

The Antichrist

From pulpits, television, and writings you are being treated to fantastic claims about that awesome and mysterious character, The Antichrist. His anticipated soon appearance is supposed to be an evidence of the imminent coming of Christ and the fulfillment of “end time prophecies.” According to the sensationalists and alarmists, the collapse of our civilization caused by the Y2K problem may be the opening of the way for dreaded “The Antichrist”! Just one year to go! Some of those screamers seem to take a devilish delight in anticipating what is to happen our sinful world.

Would you like to have all the authentic information that exists about the antichrist? Great! I can give it to you right here, for through the Spirit, John gives us all that information in the quotations below. (All quotations from NIV)

*“Dear children, **this is the last hour**; and as you have heard that the **antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour.** They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.*

*But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. Who is the liar? **It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist** – he denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also” (1 John 2:18-22).*

*“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. **This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world**” (1 John 3:1-3).*

*“Many deceivers, who **do not acknowledge that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.** Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the **teaching of Christ** does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and **does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work**” (2 John 7-11).*

There you have it all! Everything else you hear about the antichrist is commentary or pure speculation. John is clear enough that little commentary is in order, but you would not expect me to stop here without telling you what I think about it, would you? ☺ These quotations are being given in greater length in order to emphasize the setting and context in which John wrote them.

Although John’s words have been **preserved for** people of all times, they were not **addressed to** people of all times. They were written to further inform living disciples whom John had taught previously on the subject. They were living in the *last hour*, and the presence of many antichrists was evidence that it was the last hour. In spite of John’s

plain declaration that **they** were living in the **last hour**, many modern teachers are contradicting John by saying **we** are living in the last hour. Was that last hour to stretch out for many centuries? Preposterous! What twisting men will do, even as I have done to John's words in the past, to uphold such a preconceived notion!

The apostle was not writing because they did not know the truth about this matter already, for he had already taught them. He was further warning against those who would deny that Jesus is the Christ – that he had come in the flesh as the Son of God. There were already plenty of those who were “against” Christ – antichrist – present among them in that last hour of Judaism before the *parousia*, the coming of Christ in vengeance against rejecting Israel. The Jewish rejecters believed in God but not the Son. John told them they could not have God while denying the Son.

It is common to hear someone proposing to “test the spirits” by using prooftexts to argue against some debatable practice. Such an effort ignores the entire context. What was the *test*? It was whether or not the prophet acknowledged that Jesus the Messiah had come in the flesh from God. And what is *the teaching of Christ* in which they must continue in order to have both the Father and the Son? It was that Jesus was the Messiah in the flesh without whom they could not claim the Father. How totally inconceivable it is that this passage would be perverted into a prooftext against such things as hand-clapping or using an instrument while singing, singing during Communion, weekday Communion, or eating a meal in a “church building”. By perversion of this text, such practices have been declared to be as damning as the denial of both the Father and the Son!

Some claim to have an elite gift of the Spirit enabling them to “discern the spirits”. Such a power would serve no purpose in this instance, for even the most simple disciple can ask a teacher if he or she believes that Jesus came in the flesh, and then understand a *yes or no* answer. If he has not come in the flesh, there is no atonement for sin and, hence, no basis for our religion. Denial of the Son invalidates any approach to the Father.

While no believer in the Scriptures can deny that there were antichrists in John's time indicating it was the last hour, two thousand years later, teachers are pointing to the coming of “The Antichrist”, a sort of *head honcho* antichrist. That is contrary to John's plain teaching. *The antichrist* (singular) is a genre – a kind, a sort – of which there may be many. In a similar expression we may say, “The *terrorist* will destroy our country, and many terrorists are already working.” *The terrorist* is a genre – a kind, a sort – of which there may be many. Only speculation can make John refer to a certain man who would arise centuries or millennia later – still in the last hour!

Speculators, however, know no limits. It has been common for teachers to identify *The Antichrist* and the *man of sin*, *the man of lawlessness*, as the same person.. Who is that mysterious *lawless one*? Speculators have given you a plethora of choices: Judas, Simon the Sorcerer, Caligula and various other Roman emperors, Attila the Hun, Mohammed, Napoleon, Hitler, Gorbachov, Saddam Hussein, and the front runner in the contest – the popes (papacy). And that is just the short list!

What do the Scriptures say about the man of sin, or man of lawlessness? Paul told the Thessalonian disciples about him (2 Thes. 2:1-12): “*Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, not to*

*become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until **the rebellion comes and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He opposes and exalts himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, and even sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.***"

*"Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And **now** we know what is **holding him back**, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the **secret power of lawlessness is already at work, but the one who now holds it back will continue to do till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. Etc.**"*

No point is to be gained by identifying the antichrist as the man of lawlessness. Assuredly, the man of lawlessness would be an antichrist, for he opposed both Christ and God. This related to the coming of Christ, the *parousia*. Some thought that the day of the Lord had already come and they had missed out on it. Was the *parousia* to involve the return of Jesus in the flesh, a physical resurrection of all, the destruction of the elements of this universe, and all the other dramatic physical manifestations that present-day teachers vividly describe to us? Then how in the world could the disciples in Thessalonica have thought that all that had already happened? Wouldn't we expect that Paul would have replied like this: "You foolish people, can't you see that the universe is still operating as usual and those things have not happened?" Those physical manifestations were not what Paul had told them to look for at the coming of Christ (v. 5). He and other writers had used cataclysmic language familiar to the Hebrew people to picture the religious and political upheaval which was approaching. The spiritual kingdom was to replace the earthly, national kingdom.

Paul wrote years before John wrote. He stated that the coming of the Lord would not be until the *rebellion* occurred. Other translations have used *falling away* instead of *rebellion*. From that we concluded that he referred to an apostasy or obliteration of the church. That was in spite of Daniel's declaration that it would be a kingdom "which shall never be destroyed ... and it will stand forever" (Dan. 2:44), and the encouragement of the disciples to receive that unshakable kingdom confirmed by the *parousia* (Heb. 12). Paul also wrote to Timothy later "*that in later times some will abandon the faith*" (1 Tim. 4:1). **Some** would fall away, but that by no means indicates that **most** or **all** would.

For most of my career I taught lessons on the "falling away and the restoration" characterizing the Church of Christ as a restoration of the original church. The church was never destroyed. Jesus was not defeated. The King has continued to reign. So, the concept of *restoration of an apostate church* is ill-advised.

This man of lawlessness, though denying the Christ and defying God and the Law of Moses, would be a political leader of rebellion against Rome. Already there had been pockets of rebellion. This leader was gaining power as Paul wrote, even though still restrained, and he would eventually instigate the rebellion (a proper meaning of the word) of the Jews against Roman rule. Through this, God would bring destruction to that leader, their temple, their city, their nation, and Judaism in general by means of the Roman army.

Please notice that Paul uses verbs in the present tense in verse 5: *opposes, exalts, is, sets*. **He was writing to them in their generation rather than to us in this century.** Just as John later declared that the antichrists were already at work in destroying belief in Jesus among them, Paul had previously declared that “the secret power of lawlessness is already at work” in the political area. Paul was saying “not yet, but it is developing”, and later John was saying “The antichrists are here! It is the last hour!”

Jesus gave some sign for them to look for as evidence of his being at their very gates. Then he promised, “*I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.*” Then he explained, “*No one knows about the day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*” (Matt. 24:34-36). The day and hour was unrevealed them, but more than thirty years later, John could declare, “*It is the last hour!*” (From Josephus’ history, John Bray has identified a historical character of that time by name in a most believable manner. For a copy of his 45-page booklet, *The Man of Sin*, send \$2 to him at P O Box 90129, Lakeland, FL 33804.)

So, even if you think “The Antichrist” and the “Man of Lawlessness” are both the same person, have no fear, for you live nineteen hundred years too late to be affected by either or both.

It is amazing that evangelicals who loudly proclaim belief in the inerrancy of the Bible will argue that some of its writers were mistaken when they taught the imminent return of Christ and the consummation of the age in their generation. If they told their generation that those things were imminent while knowing that centuries would pass before their fulfillment, then they were deceptive. If God allowed his inspired writers to give those hearers a wrong impression, he is not to be trusted. Some claim that Jesus came to set up his kingdom, but because of rejection, he was thwarted from his plan so that he must come back to do it. If Jesus could be defeated and his writers were deceived or deceiving, how can we trust Jesus or his writers further?

It is reassuring to know that our eternal welfare is not dependent on having the correct answers about the antichrists and the man of lawlessness. If, however, we let such questions divide us, dim our realization of the presence of Jesus in our lives now, or divert us from evangelism and edification by emphasis of our speculations, we have let them become a pitfall.

Now, instead of imploring, “Lord, come quickly,” as that generation did, we can thank him for his abiding presence with us. []