

Lesson 10: “The Spirit of Antichrist”

1 John 2:18-24

Craig Crawshaw

It is no newsflash that the spirit of antichrist is strong in the world. Opposition to all that Jesus stands for is all around us and pervades the news. Christianity and Christians are clearly under attack around the globe. And anyone who has studied the Bible knows of the single man known as the antichrist – the futuristic personality that will be a Satan-possessed leader who will head up a one world government. He will arise during the seven year period of God’s wrath known as the tribulation. In our passage of the day, the apostle John mentions the coming of the antichrist and gives some clear characteristics of his character. But John focuses more on “the spirit of antichrist” - the many other antichrists that already existed in his time and would come in the years to follow. You might be surprised to learn that the word “antichrist” only appears 4 times in the Bible – and all in John’s little epistles. Two of them appear in today’s passage.

1 John 2:18-24 *Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. 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; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.*

But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know. 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. Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.

As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.

THE MEANING OF THE WORD “ANTICHRIST”

The “christ” part of the word obviously speaks of Jesus the Christ, with the emphasis on the divine anointing of Jesus – for “Christ” (Greek) = “Messiah” (Hebrew) = “anointed One.”

The “anti” part of the word can refer to one of two things. It can either mean “against, or in opposition to” or it can mean “taking the place of.” Thus, “antichrist” can mean either (1) “in opposition to the anointed One” or (2) “taking the place of the anointed One.” And both meanings should be applied to both the one antichrist and those who represent the spirit of antichrist. Both the one-man antichrist and the other antichrists that will precede him will be against and in opposition to the true Christ, Jesus. But they will not initially appear as evil. Rather they will appear as a counterfeit, look-alike Jesus, wanting unity and peace for all. And they will deceive, even many Christians.

Mark 13:22-23 *For false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But take heed; behold, I have told you everything in advance.*

Romans 16:17-18 *Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.*

So note and take heed Christian, that the spirit of antichrist will come as a “wolf in sheep’s clothing” to deceive. Sometimes its true nature will be obvious, but just as likely it will be disguised.

“THE LAST HOUR”

When John says “it is the last hour” we must realize that it has been the “last hour” since the ascension of Jesus. The sense of “the last hour” is that the last 2000 years is the last dispensation of God’s grace to mankind. Salvation has been bought and offered; God is patiently waiting for all who will to be saved; and this is God’s last call to bring mankind to Himself.

Romans 2:4 *Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?*

Remember that Jesus, in answering, “What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” said:

Matthew 24:4-5 *See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in My name, saying, “I am the Christ” and will mislead many.*

And this has been happening for the last 2000 years. Either specific so-called prophets have claimed to be the Messiah, or else ordinary people have openly opposed the person and claims of Jesus, representing the “spirit of antichrist.”

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SPIRIT OF ANTICHRIST

In our passage today we have two of John’s mention of the “antichrist.” And here is the third:

1 John 4:3 *And every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.*

The “spirit of antichrist” then, is opposition to the divinity and special anointing of Jesus. And this opposition extends to all who follow Jesus. So here is a summary of the characteristics of the spirit of antichrist, according to the apostle John:

1. **FROM THE CHURCH** Many will come from the church, having never been true followers of Jesus. (*“They went out from us”*) This is sobering!
2. **RECOGNIZABLE** Though disguised, Christians should be able to recognize because we have an anointing to recognize the truth. (*“You have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know”*) This is hopeful!
3. **IMITATIONS** Antichrists will be evident by their false characterization of Jesus. (*“The one who denies that Jesus is the Christ”*) This is helpful!
4. **NOT OF GOD** Antichrists might say they are God-followers, but if they are not Christ-followers they can’t be God-followers. (*“Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father”*) This is insightful!

OBSERVATIONS OUTSIDE THE CHURCH

1. The reluctance by so many to voice the name of Jesus, and offended by those who do
2. The common use of the name of Jesus Christ as a curse word
3. The common belief that Jesus might be a good spiritual teacher and example, but not divine
4. The open persecution of pro-life Christians
5. The open persecution of Christians by the LGBTQ community (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, queer – or questioning)
6. The disappointing trend of the younger generation to not “need” church
7. “Happy Holidays” replacing “Merry Christmas” in so many retail stores
8. So many schools not allowing prayer or Bible on campus
9. The entertainment industry often portraying Christian believers as intolerant and ineffective

OBSERVATIONS INSIDE THE CHURCH

1. High priority on church unity at the expense of God’s truth
2. High priority of tolerance and acceptance at the expense of God’s unconditional love
3. High priority of social gospel at the expense of the gospel of salvation in Jesus
4. High priority of knowledge (“gnosis” = Gnosticism) at the expense of relationship with God

5. High priority on human authority at the expense of divine authority alone

DANGER OF THE SPIRIT OF ANTICHRIST

- ✓ When “turning over a new leaf” replacing supernaturally being “born again”
- ✓ When the “goodness” of a person ensures their salvation and heavenly destination
- ✓ When sermons of “positive thinking” and “God loves you” replace Biblical teaching
- ✓ When sermons seldom mention “Jesus” or “sin” or “repentance”

A CONCLUDING CHALLENGE

John concludes today’s passage with a challenge to stay strong in who you are and in what you have learned. He says:

1 John 2:24 *As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.*

- ✓ Know the truth of who Jesus is and what the gospel is so that you will be able to readily recognize the counterfeits when they appear. Remember:

1 John 2:21 *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.*

- ✓ You cannot dispose of antichrists – they will always be with us in this life – but you can oppose them and reveal them as to their true allegiance

APPENDIX INFORMATION (not given in the sermon)

THE ANTICHRIST

You might be thinking, I thought the Bible taught about the Antichrist, not just the spirit of antichrist. Well, again, the only Biblical mention of the word antichrist appears in 1 and 2 John. But yes, the Bible does teach of one who will rise at the end of the age, during the Tribulation. We speak of him as the antichrist, but he is not called such in our Bible.

In Daniel – “Another (King), Different from the Others”

Daniel 7:24-25 As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise; and another will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings. He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.

Through Jesus – “The Abomination of Desolation”

Jesus, when He spoke of “the end” said “When you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place ... “ (Matthew 24:15) This was not necessarily a name for the antichrist, but something that he does by “standing in the holy place” which would be the Holy of Holies, thus desecrated by his presence.

In 2 Thessalonians – “The Man of Lawlessness” (or, “Man of Sin”)

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

In Revelation – “The Beast”

Revelation 13:1-8 Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten diadems, and on his heads were blasphemous names. And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority.

I saw one of the heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast; they worshiped the dragon because he gave authority to the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?” There was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him. And he opened up his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, that is, those who dwell in heaven.

It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.

The seven heads are likely symbolizing previous empires Satan used in an attempt to annihilate the Jewish people. The ten horns are likely representing ten future nations that will unite together to form a revived final beast empire. The ten crowns are likely symbolizing the ten future kings of these ten nations who willingly will give their authority to one individual, the Antichrist. The images of leopard, bear and lion are likely symbolizing the predatory animalistic terrors of his personality.

The “time, times and half a time” most likely refers to “time” as a year, making the total designation 3 ½ years. This is the same as the 42 months mentioned in the book of Daniel, half of the 7 years of tribulation.

The only 4 mentions of “antichrist” in the Bible

1 John 2:18 Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour.

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

1 John 4:3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the *spirit* of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.

2 John 1:7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist.