

Understanding Antichrist and the Last Hour – 1 John 2:18-23

Introduction – In one survey of American evangelical Christians, over half of those surveyed believe that the Antichrist spoken of in the Bible is an individual living in the world right now. Christian pulp-writers, conspiracy theorists, and pop-prophecy experts are constantly telling us who the next candidate for Antichrist is. Unfortunately, most of the assumptions made are usually far away from the actual teaching of the Bible on the subject.

The Last Hour – Two thousand years ago, John told his readers it was the last hour. John was not mistaken because John was not talking about the Second Coming. There were signs, Jesus made clear to His disciples, that would take place when the end was near (Matt 24:10-11). Sure enough, many antichrists had appeared. It is important to note that the Antichrist is not the same person as the Beast of Revelation. The Beast (Caesar Nero, and more generally, the Roman Empire) was a civil ruler who sought to destroy the people of God. The Antichrist (probably Cerinthus) and antichrists were false teachers from within the church who sought to mislead God's people. First, this means that The Beast and The Antichrist both died some two thousand years ago. Second, we still have much to learn about antichrists (and the spirit of antichrist) as well as beasts, for we must learn how to identify and fight against their spiritual descendants.

The Antichrist – The word “*antichrist*” is found in four verses (John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7). From these texts we know that the Christians had already been warned about the coming of antichrist (1 John 2:18; 4:3) and in fact “*many antichrists had come*” and were already at work deceiving the church (2 John 7). These passages also teach us that an antichrist is one who denies that Jesus is the Christ, that God came in the flesh, and that the Son and the Father (along with the Spirit) are the Persons of the One Triune God (vv22-23, 4:2-3). The fact that these antichrists had come was proof that the churches John was writing to were in the last hour of the Judaic, old administration of the covenant.

They Went Out from Us (v19) – When the gospel is faithfully preached, upheld, and protected by the elders of the church, the necessary antithesis between light and darkness, truth and falsehood, cannot over time remain together. These antichrists were a part of the church; they were religious teachers and leaders. This was a necessary and good pruning of the church that took place; this was the work of faithful shepherding and protection. We also learn here something of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. There is a sense that some can be “*of us*,” that is, members in the real church, and yet not “*of us*,” that is, not regenerate. When this kind of excommunication takes place, it reveals that some who were in the former “*us*” were not actually in the latter “*us*.” The real believers have an anointing.

We Have an Anointing (vv20-21) – The true believers have a *chrisma*, and are not *anti-christ*'s, and so the antithesis is shown even in the words. The context of knowing “*all things*” is all things pertaining to the person, incarnation, and divinity of Jesus. John wasn't writing to them because they needed to be told truths he had not told them – but rather to remind them that they do know it (and had no need of additional or supernatural information or experience of Jesus who is the *logos* of God).

The Holy One (the Lord Jesus) had anointed His church with the Holy Spirit who would lead them into all truth, the truth which the apostles had taught as the churches were established. (2 Cor 1:21-22). It is by this Spirit that we confess and know that Jesus is Lord – and all that means (1 Cor 12:3). The nature of heresy has to do with concepts (who is Jesus) and not magic words (can you say “Jesus is Lord”). The Holy Spirit does not expand the apostolic teaching of Christ. Instead, the Word tests the spirit (1 John 4:2). The spirit agrees with what John and the apostles taught or it is not the Holy Spirit. This is because it is not the work of the Holy Spirit to take us beyond the teaching of the apostles. His work is to help us to abide in that teaching, to grow in our understanding and confidence in that teaching, and to strengthen us with power to put that teaching into practice in our lives.

Affirm and Deny (vv22-23) – How important is it that we affirm Incarnation theology and the doctrine of the Trinity? The mainline church today is filled with antichrists who deny these truths. Downstream, our culture and multitudes of Christians have a Gnostic view of the material and spiritual; one such manifestation today is the impotence of the church in its ability to speak prophetically to the civil government. Licentiousness abounds in the church (as does her wicked step-sister, legalism), much due to Gnostic worldviews. Individualistic religious experiences emphasize our individual Holy Spirit baptisms rather than the baptism of the Holy Spirit which places us into the trinitarian church of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – a place of community and grace. The teachers of such lies are in the spirit of antichrist and the church needs to reaffirm her anointing and return to the teachings of the apostles of Jesus. And so we pray for reformation and revival...