

Preparing for Spiritual Battle: Part 2

1 John 2:18-27

Maintaining spiritual intimacy with God is not automatic or easy: It will require resisting the world and its lusts. Who is behind this attack on the faith of Christians? They are “antichrists,” forerunners of the Antichrist who will be judged in the Great Tribulation. Know your enemy...

The Antichrist – and many antichrists...

Recognizing the antichrists

- They are ‘forerunners’ of *the* antichrist (18)
- They are false apostles (19)
- They are exposed by the Holy Spirit (20)
- They lie against known Truth (21)
- They deny that Jesus is the Christ (22; cf. 4.1-4)
- They deny the Son (deity) (23)
- They oppose ‘beginning’ truth (24)
- They undermine assurance of salvation (25)
- They try to deceive Christians (26)
- They oppose the Spirit teaching us (27)



1 John 2:18-27

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 a liar if not the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? Anyone who denies the Father and the Son is an antichrist. 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 have 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. This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life. These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.

What is the job of a pastor? One fourth the way through the 21st century after Christ's Christ, the purpose of the Church, what the New Testament calls the Body of Christ, is more misunderstood than ever. This is reflected in confusion about what a pastor is supposed to be, or do. As we prepare to call a new pastor here at NBBC, this question is important.

As a pastor for 40 years, I know many different answers to this question. Some folks think a pastor has the easiest job in the world – he only works one hour a week! He’s a spiritual anesthetist; he puts folks to sleep at church every Sunday.

For others, he’s a super-Christian. He’s got strength, wisdom, patience, and all the spiritual gifts. This misconception about pastors leads to churches imploding when a pastor is shown to have feet of clay.

In recent decades, a new phenomenon has changed what folks think a pastor is again. Today, Christians flock to churches led by CEO-pastors – men who oversee massive budgets and multiple campuses. In 21st-century America, pastoral success is identified by dollar signs and thousands of followers.

As a result, many pastors fight depression and despair. This year the median attendance at churches in America is about 65 people. If pastoral success is lots of money and lots of people, no wonder they consider themselves to be a failure. But is this the job of a pastor?

It may surprise you to learn that church leaders weren’t called pastors in the New Testament. Elders led churches, and their job was to “pastor” or “shepherd” the flock (from the Greek word ποιμαίνω, *poimainō*). What do shepherds do?

Two things: They feed the sheep, and they guard sheep. They make sure the flock is well fed, and they protect the sheep from wild beasts that would attack them.

Now let’s apply that to the local church. What is a pastor’s job? To create a mega-church? No. First, he must make sure

that those in the church are spiritually well-fed. Secondly, he must make sure they are protected from faith-killers.

How can a pastor accomplish those two critical tasks? The answer comes in Paul’s instruction to his emissary Timothy in 2 Tim. 4.2: “Preach the Word”! What does preaching God’s word do? It feeds and protects God’s people. What does the teaching of the Bible protect Christians from?

In Acts 20.28, Paul told the elders of the church in Ephesus to “shepherd the church of God.” Then he said this:

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

Who are these savage wolves who will arise even from within the church?! They are false teachers. We see them all through the New Testament. In 2 Cor. 11.15 Paul calls them servants of Satan, disguised as servants of Christ! And in the passage we’ve read this morning, John calls them antichrists – false teachers who undermine the faith of believers in the church!

Now, we’ve all heard of the Antichrist. The Bible speaks of this coming world leader – here’s a quick overview:

- Dan. 7.25 – he will speak out against God
- Dan. 9.27 – he brings world desolation and destruction
- Mt. 24.15 – he will desecrate the temple of God
- 2 Thess. 2.9 – he is animated by Satan
- Rev. 13 – he leads people astray in the Great Tribulation

But we also learn in 2 Thess. 2.7a that just as Satan is going to work through *the Antichrist* in the future, even now he is working. How is Satan working? One way is through the “antichrists” – false teachers who proclaim his message.

The question is simple: How can we recognize these false teachers – these ‘antichrists’ – today? In 1 John 2.18-27, John lists ten ways to identify the *antichrists*, so that we can avoid their destructive infection.

Recognizing the antichrists (false teachers)

- They are ‘forerunners’ of the antichrist (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.

In other words, antichrists today are going to do the same kind of thing the coming Antichrist will do in the Great Tribulation. He will deceive people, make them think he is from God. In 2 Cor. 11, Paul said that Satan presents himself as an angel of light – so don’t be surprised if his servants present themselves the same way. They infiltrate the church of Jesus Christ, then preach lies. This happened in the New Testament church, and it is rampant today.

- They are false apostles (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.

Some wrongly think that Paul is saying that people who leave the church show that they were never saved. That makes no sense here. These false teachers were *in the church*! That is why they were so dangerous. They said they had come from the apostles – then gave false teaching. John is writing from Jerusalem, and tells these Christians in Ephesus, “Don’t believe them. They went out from us, but they aren’t of us!” The key is that they do not teach biblical truth.

- They are exposed by the Holy Spirit (20)

But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know.

The ‘anointing of the Holy One’ indicates the work of the Holy Spirit, who lives in every believer. Just as Jesus told His disciples that when the Holy Spirit came, He would guide them into all truth, so too the moment a person believes in Jesus as Savior, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in us, and He becomes our teacher. False teachers are exposed when we read the Bible, and allow the Holy Spirit to teach us.

- They lie against known Truth (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.

The more that we read and study the Scriptures, the stronger our ‘spiritual white blood cells’ become to fight off infection from false teachers. John’s readers were well taught – they knew the truth, so when they heard false teachers telling them something different, they knew it was a lie.

