

1 JOHN

Part 5: “How to Fight the Antichrist”

1 John 2:18–27

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Sunday, June 11, 2023 (Ordinary Time)

Scripture Reading

“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. They 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. But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. 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. No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life. I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him”(1 John 2:18–27).

Introduction

I was a fourth-grader when I first heard a sermon that truly arrested my attention. Not only did I listen to this sermon once. I listened to it over again and over again. I even listened to the sermon on a cassette tape back when people listened to sermons on cassette tapes! I even took notes, drew charts, and studied maps because of this sermon.

What was this sermon about, you might ask? It was about the identity of the antichrist. And who was the antichrist? You guessed it: it was none other than Prince Charles of Wales [show [1Charles III](#)].

I am not joking or exaggerating.

I studied this sermon so diligently that I still have brain cells devoted to storing long-term information about the symbolism of Prince Charles's coat of arms, his participation in the 1993 peace accords in Oslo, Norway, and the strategic importance of the Golan Heights in the Holy Land.

According to the preacher, not only was Charles very likely the antichrist, we were also living in the midst of the Great Tribulation, and Jesus was almost certainly coming back in the year 2000.

Now, you might think I'm crazy for falling under the spell of such a sermon, but I was not alone. The Sunday following the presentation of this sermon, the same preacher informed his congregation that more copies of that sermon were sold and distributed than any previous sermon in his ministry career up until that point. Soon people across the nation were even talking about his sermon.

However, that sermon has not aged well. You cannot find a copy of that sermon anywhere, and believe me, I have tried.

Now, after years of theological training under my belt, I would hope I would be less susceptible to such a sensational sermon. However, in retrospect, my greatest critique of this sermon was not that it was simply wrong or absurd. My critique is this sermon and sermons like that sermon on the antichrist tend to produce nothing but a sense of fear and morbid fascination.

Today, I want us to entertain the possibility that the Bible is not inviting us to speculate about the exact identity of the antichrist. In fact, perhaps the term "antichrist" describes something quite different than what the term means in popular American culture.

And we are in luck because today's Scripture reading is arguably the most comprehensive and clarifying passage in all of the Bible about the idea of the "antichrist" and how we should respond and live in light of what the Bible teaches about this concept.

So without any further ado, we will dive deeper into 1 John 2 and discover **"How to Fight the Antichrist."**

Exposition

1) Understand the Nature of the Antichrist

If you know nothing about the antichrist other than the term antichrist, you would likely assume that whoever (or whatever) the antichrist is it is bad news. And that is a correct assumption.¹

¹ Antichrist (ἀντίχριστος) is a compound word that derives from the prefix "anti," meaning "against or opposed to" and the noun "christos," which means the Messiah. So, just from the term, we can understand antichrist refers to something or someone who, by their very nature, is against and opposed to Jesus. And by extension, the antichrist also stands against God and his people.

But if we are actually going to effectively oppose the antichrist, we need to know more. In order to effectively fight your enemy, you need to know your enemy. And this passage of Scripture has a lot to teach us that might surprise you.

According to this text, before we can begin to understand the “who” or “what” of the antichrist, we have to understand the “when” of the antichrist.

The Apostle John tells us the antichrist or antichrists are to come at a point in history known as "the last hour." Now, often times when many people hear the phrase "the last hour" or "the last days," they automatically think of the last few years of human history. You might think of the last decade or generation before the end of the world and the return of Christ.

However, that understanding of "last hour" doesn't fit well with the New Testament. After all, John says that he and his fellow Christians alive at the time 1 John was written were living in the last hour. Look again at verse 18, *“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”* (1 John 2:18).

How could it be that John, who lived two thousand years ago could say that he was living in the last hour? Was he simply mistaken?

Not at all. We simply need to learn how to see history the way John and the other apostles saw history.

According to the authors of the New Testament, phrases like "the last hour" or "last days" do not necessarily refer to the final few years at the end of history. They refer to the way the coming of Christ has changed the fabric of time and reality. God's intrusion into history has forever divided history into two halves.

Once, creation was under the tyranny of the powers of death and darkness. But those were the former days. And the moment Jesus Christ stepped out of his tomb on the third day, he inaugurated a new era of the last days.

The last days refer to a time between times; an age between the ages. The last days are all the days that come after God's perfect revelation of himself in and through Christ but before the consummation of God's kingdom and Christ's return. As the author of Hebrews writes, *“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”* (Heb 1:1–2).

So, how does the presence of antichrist figures signal that we live in the last hour?

It is because the real thing has to come before a forgery to be effective.

For example, if you were to travel back in time five hundred years ago with a stack of perfectly convincing but fake \$100 bills, they would not have been effective counterfeits. Why? Because the real thing did not exist yet. Five hundred years ago, the dollar did not exist, the United States did not exist, and Benjamin Franklin, whose face adorns the one-hundred-dollar bill, had not yet been born.

John is saying only now that the truth of Christ has come, there will be counterfeit Christs.

And, indeed, there were false messiahs who would come after Jesus. One of the more famous examples of such a counterfeit was a man who would become known as Simon Bar Kokhba [show [2Bar Kokhba](#)]. Bar Kokhba was a Jewish military leader who lived in the early part of the second century. He was a fanatic Jewish nationalist who leaned into messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, and there was even a leading rabbi of the time who declared Bar Kokhba to be the Messiah.

Bar Kokhba channeled the fervent devotion of those who believed him to be the Messiah into sparking a revolt against Rome. Those who followed Bar Kokhba believed he would deliver them, save them, and usher in the kingdom of God on earth. But after years of dealing with such uprisings, Rome crushed Bar Kokhba and his followers and displaced millions of Jewish people from their homeland.

The Bar Kokhba fiasco reminds us that false messiahs are not only dangerous—they are deadly.

But who is the antichrist John is talking about? This is where the Bible might surprise you. If you grew up hearing that the antichrist was a single, spiritually charged supervillain who was evil incarnate, what the Bible has to say about antichrists might seem a little bit of a letdown.

According to John, there are actually many antichrists, and there are a few of them who were once a part of the very churches that John is writing. John says of these antichrists, *“They 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”* (1 John 2:19).

Here John is talking about false teachers who, at one point, infiltrated the early Christian communities. But instead of submitting to the apostles' teaching about Jesus, they left the church to go their own way. They began to twist and distort the gospel. They began to twist and distort the character and nature of Christ himself. And as a result of their teachings, they threatened to divide the church and lead Christians astray.

What the Bible actually teaches is a lot less sensational than what we typically think of when we think about the idea of the antichrist. But it is also a lot more relevant to our everyday life—because antichrists are a part of our everyday life.

We often think of the antichrist as some epic spiritual villain who would attempt to coerce us into the worship of Satan. But true antichrists are much more subtle, and, for that reason, much more effective. They distract us gradually. They deceive us with partial truths. They cause us to drift until we are very far from God and his people.

An antichrist can be a self-absorbed celebrity pastor or spiritual guru who teaches false doctrine and fosters worship of himself instead of the worship of Christ. An antichrist could be a jaded college professor with an axe to grind against Christianity who actively influences Christian students away from following Jesus and experiencing fellowship with other Christians. An antichrist could be a charismatic political leader who would present himself as a type of Messiah who alone can save us and bring justice to the world.

An antichrist is anything or anyone that would oppose your devotion to Christ, your nearness to Christ, your focus on Christ, and your hope in Christ.

That leads us to our second point.

2) Understand the Centrality of Christ

The core of the Christian gospel is Christ himself.

This is why, throughout the letters of the New Testament, the apostles will over and over again bring the attention of the early Christian churches to the central truth of Christ.

As the Apostle Paul once wrote to the church in Corinth, *“And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified”* (1 Cor 2:1–2).

This central truth about Jesus is precisely what the false teachers and antichrists that John is concerned about have never been able to understand or embrace. They never really knew Jesus. They never saw the brilliance and the beauty of Jesus. Instead, they deny Jesus and actively lead others away from the truth of Jesus.

This is why John writes, *“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. No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also”* (1 John 2:22–23).

There are so many challenges, so many questions, and so many hardships in the Christian life. But the ultimate solution, the ultimate answer, and the ultimate balm of healing is Jesus. Thus, we must never lose sight of the centrality of Christ.

In the early years of the Christian movement, several church councils with pastors from all around the world met together to clarify and confirm the most foundational truths of

the gospel and contend with the greatest challenges that faced the church [show **3Early Church Council**].

You might wonder, what were the issues the early Christians would spend most of their time discussing and defining at length? As foreign as it may seem to us, they did not spend their time fretting over politics or arguing about culture war issues. Instead, their primary point of concern and conversation was how to rightly understand Jesus Christ.

There were some false teachers who were teaching that Christ was not fully divine; that he was simply an inspired human teacher. Others denied that Jesus was ever truly human; they taught he was a spirit who only appeared in the form of a man. Others taught that Jesus was divine, but he was a created, non-eternal being that was not on the same level as God the Father—kind of like a junior varsity God.

For the early Christians, these were not small matters. These were matters of salvational importance.² Now, I want to be upfront with you. Christians don't always agree on all matters of doctrine. But we must agree on some central truths about Jesus; because without Jesus, there is no gospel.

If we don't have a savior who is both fully God and fully human, then we do not have hope for salvation. Only one who is fully human is able to bear the penalty of death. And only one who is fully God is able to overcome the power of death. Thus, only one who is both fully God and fully man is worthy and able to be the Messiah who saves us. There is only one Savior who meets these requirements, and his name is Jesus. And, as the Apostle Peter preached in the book of Acts, “...*there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12).

John is telling the early Christians (and he is reminding us) something we cannot afford to forget.

Don't let anyone distort your vision of Jesus. Don't let anything disrupt your nearness to Jesus. Don't listen to any deception that would cause you to doubt the truth of his love or the power of his salvation.

