

Unshaken by Antichrists

1 John 2:18-23

Introduction

The apostle John has just talked about the difference the Father's love at work in us makes. Our desire is to do the will of God, not to pursue the desires of the flesh, the eyes, and the pride of life. God's love for us has sparked our love for God, displacing our natural love for the world system in settled opposition to God as One who interferes with the self-indulgence and self-promotion that drives the culture of the times in every generation.

Because the battle between pleasing God and worldly desires is an internal battle of heart desires, none of us can avoid it. The war for hearts goes on not just in the community at large, but also in the congregation of professing worshipers of Christ. Hence, John's command to believers not to love the world or the things in it—that is, the selfish desires that drive the anti-God world system.

Most of the time every congregation is a mixed multitude of genuine born-again believers who fight this ongoing battle, and those who only profess to know Jesus but are still pursuing worldly desires. In time, however, the true state of a person's heart

becomes known. That reality is what John addresses next.

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. **19** 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. **20** But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. **21** 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. **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. **23** No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.

1. The Era of Antichrists (18-19)
2. The Anointing of the Holy Spirit (20-21)
3. The Lies against Jesus (22-23)

1. The Era of Antichrists (18-19)

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.

Children—expresses John's tender affection for his readers and his sense of responsibility to teach them and care for them as those who are growing in Christ

It is the last hour—*history is not an endless cycle of events, but rather is moving toward God's determined goal for it.* God rules it and foretells what will happen. There is urgency for the believer to live in light of history's destiny.

What does John mean by the last hour? We find frequent reference to the last days (Micah 4:1; Joel 2:28—Acts 2:17; Hebrews 1:1-2) and the last times (1 Peter 1:20; 1 Corinthians 10:11). In the last days of the last days perilous times will come (2 Timothy 3:1ff) and scoffers will arise who mock at Christ's coming again (2 Peter 3:3). Jude 18—scoffers following ungodly passions; 1 Timothy 4:1—departure from the faith for doctrines of demons; 1 Peter 1:5—salvation to be revealed in the last time; James 5:3—laid up treasure in the last days—impending judgment; culminating in Christ's raising the dead and judging the world (John 6:39-40, 44, 54; 11:24; 12:48).

With the coming of Jesus the light has come, and the darkness passing away, as John has already mentioned. We live in this present age that will usher in the age to come. Jesus

has inaugurated that new age and has condemned the present age. It is passing away. From the incarnation of God the Son, Jesus the Messiah onward, opposition to Christ as the promised Spirit-anointed Savior-King of the world reveals itself for what it is. *We live in that era where rejection of God shows itself most clearly in hostility to Christ. It is an anti-Christian era because it is also a Christian era.*

John links this anti-Christian spirit of the times to the last hour. It will not remain this way forever. It is a mark of the coming end of the age.

You have heard that antichrist is coming. How? When?

John is the only one who uses this precise term, but we find the concept in the OT and the NT.

In Mark 13:14 Jesus refers to the abomination of desolation prophesied by Daniel (Daniel 11:31, 12:11) and warns that it is yet to come. He warns about false Christs who will come

Paul refers to the man of lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians 2, and describes him the same way Daniel does as one who opposes God and exalts himself as god in the temple of God. Paul further warns that the mystery of lawlessness is already at work.

Revelation talks about the beast and the false prophet, using language similar to Daniel's kingdom visions in Daniel 7-8.

The personal antichrist is prophesied yet to come, but there are already many antichrists. Some teach that John is redefining the personal antichrist as the spirit of antichrist evident in the many antichrists.

More likely he is making the point that *the personal antichrist will be the culmination of the spirit of antichrist we see throughout these last days in the lives of many antichrists*—not just world leaders, but individuals who once passed themselves off as members of the body of Christ, but have defected and turned against Him, thus revealing their true disposition of heart—a heart set against the authority of Christ and the redemption He offers to those who repent from their self-promoting sin and rely on Him as their Lord and Savior.

1 John 2:19

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.

Sobering reality. "They went out from us."
These are friends we thought were fellow

believers, part of the family of God—with names and faces, people of whom we may have fond memories of serving the Lord together. (Remember that Judas Iscariot was one of the twelve.)

Going out from us is not just moving their membership to another local church. Rather it is leaving the universal church, abandoning the faith and the company of those who believe. A rejection of Christ and the gospel. A disdain for His people.

It's one thing to critique the foibles and flaws of a particular Christian group, but we must be very careful where that goes. Holding gospel-believing Christians up for ridicule borders on attacking the gospel itself and dishonoring Christ. True believers are members of His body. They are brothers and sisters in the household of faith. Truly born-again people find a loving disposition in their hearts toward other believers. If they slip into joining the accuser of the brethren, their conscience cries out. They have to repent of it. They are doing the devil's work, who is the enemy of God and of Christ.

"They went out from us because they were not of us."

"They share our earthly company but not our heavenly birth." John Stott, 106

They were not regenerate. They were not born again. God's spiritual DNA was not in them. If they had been of us, they would have continued with us.

Part of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints

Mark 13:13b

The one who endures to the end will be saved.

"Not because salvation is the reward of endurance, but because endurance is the hallmark of the saved." John Stott, 105

One of the most obvious ways unregenerate persons expose their true identity is to pull away from the company of believers. They feel out of place because they are. We are united by the indwelling Spirit of God. His work in us gives us a sense of God's love for us and gives us a love for others who have been born into His family.

A believer who has allowed sin to remain unchecked in his life will experience the same symptoms of alienation from other believers. But he cannot stay that way. He must come back because of who he is. He can't stay away.

This is the difference between a Judas, who betrayed the Lord, and a Peter, who denied the Lord. Judas never came back. Peter did.

Judas suffered regret and killed himself. Peter suffered regret and repented, rejoining the Christ-followers.

Jesus had predicted it:

Luke 22:31-32

³¹ "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, ³² but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."

It grieves us to see professing believers turn away from Jesus, but do not let their departure shake you. It was happening even in the first century, and it will continue to happen. It has less to do with their rejection of Christians than their antagonism against Christ. Christ protects those who love Him from those who don't when those that are antichrists leave, revealing who they actually are.

- Urgency of the hour—live your life with history's destiny in mind
- Reality of opposition to Christ—don't be surprised or shaken by it
- Importance of Christian community—stay connected to God's people

Satan with his antichrists—so powerful and pervasive; what hope do we have of survival?

2. The Anointing of the Holy Spirit (20-21)

20 But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. **21** 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.

Notice John's stress on true knowledge versus the kind of so-called knowledge of the Gnostics (the knowing ones) who claimed superiority over simple-minded Christians. Still the world's tactic—disdain, intimidation, redefining terms

A lie is not sophisticated or superior. It's just a lie. The opposite of truth and therefore the opposite of true knowledge.

Christ or Messiah means "the Anointed One"—anointed with the Holy Spirit without measure; prophets, priests, and kings were anointed with oil to symbolize the empowering of the Spirit for their task. Christ Jesus gives the Holy Spirit to those who believe in Him.

John 7:38-39

38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" **39** Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not

been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Romans 8:9

You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

John 15:26

But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.

The anointing of the Holy Spirit is what convinces the believer that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Matthew 16:13-17

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴ And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

What separates those who follow the teaching of antichrist and those who follow the teaching of Christ is the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. What we're going to learn in the next verses is that if the spirit you're listening to does not honor Jesus Christ the Son of God, it's a lying spirit not the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit indwells every genuine believer, convincing him or her of the true identity and powerful work of Jesus.

Leave Jesus out and you don't have Christianity. You don't even have God. You just have a satanically inspired, manmade religion. You might as well be worshiping a stone. Such fraudulent religion is powerless to save and is at war with the living God.

The Holy Spirit regenerates, seals, convicts, assures us
Walk in the Spirit
Self-reliance is insufficient. We are strong only in the Lord.
Spiritual health—best strategy for winning the battles
Know the real and you'll spot the counterfeit.

3. The Lies against Jesus (22-23)

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. ²³ No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.

Later in 1 John 4:2-3 John further explains
² 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.

Three-fold denial

- Denies Jesus is the Christ (Messiah)
- Denies the Father and the Son
- Denies the Son

The test of authenticity here is what a person thinks of the person and work of Jesus. If he denies Jesus is the promised Messiah, he's a liar. He is an antichrist. The Messiah was the promised Savior of the world—the only one who can deliver humanity from sin and death. Anyone who promotes some other way of finding deliverance is denying the work that Jesus the Messiah alone has accomplished.

If he denies the deity of Jesus as God the Son, he is a liar. Anyone who holds that Jesus was just a good man or just a prophet or teacher, but not God in the flesh, is denying the Person of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Scriptures.

If he denies the divine union of Father and Son in the Godhead, he is a liar. The authoritative words Jesus taught and the miraculous works He did were from the Father. He and the Father were one in these activities. So anyone that denies this union of Father and Son, or the divine reliability and authority of Christ's teaching, or the genuine reality of His powerful miracles, is denying who Jesus actually is and what Jesus actually did.

Sometimes people balk at the authority of the words of Jesus while they claim to be trusting in Jesus Himself. They argue that doctrine doesn't matter, only that you believe in Jesus. It's not uncommon for such people to end up dropping Jesus from the equation altogether, and to argue that all that matters is that you are seeking God, or just doing your best. They have more confidence in manmade healing therapies and rituals than in the power of Jesus to save people to the uttermost. And they deny His authority to judge.

The denial that was rising in popularity and would reach full force in the second century was the gnostic heresy that God could not take on human flesh, and that God could not die. So they taught that the spirit of Christ came on the man Jesus during his ministry and left him before he died on the cross.

There is Muslim teaching today that is very similar to this, since Islam considers Jesus to be a prophet who did not sin and who did miracles, but denies his deity and denies that he died on the cross for us. The influence of Greek dualism—that matter is evil, and spirit is good—brought about this corrupted doctrine of Christ. *Human philosophy, speculation, and mystic ideas became more important than clear Scriptural teaching and historical reality established by eyewitness testimony. To be considered educated and wise, you had to give up doctrine that was viewed as primitive and unsophisticated.*

But whatever deviation from the truth about Jesus Christ one's denial takes, he or she is taking on the position of an antichrist, aligned not with God, but with Satan, the enemy of God.

This can happen where you might least expect it, among those versed in the Scriptures and in religious practices and who give lipservice to God. Listen to Jesus' words to the Pharisees whom Jesus identified as of the world and who would die in their sins.

John 8:42-47

⁴² Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. ⁴³ Why do you not

understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. ⁴⁴ You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵ But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. ⁴⁶ Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? ⁴⁷ Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God."

Earlier Jesus had taught

John 5:21-23

²¹ For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. ²² For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, ²³ that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.

No wonder then that John teaches here that whoever acknowledges the Son also has the Father.

Stay Christ-centered, Christ-focused.

He is the Hero of the gospel—without Him there is no good news at all

People need Him—before it is too late

Conclusion

One day every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, but for many it will be too late. Don't let that be you.

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Closing Song: Show Us Christ

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways does/should knowing history has a purpose and is moving toward a God-appointed destiny shape how you live each day?
2. What examples of the spirit of antichrist have you observed in our own world?
3. Why do you think leaving the company of other Christians reveals a person to be against Christ (an antichrist), and what does that call for us to do in terms of our relationships to other true believers?
4. If the anointing is to symbolize the Spirit's empowering for a God-appointed task, what does the anointing of the holy one indicate about a believer's purpose and strength in a hostile world?
5. Why is it important to know that our commitment to the truth of Christ

- comes through the power of the Holy Spirit and not through our own power?
6. What are some current examples of lies that pass themselves off as superior to Scriptural truth?
 7. Denying that Jesus is the promised Savior-King, the unique Messiah is lying. Denying that Jesus is God the Son, one with the Father in His teaching and His miracles and in His authoritative judgment is lying. What lies about Jesus have you heard?
 8. If the Person and Work of Christ is the ultimate doctrinal test for whether someone is an antichrist, what kinds of religion are actually of the devil and not of God?
 9. What are ways you can be more Christ-focused in your thinking and living?