

Antichrists

15/12/19 dkm

Read: Luke 1:67-2:20, 1John 2:15-27

Text: 1John 2:18-27

Psalms: 45:3-7, 105:7-15, 2:1-6,117

In the church to which the apostle John was writing this letter, false teachers were undermining the gospel that was taught by John and the other apostles. They were undermining what we might call 'orthodox theology'. Peter wrote with the same concern for the church, namely false teachers. The NT church was not even fifty years old when Peter wrote, and only a couple of decades older when John wrote. False teachers entered the church early on, and have continued to plague the church down through the ages.

Martin Luther faced a situation in which virtually the whole church had succumbed to false teaching. In our generation the situation is almost as bad, with liberal theology undermining orthodox theology or the true gospel in many churches. We have also seen people leave the church, to set up their own churches based upon false teaching, groups like the Jehovah Witnesses and the Mormons.

John initially told his readers he was writing to them that their joy may be full (1:4). Now he tells them he is also writing out of concern that false teachers might be deceiving them and leading them astray (2:26). He was not concerned that they did not know the truth but that they might depart from this truth (2:21). John gave the church tests by which false teachers in the church could be identified. If such teachers were identified they were to be removed, according to procedures set in place by Jesus (Mat 18:15-20) and the apostles (1Cor 6:9)- Jesus was referring to any sin when he spoke of bringing the matter before the church, and Paul was speaking of refusing fellowship with an immoral brother, but the principle is the same. John, like Paul, speaks of refusing fellowship with false teachers (2John v10, Rom 16:17, 2Thess 3:6,14). We should not welcome door-knocking deceivers but should denounce them as antichrists.

John gave the church two tests earlier in this chapter. Those who refuse to obey Christ's commands are liars and not true Christians. Those who do not love a brother or sister in Christ are similarly lying if they say they love God (2:11, 4:20). In this passage John says that anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ is also a liar, and in fact an antichrist. 'Antichrists' is our sermon title, and our first subheading. Other subheadings will be, 'anointing' and, 'abiding'.

1. Antichrists

When the OT prophets spoke of the day of the Lord being near, they were speaking of the day when the Lord would come to judge the world in righteousness (Joel 1:15, 2:31, Obadiah v15). The coming of Jesus into this world marked the beginning of the end; his return will be the day of the Lord, the final judgment. The NT refers to the period between the resurrection and the return of Jesus as the last days. When John writes, 'little children, it is the last hour' he is referring to the return of Jesus Christ on the clouds of heaven (Mat 24:30). At this time Jesus will judge the wicked and save the righteous as he establishes his kingdom in it fullness.

It was almost two thousand years ago when John wrote, 'it is the last hour'. Does that surprise you? Does this worry you? Do you find it hard to believe that we are still in the last hour? The prophet Joel wrote about eight hundred years before his words, 'in the last days' were, according to the apostle Peter, fulfilled at Pentecost (Acts 2:17). John was writing to a church into which antichrists had come, telling them that by this 'we know it is the last hour' (2:18). It seems that teaching about the antichrist was part of apostolic teaching because these people had heard about antichrist coming (2:18). Only John writes of antichrist, although Paul writes about the 'man of lawlessness', who seems to be the same individual (2Thess 2:3, 8), and John later writes of the beast coming out of the sea in Revelation 13.

Although not Satan himself, this man of lawlessness is a powerful, lying and blaspheming beast, who exalts himself against God just like Satan. He will appear towards the end of the last days. But 'even now', as in two thousand years ago, John says that antichrists have come. Antichrists are 'anti', as in against, Christ; they oppose Christ and everything about Christ. They may also be men who claim to be the Christ. They oppose truth, they oppose love, and they oppose life. Looking around, you can see such antichrist attitudes and actions in the world today. Who is teaching these things? Yes, we have antichrists in the world today. Note however, that John says 'they went out from us'. He uses this term to refer to false teachers coming from within the church.

The Reformers saw the pope in Rome, who calls himself the vicar of Christ, as an antichrist (Westminster Confession of Faith chapter XXV). The pope vigorously opposed the truth that men like Luther sought to teach in the church. We have mentioned huge religious organisations that call themselves Christian while denying the doctrine of the Trinity. John would call their leaders antichrists.

Before we look further at this theological test of orthodoxy, notice what John teaches about the church in verse 19, albeit indirectly. These antichrists 'went out from us', from the church. They were once part of the visible church, the church that exists in this world, but not members of the invisible church, the assembly of true Christians. If they had been believers they wouldn't have left but 'would have continued with us' (2:19). Their going astray shows they were never really true believers; they were only nominal 'hanger-oners' as we say. They were not believers who lost their faith; they were never true believers.

This, dear friends, is still the picture of the church. Some people can profess faith in Jesus and be actively involved in the church for a long time, but it is how they end that is critical. It is hard to know why they joined the church, or why they stayed in for so long, but their

end reveals that they were not believers. Lots of runners join the City to Surf race in our city, but few finish. Those who fail to finish often have no intention of finishing; they join the race because of friends, or because of a free T-shirt or cap.