Let the simple gospel that you heard from the moment you became a Christian sink into your heart. He writes, “*Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life*” (1 John 2:24–25).

We are not meant to merely believe in Christ; we are to abide in Christ. In Christ, we have access to the fullness of the Father and the promise of eternal life.

² “...it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man.” *Historic Creeds and Confessions*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor: Lexham Press, 1997).

You need to know that if you are Christian, you will endure spiritual attack that is actively in opposition to you experiencing closeness to Christ and finding rest in Christ. There are antichrist voices in this world that will attempt to distract you and deceive you regarding Christ.

But the good news is that we have access to a spiritual power that far greater than all powers of darkness in this world. And that leads us to our third and final point.

3) Understand the Anointing of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the third member of the divine Trinity. He is the Lord and giver of life who proceeds from the Father and the Son and dwells in us and among us as his people.

The Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit is capable of some truly incredible things. The Holy Spirit is able to give sight to blind eyes, heal the broken, and set people free from spiritual bondage. The Holy Spirit is even able to resurrect the dead to life.

John knows the power of the Spirit very well. He witnessed Jesus move and minister in the power of the Spirit. He was there when Peter told a lame man to rise and walk in the power of the Spirit. He remembers feeling the Spirit shake the ground beneath him as he and the other apostles would gather to pray.

But here, in 1 John 2, John points to perhaps the most powerful and consistent way the Holy Spirit ministers to us. The Holy Spirit empowers us and enables us to truly know Jesus. John writes in verse 20, *“But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth.”* (1 John 2:20–21).

The language John uses here is very related to the way Jesus in John’s gospel describes the Holy Spirit as one who Jesus promises to send to his people that we might be led us into all truth and abide with Christ (cf. John 16:13).

If you are a Christian, the same Spirit that spoke through the prophets of old, the same Spirit that flowed through the apostles, the same Spirit that rose Jesus from the dead now abides within you.

John is reminding his readers of this truth because there are those who would deceive us and discourage us. And left to ourselves, we could easily be led astray.

But we have not been left to ourselves.

God has given his people with his very Spirit. If you trust in Jesus, you have been empowered, you have been set apart, you have been anointed.

You don't need some special teacher or guru to teach you a new gospel that no one else has ever heard before. You simply need the Spirit of God to remind you of the true gospel so that you might rest in Christ alone.

John writes, *"I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him"* (1 John 2:26–27).

Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ is coming again. This is the glory of the gospel and the mystery of our faith. And it is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that we are given eyes that are able to behold this truth.

In Exodus 34, the Old Testament recounts a rather bizarre story about Moses. Moses is the great deliverer that God used to deliver the nation of Israel from slavery in Egypt and who then led them to their Promised Land. But Moses is also famous for being the one who went to Mount Sinai and received the Torah, or the Law of God.

After speaking with God on the mountain, Moses returns with the tablets of the Law to the people of Israel. But as he comes down the mountain, he is unaware that his face is shining with the unbearable brightness and radiance of God's glory [show 4Moses]. In fact, his face is so bright that the people are afraid to even speak to him. So, as a result, he put a veil over his face.

Later in the New Testament, Paul uses this odd story to illustrate the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian. Paul says that in the same way the glory of God on Moses's face was concealed and covered by a veil, many people can read the words of the Bible and still never truly see the glory of God. Many people can learn a lot about God but never truly know God. Without the Holy Spirit, a spiritual veil lays over our hearts, and we are obstructed from true nearness to God.

But the Holy Spirit changes all of that. When we turn to the Lord, the Holy Spirit removes the veil from our hearts! He is the one who gives us eyes to behold Jesus! He is the one who transforms and changes us as we behold Jesus and sets us free!

Paul proclaims, *"But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit"* (2 Cor 3:16–18).

Conclusion

This is how we truly fight the antichrists among us. We don't need to scour the news or the internet for clues to the antichrist's true identity. We don't need to prepare to fight

some cosmic battle with a final boss at the end of history in our own strength or cleverness.

We simply need to stay far away from anything or anyone that would cause us to be distracted from our devotion to Jesus. We must remind one another to be fiercely committed to Jesus. And we must pray that the Holy Spirit would continue to move in and through us and give us eyes to behold the unending glory of Jesus.

So, Redeemer Christian Church, may learn to discern the real from the counterfeit. May we cling to Christ and abide in Christ. May we trust in the true knowledge and the eternal life that is given to us by the Holy Spirit. AMEN.

Discussion Starters for Gospel Communities

1. *Read 1 John 2:18-27.*
2. *What does John mean when he uses the phrase "last hour"? How is it possible for John to have lived in the "last hour" when he lived and died almost two thousand years ago?*
3. *What are some of the ideas that come to your mind when you think of the word "antichrist"? How do those ideas compare to what John teaches us about the antichrist or antichrists in this passage?*
4. *What does this passage teach us regarding the importance of the doctrine of Christ?*
5. *How should this passage both encourage us and warn us?*