

Who is the Antichrist?

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John is the only writer of the New Testament to employ the term "antichrist" in speaking of those who are, or that which is, opposed to Christ. It is first used in 1 John 2:18: "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time." It is next used in 1 John 2:22: "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son." In 1 John 4:3, "And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is in the world." The last time John uses the word is in 2 John 1:7: "For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist."

There is a great difference of opinion as to the person or group referred to by this term. Some say it refers to the rebellious Jews - the Jewish Sanhedrin - others say it refers to the Pope of Rome, others claim it refers to atheism, still others to the Devil, and some say it refers to some person in John's day who is not mentioned by name. Anytime the word of God warns us against some evil, that evil is always identified. If a person or persons are intended, they are identified. When Christ spoke against the doctrine of the Pharisees, he told who they were and what they taught. We believe these and other passages identify for us that antichrist of John's day as well as now.

John said there are "many" antichrists. Then it does not refer to a single person as such. He said the antichrist was already in the world, so it would not refer to the Pope as such because there were no popes when John wrote this. He said the one who denies that Christ came in the flesh is A deceiver and AN antichrist, hence it would refer to anyone whose attitude and actions deceive.

"Anti" means *opposed to or against*; "Christ" means *anointed*. "False Christs" (Pseudochristos) denotes anyone who claims to be the Christ of God. "Antichrist" combines "anti" *opposed or against* with "Christ" - the *anointed*. This clearly means he who or that which is opposed to Jesus Christ the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world. He was the *anointed of God*, the anointed Saviour. The "antichrist" would be that which opposes the anointed of God. Jesus identified all who oppose him by these words: "He that is not with me is against; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad" (Matt. 12:30). To reject Christ is to receive not his word (John 12:48). This word (gospel) was given by the apostles of Christ, therefore to receive Christ we must receive the apostles' doctrine (Matt. 10:40; Acts 2:42). Any person who does not "gather" with Christ is not with him and is against him, regardless of who he is or what his religious affiliation might be. Since Christ said the person who is not with him is against him, that puts that person *against or in opposition* to Christ. This is what *antichrist* means.

Jesus said there would come false Christs to deceive many (Matt. 24:5). These false Christs and false prophets who would show such signs and wonders as to deceive the very elect if possible (Matt. 24:24), would be "anti" or against Christ. There would also arise false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ (2 Cor. 11:13). The church at Ephesus was commended for trying those who said they were apostles, and were not, and finding them liars

(Rev. 2:2). There will appear false prophets who will appear in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are really ravening wolves to destroy the flock (Matt. 7:15).

John warned against believing every spirit: "but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). Peter said there would be false teachers who would privily bring in damnable heresies, "even denying the Lord that bought them . . ." (2 Pet. 2:1). This verse says there would be *false teachers* (plural) who would bring in *damnable heresies* (plural); there would be many. This is in harmony with John's description of the work of *antichrist* who would deny the Lord. Paul also speaks in the Galatian letter of "false brethren" and their work: "And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage" (Gal. 2:4).

These passages describe attitudes and works that are against or opposed to Christ and his gospel. Such works are of "antichrist" as John, Paul and Peter tell us. From all these passages, how can we say that anyone is the antichrist and deny that all the others are? If one opposes Christ, all do, and for the same purpose and by the same spirit.

Adam Clarke in commenting on 1 John 2:18 says this about the antichrist: "Any person, thing, doctrine, system of religion, polity, etc., which is opposed to Christ, and to the spirit and spread of his Gospel, is antichrist . . . Every man who opposes the spirit of the Gospel, and every teacher and writer who endeavors to lower the Gospel standard to the spirit and taste of the world, is the genuine antichrist, no matter where or among whom he is found." (Vol. VI, p. 909).

Macknight in commenting on 1 John 4:3 says: "2. From this, as well as from chap. ii:18, it appears that Antichrist is not any particular person, nor any particular succession of persons in the church, but a general name for all false teachers in every age, who disseminate doctrines contrary to those taught by the apostles; especially if these doctrines have a tendency to derogate from Christ's character and actions as the Saviour of the world" (Apostolic Epistles, p. 666).

