

*On April 3rd, 1965 legendary radio host Paul Harvey issued a warning to America. In this warning, he detailed what he thought the devil should do if the devil wanted to keep destroying the United States. He said:*

*“If I were the devil ... If I were the Prince of Darkness, I’d want to engulf the whole world in darkness. And I’d have a third of its real estate, and four-fifths of its population, but I wouldn’t be happy until I had seized the ripest apple on the tree — Thee. So, I’d set about however necessary to take over the United States. I’d subvert the churches first — I’d begin with a campaign of whispers. With the wisdom of a serpent, I would whisper to you as I whispered to Eve: ‘Do as you please.’”*

*“To the young, I would whisper that ‘The Bible is a myth.’ I would convince them that man created God instead of the other way around. I would confide that what’s bad is good, and what’s good is ‘square.’ And the old, I would teach to pray, after me, ‘Our Father, which art in Washington...’”*

*“And then I’d get organized. I’d educate authors in how to make lurid literature exciting, so that anything else would appear dull and uninteresting. I’d threaten TV with dirtier movies and vice versa. I’d pedal narcotics to whom I could. I’d sell alcohol to ladies and gentlemen of distinction. I’d tranquilize the rest with pills.”*

*“If I were the devil, I’d soon have families that war with themselves, churches at war with themselves, and nations at war with themselves; until each in its turn was consumed. And with promises of higher ratings, I’d have mesmerizing media fanning the flames. If I were the devil, I would encourage schools to refine young intellects, but neglect to discipline emotions — just let those run wild, until before you knew it, you’d have to have drug sniffing dogs and metal detectors at every schoolhouse door.”*

*“Within a decade I’d have prisons overflowing, I’d have judges promoting pornography — soon I could evict God from the courthouse, then from the schoolhouse, and then from the houses of Congress. And in His own churches, I would substitute psychology for religion, and deify science. I would lure priests and pastors into misusing boys and girls, and church money. If I were the devil, I’d make the symbols of Easter an egg and the symbol of Christmas a bottle.”*

*“If I were the devil, I’d take from those who have, and give to those who wanted until I had killed the incentive of the ambitious. **And what do you bet? I couldn’t get whole states to promote gambling as the way to get rich?** I would caution*

*against extremes and hard work, in patriotism, in moral conduct. I would convince the young that marriage is old-fashioned, that swinging is more fun, that what you see on TV is the way to be. And thus, I could undress you in public, and I could lure you into bed with diseases for which there is no cure. In other words, if I were the devil, I'd just keep right on doing on what he's doing."*

*"Paul Harvey, good day."*

And, I need to remind you – that was from a 1965 radio broadcast which I think describes the world we know today.

This morning we are continuing with this letter from the Apostle John to Christians – Christians back then and there, and Christians here and now, who need to know what is really going on in the world around them and they need to understand that their struggles are actually part of a much greater conflict between God and the forces of evil.

So, if you have your Bible, turn to **1 John 2** and we will begin with **verse 18** where John says,

**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.**

Once again, John begins with the word “**children**” – so, he’s talking to the church, and he says to them **it is the last hour**. That phrase “**the last hour**” – said some 2000 years ago, can be confusing if we only understand it as a duration of time for it seems to entail more than just *time* but also the *kind of time*. It is the last hour – referring to an uncertain length of time between the Lord’s ascension into heaven and His promised return from heaven – it’s a time where the full revelation of Jesus Christ has been recorded for us in the Bible – it’s a time when those who are opposed to the Lord will come out of the woodwork and attempt to lure people away – and it’s also a time that’s running out.

If you noticed in this verse, John uses the word “**antichrist**”, both in a singular form and in a plural form, and that might surprise you. That word “*antichrist*” is an important word to understand in this last hour, and just so you know, the prefix “*anti*” has a couple of meanings. First, as you might expect, it means “*against*.” The Antichrist is against Christ. We understand that, we expect that, but another meaning for “*anti*” is “*in place of*.” The Antichrist opposes Christ and he also seeks to replace Christ.

Now, to address the singular form, if you recall from our study in **Revelation**, we talked about *the* Antichrist – this one man – prophesied to be Satan’s superman who rides in on a white horse like a hero to save the world. He will be everything the world admires and chooses to follow, but he’s very evil and deceptive and cunning, and during the Tribulation period he leads humanity into rebellion against the one true God, he seeks to be worshipped in place of God, and he ultimately draws his followers down to their own destruction.