- They deny that Jesus is the Christ (22; cf. 4.1-4)

Who is a liar if not the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? Anyone who denies the Father and the Son is an antichrist.

In v22, and v23, John strikes at the very heart of what false teachers says. First, they deny that Jesus is the Christ – that He is *the Anointed One*, the *Messiah*, the One who guarantees eternal life to all who believe in Him! This is a frontal attack on the gospel message. We present a simple message to the unbelieving world: Jesus died on the cross for your sins and rose from the dead. That’s the gospel message (1 Cor.15.1-4)!

In the first century, and still today, many say that believing in Jesus as God’s Messiah, your personal Savior, is not enough. They may even agree that Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead, but they will deny that this is enough to save you. They deny that eternal life is a free gift given to all who believe in Jesus. This message has undermined the assurance and joy of millions of Christians.

- They deny the Son (deity) (23)

Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.

Here John gets specific. At the heart of all false teaching is the denial that Jesus is the Son of God. After all, if Jesus is God, then everything He affirmed, and everything He did, is absolute truth. The first thing that every false teacher does is to undermine the deity of Jesus Christ. Every cult, every ism,

every progressive religion, in some way disavows the unique place of Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

- They oppose ‘beginning’ truth (24)

As for you, let that abide in you which you have 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.

False teachers – antichrists – in the first century, and today, love to discover ‘new truth.’ John tells us to hold on to the truth that you’ve heard from the beginning – not to be swayed by the latest fad of teachings. I routinely tell young men who want to go into the ministry and are going to Bible college or seminary to ‘hold on to their beliefs with both hands’! Why? Because false teachers often have theological degrees and positions of respect – but they are educated beyond their own good.

- They undermine assurance of salvation (25)

This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life.

The tragic result of the teachings of antichrists is that many believers lose their assurance of salvation. John reiterates here a truth that is central to his epistle: God has promised us eternal life in His Son Jesus Christ. If you ever sense that the teaching of a preacher or theologian is causing you to doubt your salvation, hold on to God’s promise. As John writes later in 1 John 5.1, *Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God...*

- They try to deceive Christians (26)

These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.

Satan is in the business of counterfeiting God's truth. If a counterfeit doesn't look like the real thing, it will never fool anybody. Satan knows that. His counterfeit Christianity looks like the real thing...but it steals your assurance and joy in Jesus Christ. Satan is, as Jesus said, 'the father of lies' (John 8.44).

- They oppose the Spirit teaching us (27)

As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.

One of the most common refrains I hear from false teachers goes something like this: "The best theologians in the world agree that what I'm saying is true. No one believes that old teaching any more." Modern theologians act like truth is whatever most theologians say – like it's a vote, and whoever gets the most votes wins.

My response is this: God plus one is a majority! As someone once put it, "The Bible says it, I believe it, and that settles it for me." Someone may look down their nose at you for what you believe, but if it comes from God, it's true.

Conclusion

When Jesus sent His disciples out to witness, He didn't sugar-coat their task. He said this to them.

"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves. But beware of men..." (Matt. 10.16-17a)

That advice still rings true today. Satan is alive and well on planet earth. He is still seeking to blind the eyes of those who do not know God. He is still deceiving the world. And he still has his *antichrists* – just as he did in the first century – who spread his lies. As ambassadors for Christ in this world, we must be aware of *antichrists*, and never let them destroy our intimacy with God and fellowship with each other.

blindly follow “antichrists” without knowing it. How can 1 Jn. 2.18-27 help us recognize, and resist, such false teachers?

Digging Deeper

1. It's been said that while Jesus won the “war” with sin and death at the cross and by His resurrection from the dead, the “battle” with sin continues. In this ongoing battle, there are unbelievers and believers. Satan has a battle plan for both “fronts”. How does he seek to defeat unbelievers (Matt. 13.19; 2 Cor. 4.4)? What does the ‘progressive blindness’ of unbelievers look like (see Rom. 1.21-32)? What are some of the ways that Satan attacks Christians (Eph. 6.11-12; 1 Cor. 7.5; 1 Thess. 2.18; Rev. 2.10; 12.10)? How does Satan attack you?
2. Satan and his demons work through people in this world with a goal of keeping unbelievers enslaved to sin (Rom. 6.20-21). A prime way to achieve this goal is causing Christians to lose their confidence in Christ (Heb. 10.35-39), rendering them of little value in reaching the lost. Amazingly, the local church is fertile ground for him to spread his lies! What New Testament examples of this can you think of (see 2 Cor. 11.12-15; Gal. 1.6-9; Heb. 13.9; 2 Pet. 2.1; etc.)? Of course, Satan is still at it today! What examples of his infiltration of the modern church in these ‘last days’ are you aware of?
3. John wants believers to enjoy intimacy with Christ and fellowship with each other, but he knows that Satan will use anyone he can to prevent that happening. John calls these false teachers “antichrists”. We've all heard of the Antichrist; what do we know about him (see Dan. 7.25; 9.27; Matt. 24.15ff; 2 Thess. 2.3-10; Rev. 13). John is the only biblical writer to use the title “antichrist”; he uses it to refer to 1) the future world ruler (1 Jn. 2.18a), 2) the spirit of antichrist that infects men (1 Jn. 4.3; see 2 Thess. 2.7a), and 3) false teachers who proclaim the message of antichrist (2.18b, 22; 4.1-3; 2 Jn. 7). What traits of *the Antichrist* are evident in the *antichrists* (false teachers) in 1 Jn. 2.18-27? What examples of ‘antichrists’ do you see today?
4. Prophecy gurus often predict who the antichrist is (Putin, Pope Leo, Prince William, Obama, Trump, etc.), but most will be surprised and not realize who it is when he arises. Similarly, Christians today may