How can we identify false teachers to know whether they come under the term "antichrist" or not? In 1 John 4:16 the answer is found. "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." Peter said, ". . . there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them . . ." (2 Pet. 2:1). We are instructed to try or test the spirits (prophets or teachers), even those among us, to determine whether they are of God or not. In 2 Pet. 2:6 he says, "We (apostles) are of God: he that *knoweth* God *heareth* us; he that is not of God *heareth not us*." The difference between those who are of God and those who are not of God is determined by who hears the apostles of Christ and who hears them not. "Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error."

In testing false apostles, prophets, teachers and brethren, we compare the doctrine they teach and the fruit they bear with the word of Christ as given by the apostles. True doctrine is on the side of the true Christ; false doctrine is on the side of false Christs or antichrists. Timothy was instructed to charge some to "teach no other doctrine" (1 Tim. 1:3). John said those who abide not in the

doctrine of Christ have not the Father (2 John 9). Paul said some would not endure sound doctrine (2 Tim. 4:3). He also said anyone who taught any other gospel than the one delivered by the apostles was accursed (Gal. 1:8-9). There is just one doctrine: the sound doctrine, the doctrine of Christ. Every other doctrine belongs to the antichrist.

"They went out from us" (1 John 2:19). "They" - the false teachers and false brethren who were not with Christ, but were against him, the antichrist. Their going out did not signify a change of meeting place, or simply leaving the assembly (church). It meant leaving the body of believers by leaving the faith; they went out from the fellowship of the saints. They taught and practiced a different "faith." Fellowship is broken in two ways: by the faithful withdrawing themselves from the ungodly, and by the rebellious leaving the fellowship of the saints.

In speaking to the elders of Ephesus Paul warned: "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:29-30). From what would disciples be drawn away? From the fellowship of the faithful. The speaking of perverse things (false doctrines) was the power used to draw the disciples away. Now these who did the drawing away would be those who had been elders in the church. They had to go out from the disciples in order to draw AWAY disciples AFTER them. To the false brethren who came in to bring into bondage, we should give no place by subjection, not even for a single hour (Gal. 2:5).

Some would turn away their ears from the truth and be turned unto fables. They would bring in false teachers to tickle their itching ears (2 Tim. 4:3). These are the ones to which John referred in the expression "they went out from us . . ." That which turns from the truth is the work of antichrist. "Not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men, that turn from the truth" (Titus 1:14). The commandments of men are those orders that originate with men and not with God. It implies the speaking of those things beyond what is written (1 Cor. 4:6) as well as leaving off what God has authorized. It also involves a perverted gospel which draws away disciples after the false teachers.

"They were not of us . . ." There is no fellowship between evil and righteous; between the works of Satan and the work of Christ. We are to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Eph. 5:11). That is very definite and plain! "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful of darkness" means to have no part or share in any doctrine or deed that is not of "sound doctrine." Our fellowship with each other depends upon our fellowship with God. Our fellowship with God depends upon our walking in the light of his word. When one turns aside from the truth, he is not walking in the light and is not of those who walk in the light. If men can be turned from darkness to light by preaching the truth (Acts 26:18), these men can be turned from light to darkness again by teaching something opposed to the truth. As the children of darkness are opposed to the children of light (1 Thess. 5:5), so are those who turn to darkness not of those who remain in the light.

John said, "had they been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us." The very fact that they went out demonstrated that they were not of the same mind and the same spirit. It was proof that they had adopted another authority than that of Christ.

"But they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." To make manifest is to declare. Paul said the man of sin would be revealed. That means he would be shown or declared. God's will is revealed by the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10), and the antichrist is revealed or made manifest by the doctrine he preaches that is opposed to Christ. The light of God's word declares who is teaching error. "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light" (Eph. 5:11-13).

The *antichrist* is that which is opposed to Christ to any degree. It includes those who were once in the church as well as the most rank infidels. The very fact that they went out by another doctrine evidences the fact that they are no longer of the faithful. Had they been of the faith they would have continued with the faithful. This is the person who opposes Christ and is called by John, the *antichrist*.

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