they were talking about Old Testament prophecy – all of which LANDED FULLY and FINALLY upon the person and work of Jesus Christ.

So they were ready.

They remembered Jesus saying: “It is finished” so they anticipated his coming at any moment.

But they knew too that God was patient, not wanting any to perish but for all to come to repentance – Peter had said that – also long before 1 John was written.

So John’s people knew that the mystery of lawlessness – this spirit of antichrist was already at work in the world. They knew that. And John knew they knew that. And they also knew that just prior to the Second Coming of Christ a sort of trigger event would occur – some kind of chain would be lengthened giving increased permission and operating space to a principle and a person described by Paul as The Man of Lawlessness.

But for now, he was being restrained.

Paul doesn’t say HOW precisely he was being restrained, he just says that someone or some thing was restraining him. Some say Paul was referring to an Angel, others say he was referring to government – after all Paul does say that the government has been ordained by God to restrain evil – he says that in Romans 13. So be careful what you wish for, all you anti-government protesters. The government may be all that is standing between you and the Man of Lawlessness.

Just putting that out there.

Regardless – the point is that Paul and John agree. There is some principle of lawlessness – some spirit of antichrist operating all throughout the last days – that will intensify and personify just prior to the return of Christ.

This spirit or principle of antichrist is EFFECTIVE against everyone who does not love the truth.

Think of it as a wind that blows across the road that leads to eternal life and is so strong that it DECEIVES and DISPATCHES ALL THOSE WHOM IT TOUCHES. Except those who have the Seed of God in them. That is exactly what John says in 1 John 4:4, he says:

Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. (1 John 4:4 ESV)

You have something STRONGER IN YOU than the spirit of antichrist. Therefore YOU remain on the road – while everyone around you is blown away.

That's the spirit that is HERE and that is coming into the world. It is a spirit that actively and aggressively opposes anyone even attempting to walk on the road that leads to eternal life.

The second thing we can say based on these readings is that:

2. The Spirit of Antichrist denies that Jesus is the Christ, God's Son

You can see that in 1 John 2:22:

Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. (1 John 2:22 ESV)

Now remember, John has already identified the people who departed from his churches in an act of formal schism as “the antichrists”. It may be that John coined this phrase “the antichrist” because of the particular error of these people. These people disputed and denied the Apostolic

teaching about CHRIST. Because of their Greco-Roman background, they could not buy into this idea that Jesus of Nazareth could somehow be identified with the God of the Universe.

That did not compute - so they came up with a variety of other – more “reasonable” options.

Maybe Jesus wasn’t really human. Maybe he was just an appearance of God to man.

Or maybe the Christ Spirit descended on Jesus – the man – for a season of his life. Maybe Jesus of Nazareth was “possessed” as it were by the Christ Spirit – just like Judas was possessed by the devil near the end of his life. Maybe that’s what happened.

But surely we cannot believe that Jesus was truly God and truly man – surely that could never have happened.

That’s what they were saying – they were denying that Jesus was the Christ. Now we get confused here because we tend to think that “Christ” was Jesus’ last name, but the concept of “Christ” was WAY bigger than that for John’s original hearers. Stephen Smalley explains the meaning of that title – “Christ”, he says:

“for John and the heretics it refers to a divine being, and appears to be synonymous (as in this verse) with “Son of God”.⁴

That’s exactly what John WANTS his people to believe about Jesus – he said that at the end of his Gospel. John 20:30-31 says:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30–31 ESV)

I WANT YOU TO BELIEVE that brothers and sisters – because anyone who believes that Jesus is the CHRIST, the SON OF GOD will have eternal life in his name.

⁴ Stephen S. Smalley, *1,2,3 John* in Word Biblical Commentary Volume 51, (Waco: Word Books Publishers, 1984), 113.

I want that for you – but I am opposed in that WANT by the spirit of antichrist. He wants you to believe something LESS than that about Jesus – or something different. He does not want you to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. He is deathly opposed to that.

The third thing we can say with confidence here is that:

3. The Spirit of Antichrist denies that Jesus is God incarnate

We see that in 1 John 4:2-3:

By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,³ and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. (1 John 4:2–3 ESV)

So the Holy Spirit wants you to believe and confess that Jesus Christ is GOD IN THE FLESH – he is Emmanuel, God with us – and the spirit of antichrist is doing everything in his power to keep that belief out of your heart. Colin Kruse says here:

“The aim of the antichrist is to deceive people by denying the truth about Jesus Christ, and in particular, within the context of 1 John, by denying the true humanity of Christ (that Jesus is the Christ come in the flesh).”⁵

So, basically, John is pushing back both ways here on the influence of the antichrist on his people. He was saying in 1 John 2 that WE WILL BELIEVE – we DO BELIEVE that Jesus is truly God. He is the Christ, the Son of God – now here in chapter 4 he is pushing back in the other direction – he is saying WE WILL BELIEVE – we DO BELIEVE that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh.

Jesus is truly God and Jesus is truly man – that is the Gospel!

⁵Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 148.

If you take hold of those twin truths you will have touched upon the greatest power in all the universe.

And that is why the spirit of antichrist is so fixated on this particular issue. He tries to push us one way or the other. He tries to get us to deny the Divinity of Jesus. Maybe he was just a good teacher or a good example – and if that doesn't work he tries to have us believe that perhaps Jesus was just a spirit. Maybe he only appeared to be a man. Maybe he was a hologram or something – but surely he was not – surely he could not have been TRULY GOD and TRULY MAN – because if he was – and if you believe that – then the game is up for the devil. If Jesus was who he said he was and if he did what he appears to have done and if you believe that – then the devil has just lost all his slaves!

This is the most powerful truth in all the universe – if you understand this – if you understand who Jesus was and what Jesus did and if you take hold of that – if you make him your Lord and your Savior – if you see in him HUMANITY ASSUMED and HUMANITY REBOOTED and HUMANITY REDEEMED and HUMANITY RECLAIMED by the only Begotten Son of God – then you will be SAVED!

That's what Jesus said in John 6 verse 40, he said:

“For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” (John 6:40 ESV)

That's what is at stake brothers and sisters – and the antichrist knows that all too well.

Response:

So, that's the Apostle John in his Epistles on the matter of antichrist. Now what in the world does that have to do with us? How should this interesting little strand in the biblical narrative affect us today? Let me suggest a couple of ways.

First of all, I think it should instill in us a certain urgency. I mean, in a sense, it is a miracle that we are even here. John said – almost 2000 years ago:

Children, it is the last hour (1 John 2:18 ESV)

As John Henry Newman said, this time that we are in is kind of an accident. It isn't strictly necessary. Everything has been done to affect this general REBOOT of humanity. There are no more great events, in the redemptive calendar, there is ONLY CHRIST'S FINAL and CLIMACTIC RETURN – so why then are we here?

It is Peter that gives us the answer. He says in 2 Peter 3:9:

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. (2 Peter 3:9 ESV)

History could have ended long ago – the only reason it hasn't ended is because God is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance.

Therefore let us be very clear – there is absolutely no guarantee that there will be a tomorrow. There shouldn't have been a today. So if you have something you need to do – you better do it now. If there is something you need to make right – you better do it now. If there is someone you need to talk to – you better do it today.

And you better expect opposition. This is after all, the last hour. And the closer we get to the return of Christ the more active we should expect the spirit of antichrist to be. He reads the newspaper just like we do. And he is asking the same question we're asking:

Is this the beginning of the end?

I don't know for sure. It is definitely a birth pang and every birth pang brings us closer to the Child, as it were – but I don't know if this is the end; and you don't know if this is the end. But I do know this: if we are asking that question – then he's got to be asking that question and you can

bet that he is raging against every chain and restriction so as to exercise maximum destructive influence upon all those who would preach, proclaim and believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

So urgency makes sense to me – as a response to this text – and I think **caution** too makes sense – it made sense to the Apostle John. He said:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. (1 John 4:1 ESV)

I think it past time for us to be assuming that MANY if not MOST of the voices that are presenting themselves as speaking in the power of the Holy Spirit are in fact speaking in the power of antichrist.

Many false prophets have gone out into the world – I don't know how many times people have to hear that before they will believe it. I would recommend assuming that most of the books in the Christian Book Store, for example, have been written by the spirit of antichrist.

What basis would you have for not believing that?

Right? I mean, now would be a good time for evangelicals to STOP being the most gullible people on planet earth. For many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Then thirdly and finally, I think it would be appropriate for us to respond to what we've learned today about the identity and mission of the spirit of antichrist with an attitude of **sanctified defiance**.

He WANTS US to abandon the Apostolic doctrine of Jesus Christ.

He WANTS US to deny that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

He WANTS US to deny that Jesus is GOD IN THE FLESH – so I say that we sing and shout and proclaim those truths louder, clearer and with more joy and conviction than we’ve ever done before.

You were wondering weren’t you how this sermon qualified as an Advent sermon – well now you know. What is Advent anyway? It is a time when we reflect upon the COMING of Jesus Christ in the flesh. God WITH US - EMMANUEL. So actually this is the MOST APPROPRIATE ADVENT TOPIC EVER.

And I say let’s make this the most EXUBERANT Christmas Season EVER. Because, Christmas, properly understood is an act of sanctified DEFIANCE. When you sing a Christmas carol – when you tell your kids the true meaning of Christmas, when you talk about the Virgin Birth and the miracle of the INCARNATION you break the teeth of the lion, you hit the spirit of antichrist where it hurts him the most.

And if you do that – if you are doing that, brothers and sisters, then:

you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. (1 John 4:4 ESV)

So let’s do that. Let’s do that together. Thanks be to God. Let’s me pray for us.