That’s *the* Antichrist of the Tribulation period – and we are waiting for him, but here John says **that many antichrists** (plural) have appeared which identifies the kind of days we live in. **What proof do we have that this is the last hour?** Well, in the context of this verse, John would answer – we know it’s the last hour because we’ve heard that the final antichrist is coming – and we know it’s the last hour because many antichrists have already come.

The Apostle Paul warned about them in **Acts 20:29-30** when he said:

*<sup>29</sup>“I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; <sup>30</sup>and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.”*

According to Paul, these antichrists are those who distort the truth in order to draw people away. These are the false teachers and preachers and missionaries who claim to represent Jesus Christ, and yet they knowingly distort what the Bible says about Him – they are antichrists – and if that’s not bad enough, they come from our own selves meaning they come from the church – the Christian community. That’s what John says in **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; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.**

John says these antichrists – these false teachers and preachers and missionaries who foreshadow the coming of the Antichrist, are **from us**. Like wolves in sheep’s clothing, they look like us, they talk like us, they rub elbows with us, but they are not really **of us**. Jesus spoke about this very thing in a parable found in **Matthew 13**, beginning with **verse 24**.

*<sup>24</sup> Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. <sup>25</sup> But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. <sup>26</sup> But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became*

*evident also. <sup>27</sup> The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ <sup>28</sup> And he said to them, ‘An enemy has done this!’ The slaves said to him, ‘Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?’ <sup>29</sup> But he said, ‘No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. <sup>30</sup> Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.”’”*

In this parable by Jesus, we are told that the enemy sowed these toxic weeds – these tares into a wheat field to harm the owner, and just so you know, that before tares become ripe, they look like just wheat, and Jesus said let them remain in the field, let them grow together, and when it’s time for harvest, then they will be sorted out.

In the world we know today, our greatest danger may not be from without, but from within – for these antichrists are amongst us – they emerge from the Christian community, they seek to distort doctrine by subtly chipping away at biblical truths of *who* Jesus is and *what* He has done, they try to redefine Jesus and reinvent Him, and eventually, they reveal their true colors – they are gone. John says their departure from the church is a clear sign they were never really part of us.

Now just so you know, John isn’t talking about someone who leaves one church to begin attending another church, and he’s not talking about someone who backsides from the Lord for a season.

*I was reminded of the story about a five-year-old boy who became angry with his parents and decided to run away from home. He walked out of his house with a small suitcase and trudged around the block again and again. Finally, when it was beginning to grow dark, a police officer stopped him. “What are you doing?” asked the officer. The little boy answered, “I’m running away.” The officer smiled as he said, “Look, I’ve had my eye on you for a while, and you’ve been doing nothing but walking around the block. You call that running away?” The little fellow burst into tears, “Well, what do you want me to do? I ain’t allowed to cross the street.” The boy obviously respected his parents and knew that they loved him, so he couldn’t really run away.*

Sometimes God’s children become discouraged and even rebellious. They may disobey the Lord and seek their own way for a while, but if they truly belong to Christ, they will find they are held by His power – a power beyond themselves.

Like the little boy who could not carry out his threat to run away for good – a child of God cannot, with finality, separate from God – they will persevere, but for those who depart from the church and the core beliefs of the faith – in other words, they leave both physically and theologically – John says this reveals that they were never really part of God’s people to begin with.

Yes, they may speak the name of Jesus, they may know the Christian lingo, they may understand the Christian culture, they may teach and preach, but they are not saved.

Charles Taze Russell was raised in a protestant Congregationalist church who at an early age rejected the doctrine of eternal damnation for the lost – so he left the church to start his own group, which in time, would later be called the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Without any theological education, without any knowledge of Hebrew or Greek – he admitted that in court, he reinterpreted the Bible to suit his own level of understanding, and he swayed many people to follow him. He denied the Trinity, the deity of Christ, His resurrection and His return, and he rejected the existence of hell – and let me show you an example of just how subtly he redefined and reinvented Jesus. This is **John 1:1** in my Bible:

***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.***

This speaks to the triune nature of God and to the deity of Christ – Jesus is God from the very beginning, the second Person in the Godhead, but Russell could not accept that doctrine, so this is how it’s written in their New World Translation.

***In the beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god.***

**Did you catch that?** Just add one little letter – the first letter of the alphabet – and it drastically distorts the truth, and now Jesus becomes another god – a lesser god.

We could spend all day doing this, but if you investigate the history of cults in the world we know today, you will find that in many cases their founders were once connected to the church but departed both physically and theologically – they were “*with us*” but they were really not “*of us*” – and so they left us.

Now, on the heels of his warning about these antichrists, John shifts his attention to encouraging true believers, and he tells them they know the truth – they know

enough to discern what is right and what is wrong. Beginning with **verse 20**, he says,

**<sup>20</sup> But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know. <sup>21</sup> 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.**

John's purpose in writing was not to teach some new truth or some secret insight like the Gnostics, but to remind these believers that they already had all the knowledge they needed to reject the false teaching that had been tossed around their churches. John points out that *all* true Christians know God, the Holy Spirit dwells in them and imparts wisdom to them, and because they have received the truth, they possess the resources for recognizing a lie when they see it.

*There was conversation that occurred between a husband and a wife. The wife called and said, "Something's wrong with the car." He patiently replied, "What's wrong with it?" She answered, "There's water in the carburetor" to which he responded, "Honey, you don't have a clue what a carburetor is." She persisted, "Trust me, there's water in the carburetor."*

*Feeling like he wasn't getting anywhere and that he needed to come and check things out for himself, he asked, "So, where's the car?" And she replied, "It's in the swimming pool."*

Here's the point: we don't have to understand all the in's and out's of theology to know when something's all wet. That's what John is saying to these Christians.

*"You know how to distinguish the truth you have been taught at the beginning from these distorted lies that have circulated among you. You know the foundational saving truths of the gospel, and you don't need me to tell you that this other stuff is heresy, and on top of that, you have the Holy Spirit dwelling in you to help you discern what is right and what is wrong."*

Charles Swindoll asks this question, *"Have you ever found yourself catching some kind of preacher or teacher on the television spewing nonsense, and you think, "How could anybody believe this?" Then the camera pans across the audience with a wide shot and you see an arena-sized building packed with people nodding, smiling, clapping their hands, and shouting 'Amen!'"* Our right response is to thank God that His Spirit has intuitively opened our eyes to foundational gospel truth and He has given us discernment through His Word – we just need to be in His Word and we need to put into practice what we already know.

Now in these last two verses, John explains that any attempt to deny the biblical truths of *who* Jesus is and *what* He has done, is to deny the Father who sent Him. Let's look at **verses 22 and 23**.

**<sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.**

As you can see, God the Father and the God the Son are linked. These antichrists, the false teachers and preachers and missionaries may say, "*We worship God, but we reject what the Bible says about Jesus,*" and John would say, "*you can't do that.*" If you deny Jesus – you also deny the Father who sent Him.

The Apostle Paul really hammered this point home when he said in **Galatians 1:8-9**,

***<sup>8</sup>But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! <sup>9</sup>As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!***

Anyone, even an angel from heaven, who comes along with some new and improved knowledge and attempts to teach and preach anything other than the true gospel which is centered on our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and on His finished work – that person is an antichrist who is accursed. They do not know Jesus, and therefore, they do not know God.

Now sometimes it is said, "*We all worship the same God – we're just taking different paths to Him.*"

Well, here's the question to ask: ***"Was your God perfectly revealed in the Person of Jesus Christ?"*** If not, then trust me – we don't worship the same God. Yes, they may be sincere, but sincerity does not make things true. And yes, their beliefs and their spirituality may do them some good in this life – but it does nothing for them in the life to come, because in rejecting Jesus they are rejecting God.

*It's often said that the best way to detect a lie is to know the truth. In the world we know, we live in a day where modern technologies have opened up the flood gates for deceptive con artists who want to scam us out of our money, and to avoid from*

*being ripped off, we must be on our guard, being able to discern what is true and what is a false.*

In the same way, there are spiritual con artists within the Christian community who claim to be one thing, when in fact they are something else. They are antichrists – false teachers and preachers and missionaries who prey upon the unsuspecting and untaught, and the damage they can do is far more dangerous – it has eternal implications. We need to reject anything that is contrary to the gospel truth found in the Bible – we need to stay in our Bibles, and we need our Bibles stay in us.

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