John has already told about men who refuse to obey the commandments (2:4). If they were Gnostics, they claimed to have a special, higher knowledge by which they lived, knowledge that released them from the moral teaching of the Bible. Some call this a moral test. Another test given by John is a doctrinal test or a test of beliefs. The doctrine in question is that of the Holy Trinity, and particularly the person of Christ. The apostle Peter refers to Jesus as the rejected stone and the stone of stumbling. The Jews stumbled over Jesus, refusing to accept his divinity. People in the church stumble over Jesus; some refuse to accept his divinity, others his humanity; the latter was the false teaching that John had to counter.

John began his letter with a clear declaration of the humanity of Jesus: he saw, he heard and he touched Jesus. With worldly, rather than biblical thinking, the Gnostics denied the incarnation and the death of Jesus. In chapter 4, John again refers to this heresy: 'every spirit that does not confess that Jesus has come in the flesh is not of God. This is the spirit of the antichrist' (4:3). To deny either the divinity or the humanity of Jesus is to deny Jesus as Messiah or Christ (2:22). Messiah means 'anointed one', anointed of God.

Similarly, to deny Jesus as the Son is also serious heresy because such denials mean one does not have the Father or the Son (2:23). If someone claims to worship God while rejecting the full humanity or divinity of Jesus they are deceiving themselves, and lying to those who listen to them. And they are deceiving themselves if they think they are saved because if Jesus is not fully man he cannot represent us on the cross, and if he is not fully God he carried his own sin to cross, not ours. Did not God himself say to Jesus 'You are my beloved Son' (Luke 3:22).

You may know people who have been deceived by antichrists, and they may be trying to deceive you. If anyone does not accept that Jesus is fully human and fully divine they do not know Jesus and hence do not know the Father. You must cling to the truth of the Trinity as set forth in the Scriptures, and in the Shorter Catechism where we learn: 'There are three persons in the Godhead, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory'.

2. Anointing

While condemning false teachers, John assures his 'little children' that they are secure because they have an anointing from the Holy One (2:20). This security comes from knowing the truth. If they hold to this truth they will not be deceived by false teachers or antichrists. The anointing is the anointing of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. The Spirit is called 'the Spirit of truth', who 'will guide you into all truth' (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit is given to all who believe, when they believe (Rom 8:16). This anointing is related to the term Messiah or Christ which means 'anointed one'. Christ or '*Christos*' in Greek means 'anointed one', while the word anointed is '*chrisma*'. 'Christians abide in the Anointed One by means of their anointing'.

The Spirit leads us into truth while Satan and his agents try to lead us into lies. Jesus calls himself the truth, 'the way, the truth, and the life', but the ruler of this world and the father of lies does not like truth. Antichrists do not like the truth. They do their best to confuse and confound the clear teaching of the Bible. Some do this with scholarly precision, others with less-subtle ridicule and bully tactics.

The Holy Spirit does not reveal new truth but leads us into the truth already revealed (John 14:26, 16:13). The Spirit is sent by Jesus; in fact, John speaks of the Father and the Son living within us (John 14:23). This is our anointing. Antichrists know nothing of this

anointing. They speak of the Spirit revealing new things to them, even things contrary to the revealed word of God.

Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, an incident that in itself shows his humanity, but he rejected these temptations saying, 'It is written'. If people tell you the Spirit has told them something new and interesting, be sure to tell them what is written in the Bible about no new revelations.

3. Abide

The Spirit reminds us of what Jesus said, and of all that is written in the Scriptures. Jesus is the truth. God's word is the truth. John goes on to speak of abiding in Christ, or more precisely, of letting the anointing of the Spirit abide in us, and of letting what we have heard abide in us (2:24,27). He makes a somewhat surprising statement in telling us that we do not need anyone to teach us (2:27). We must read this in the context, which is that John is actually teaching them in this letter.

Teachers are important but we dare not follow any teacher blindly. Some Christians follow a preacher all over the country, taking in every word that he preaches. This can be dangerous. This is a feature of the antichrists who claim to be chosen leaders, even a spokesman for the Almighty. Remember that your teachers rely on the same source of truth as you do- if they are teachers of the truth. They also share the same anointing of the Spirit as you do. The true church does not have a man claiming to speak *ex cathedra*. The true church will never elevate the words of a man above the word of God.

Along with abiding in your anointing, John refers to abiding in the gospel or in 'that which you have heard from the beginning' (2:24). Every believer has heard the apostolic gospel and believed this truth. This gospel has not changed, and never will change. Truth does not change. We must hold to the truth as it has been passed down to us in the Scriptures and by faithful preachers of God's word. First

generation Christians usually cling to the truth of the gospel as they heard it. They throw out their old gods and old ways to embrace the new way of life in Jesus Christ.

New believers take hold of the promise of eternal life in Jesus Christ as set forth in the gospel, and cling to it (2:25). It is later generations that start twisting the words of the Bible to make them fit with their own thinking or ways, the ways of the world (cf.2:15-17). False teachers or antichrists know nothing about eternal life. Ask anyone about eternal life, even a church goer, and if their faces glaze over you know they are not born again. Observe the way in which a person faces death and you will know if they truly believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. Do you know, and understand, the promise of eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord?