



"If we choose a false way of worship we shall, ere long, choose to worship a false god."

—Charles H. Spurgeon

04-Dec-15

Deceivers and Antichrists (Part One)

By the time the apostle John penned his gospel and epistles, he had witnessed the ministry of [Jesus Christ](#), [the crucifixion](#), the resurrected Messiah, and the founding of the church of [God](#). He had preached [the gospel](#) and made disciples, and he had observed the differing responses to God's truth among those hearing it. He had also seen turmoil in the young church and the effects of false ministers and false doctrines on the brethren he loved. Consequently, in his gospel—and even more in his letters—it becomes clear that a major purpose in his writing is to counter the [false teachers](#) and their teachings that were corrupting the [faith](#).

John's epistles are unique in that they are the only places the term "antichrist" is used. This word has taken on a life of its own, especially within Evangelical Protestantism, and today it is typically used only in reference to the end-time ruler known as "the Beast." However, that was not John's main focus when he used the term. In the original Greek, none of the five places he uses "antichrist" contains the definite article "the" (see [I John 2:18](#), 22; 4: 3; [II John 7](#)). In other words, John used the term "antichrist" as a general

description of an attitude that is opposed to God, along with those bearing it. While we know that the Beast will be the epitome of this attitude, John's warning encompasses far more than just the last few years of this age.

One particular description of antichrist seems to attract the least attention, yet it may have the greatest relevance for us right now. But before we examine that reference, we will look briefly at the better-known antichrist references to remind us of what John was warning against:

Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. ([1 John 2:18](#))

The NKJV is one of the few translations that reads "*the* antichrist," yet it also includes a footnote to inform the reader that the definite article is not in the original. John is saying that just as true believers had been warned about something that is against Christ, even at that time there were many antichrists. Many were opposed in some way to Christ, the Messiah or Anointed One.

It is essential to remember that even though John is referring to people, the real problem is a *spirit*—an unholy spirit that is influencing people toward beliefs and practices that are completely against the Savior. In John's day, people who were led astray by this spirit had been fellowshiping with the brethren, but a separation had occurred, as verse 19 shows. The unholy spirit was at odds with the Spirit of God, and it led those antichrists to "go out." Despite the separation, John continued to warn the church because the antichrist spirit could still deceive those who remained.

The fact that the antichrists "went out" is only one of the characteristics John gives. More can be found in [1 John 2:22-23](#):

Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

The issue here is the denial or the acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah. Much could be said about what it means to deny the Son, but for now, we will just note that, of the three so-called "Abrahamic faiths," Judaism and Islam are excluded by this one criterion. Judaism flatly rejects Jesus as the Christ, while Islam regards Him only as a prophet, and less than its primary "prophet" at that.

Nominal Christianity holds belief in Jesus as the Christ as its cornerstone, so—on the surface—it appears to pass this particular test. In the Olivet Prophecy, however, the first sign that Jesus gives is that many would come in His name and proclaim that He is the Christ, yet deceive many ([Matthew 24:4-5](#)). While it is true that denying Him as the Messiah is a clear marker of antichrist, coming in His name is still not an absolute guarantee of true belief.

Clarifying this, John gets more specific in [I John 4:1-3](#):

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into [the world](#). By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

Verse 1 equates the false prophets with the deceiving spirits behind them, showing that the principal factor is not the man who is speaking but the spirit motivating him. John says that we have to test the spirit behind the man. We have to judge whether what is said agrees with Scripture. We must also evaluate the intent behind the message—both why the message is given and what the message is motivating its audience to believe or do.

Then, in verses 2-3, John gives another concrete criterion: whether the spirit speaking through the man will confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. The apostle adds this because a large part of what he had to counter was [Gnosticism](#), a set of heretical ideas that had attached itself to the true Way. In particular, he was contesting a gnostic belief called Docetism, which held that Jesus was a physical man, but that a separate spiritual entity—the

Christ—had entered into Jesus when He was baptized and had left Him before He suffered crucifixion.

The Gnostics considered material things, like human flesh, to be defiled and sinful, while the spirit was pure. They used this Greek philosophical belief to interpret the gospel, rather than measuring their beliefs against the standard of the gospel. It did not make sense to them that God would come in the flesh or that God could die or would die. The idea that, as John himself put it, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" ([John 1:14](#)), was nonsense to them.

Gnostics could agree with a great deal of the truth, yet every flavor of Gnosticism somehow corrupted the true nature of Jesus Christ. Thus, John stipulates that anyone who does not believe in the incarnation of God into human flesh is anti-Christ—against the whole purpose for the Messiah's life, ministry, and death.

Next time, we will look at the final reference to "antichrist," in which resides an abundance of significance.

- David C. Grabbe

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[Antichrist Deceptions](#)

by Martin G. Collins

Antichrists manifest several characteristics, including fostering deception and confusion, preventing fellowship, and creating intense spiritual conflict. Realizing that our real enemies are not human beings at all but demonic principalities emanating from the spirit of darkness, we are mandated to put on the whole armor of God, embracing the truth. The mystery of evil and lawlessness has been extant from the beginning of the early church, recognized by Paul and John. Some teachers in the early church actually attained leadership and influence in the teaching of noxious false doctrine. Ultimately, the being or order emerging as the antichrist will be motivated

directly by Satan. Historically, antichrist teachers have proclaimed that Jesus was only a man, or that He had a phantom body and never really experienced death. The syncretistic new religion of Chrislam is actually a prime example of antichrist doctrine. The false prophet and the great political leader in Revelation 13 and 17 will both be worshipped by people duped by Satan to believe a strong delusion. We need to be on guard for antichrist influences attempting to penetrate the greater church of God. We are admonished to test the spirits, realizing that heretical tares have been permitted to test our faith. The spirit of the antichrist is alive and well today, attempting to sabotage our spiritual welfare and steal our spiritual crown.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Let No One Deceive You](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

We live in a day of increasing knowledge—to the point that we are increasingly overloaded with information. Richard Ritenbaugh argues that these and other modern factors lend themselves to deception, yet this is one of the primary end-time trends that Jesus warns us against!

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