

How to Spot an Antichrist | Reading: 1 John 2:18-27

While there are references in the gospels to false Christ's & false prophets only John in his letters uses the term antichrist. 26 out of 27 NT books warn of false teaching in some way, this means we cannot faithfully preach the gospel without also dealing with false teaching. If my preaching is always positive then it is a sign I am not preaching to you the whole truth. John's word 'antichrist' is a term loaded with speculation. Many have attempted to prove this or that person as the antichrist. This is not my purpose this morning because I don't think it is John's in these verses. The word 'antichrist' simply means opposed to, rival to or counterfeit to Christ. Always hold in mind that when you hear the word Christ it simply means Messiah. It is not Jesus' surname; it is a fundamental declaration about him. When we say Jesus Christ we are declaring Jesus is Messiah!

In verse 18 John speaks of both the antichrist & antichrists. Regarding antichrist John says **“you have heard that antichrist is coming”** pointing to the future. This is something these believers had already been taught about. One Study Bible comments that (ZSB); *“The coming of an antichrist figure was part of early Christian teaching. It distinguished between the great antichrist figure that would appear near the end of the age (cf. 2 Thess 2:3-5; Rev 13:1-6) & lesser antichrist figures whose influence was already being felt.”*

Regarding antichrists John writes **“many antichrists have come”** – present tense. So John not only speaks of the antichrist but of many antichrists & it is addressing the activity of such antichrists which he is addressing in the rest of this passage. These believers have already been taught that there is an antichrist who will appear but John now wants them to understand that there are many forerunners to this Antichrist. He also links both the activity of many antichrists & the idea of the antichrist to the last hour. Verse 18 opens & closes with the phrase **“it is the last hour.”** The last hour is the time between the first & second coming of Jesus. John understood himself to be in the last hour & we should understand ourselves to be in the last hour. It's also worth noting that 1 John 4:3 also talks of the spirit of the antichrist; **“This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.”** The spirit of the antichrist is present in & uses the system of this world to influence people against the true Christ.

My aim today is not that you know who the antichrist is but that you know the characteristics of antichrists so you can detect them & remain faithful to the only true Christ.

Three Characteristics of Antichrists

As well as knowing the authentic Christ I reckon another key to discerning the Antichrist when does come is the ability to detect his forerunners. John gives us three characteristics of antichrists in these verses. *1. They depart from fellowship. 2. They deny Jesus is the Christ. 3. They try to deceive Christians.*

1. *They depart from fellowship (19-21).*

The antichrists that John is currently talking about were once part of the fellowship but had departed from it. As John writes in V19; **“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out that it might become plain that they all are not of us”** (cf. Acts 20:29-30; 2 Pet 2:1). It’s clear in John’s thinking that there is an “us” and “they”! Who are the “us” & who are the “they”. Well the “us” are the apostles & the believers John is writing to & the “they” are the antichrists who have departed from the apostles teaching by denying that Jesus is the Christ. For this reason they have departed from the churches John is writing to & are now trying to deceive believers in these churches (26). So the “they” John is talking about are not only people who have left a local church, they are those who have left the faith. We need to understand this if we are to apply this correctly. Yes they have left local churches, but more than this these antichrists have departed from authentic Christianity & are now trying to set up a rival Christianity. This is the first characteristic of these antichrists John is specifically addressing.

All this helps to underline for us the importance of committing to the apostles teaching (of trusting the right source) & on this basis committing to authentic Christian fellowship. Church is more than Christians meeting together for worship & teaching but it is not less than this. Being in authentic Christian fellowship demonstrates publically & visibly our commitment to Jesus & what he has promised to build. It helps testify to where our allegiance & priorities lie, it is one way we nail our colours to the mast. The reason we gather today, on the first day of the week, the day on which Christ was raised, is not because it is our day, but because it is the Lord’s day (as the NT puts it) & therefore it helps express to our family, our children, our neighbours, our friends, our work colleagues & our community that Jesus is our Lord & the kingdom he is building is the priority of our hearts & lives. Yet all of this is only actually legit if we are seeking to follow the testimony & teaching of those who seen, touched & heard our Lord – his apostles.

The reason the antichrists departed from fellowship was because they wanted to build a rival community to Christ’s, based on an alternative knowledge they claimed to have attained. Why did they leave? They left because they did not want to abide in the teaching of the apostles! It is not those who remain in the apostles teaching that are divisive but those who depart from it. So we are not talking here of Christian’s who are disillusioned with church or who have been burnt by a bad experience of church (although there is an indirect challenge for such people). If that is you I don’t want to throw guilt grenades from the pulpit & blow up all your excuses for not being in regular fellowship. I want to sit down & have a coffee with you & talk & dream about how we can do church better for the glory of God & good of all. What we are talking about specifically in this passage, I believe, is a group of arrogant people who are deliberately aiming to set up a church that rivals the one Jesus promised to build on the trustworthy & timeless testimony of his eyewitnesses! To depart from or add to the teaching of the original apostles is to break fellowship with authentic Christianity. It is to follow the spirit of the antichrist.

John then goes on & writes; **“But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you have all knowledge. I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is in the truth.”** He now reminds them of their identity & of the fact they have all they need. John talks to them as those who already have all they need & as those who know all they need to know. The anointing points to the fact they have been given the Spirit, the **“Holy One”** is Jesus & the knowledge is what we essentially have today in our Bibles. John says this to every true believer; **“You have been anointed by the Holy One, and you have all knowledge...”** In other words you are not inferior, you are not lacking in anointing or knowledge & therefore you don’t need the latest spiritual or religious guru to give you something more or something else! **John continues – read 2:22-23.**

2. *They deny Jesus is the Christ (22-23)*

These antichrists left the churches John is writing to because they had left the true Christ. They no longer believed what the apostles, the eyewitnesses, had taught. As we have seen before their teaching denied the incarnation of Christ. They denied the Christ by denying a key aspect of his nature. As John Stott puts it; *“They denied that the man Jesus and the eternal Son are the same person, possessing two different natures, human and divine.”* They did not see Jesus as fully human & fully divine; this is how they denied him as the Christ. An antichrist will always attack or undermine a key aspect of Christ’s nature or work. This is why knowing Jesus is so essential to Christianity.

That Jesus is the fully human & divine Christ is such a key doctrine to authentic Christianity. It is because Jesus is fully human like us & fully God like the Father that we have an advocate & an atoning sacrifice for sin. This is why Jesus alone is our Christ! Since Jesus is fully God he can truly reveal the Father to us & since he is fully human he can truly represent us! This is one of these truths that hold’s authentic Christianity together. So on one hand we have verses like John 1:17 NIV were John says; **“No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.”** Or there is John 19:9 were Jesus says; **“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”** Then on the other hand we have verses like 1 Timothy 2:5-6; **“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.”** Or of course there are the powerful words of Hebrews 4:14-16!

3. *They tried to deceive authentic Christians*

In verse 28 John says; **“I write these things about those who are trying to deceive you.”** So they depart, they deny & now John tells us they try to deceive. I just want to point out one thing about this: The way they tried to deceive was by offering new knowledge beyond the teaching of the apostles. This is why John said; **“you have no need that anyone should teach you”** in verse 27. Of course this doesn’t mean we don’t need preachers, teachers & pastors etc. What it does mean however is that we don’t need them or anyone

to teach us anything that is new. Their role in every generation is to remind us of what was heard from the beginning. The new knowledge if accepted would alter the whole nature of the gospel. The role of teachers & pastors etc is to make sure that doesn't happen. If we have a complete gospel what else do we need? This sets us up well for the two safeguards John now gives us in 2:24-27.

Two Safeguards against Being Deceived (24-27)

The best way to protect ourselves from antichrists is not by playing "Guess Who" but by ensuring the apostles teaching abides in us & knowing the Holy Spirit abides in us. This is what helps us to abide in the Authentic Christ & persevere in true Christianity.

- 1. The Word of the Apostles**
- 2. The Anointing of the Spirit**

The Word of the Apostles (24-25): The way to abide in the Son & in the Father is to let what has been taught from the beginning abide in us... The Word teaches us to abide in Christ!

The Anointing of the Spirit: The anointing (the Spirit) we received from him abides in us. This anointing, like the Word, teaches us to abide in Christ. So the Word & the Spirit are both given to teach us to abide in the true Christ! The Holy Spirit is given to guide us into all truth not to guide us into new truth! Knowing these two safeguards & their purpose is what will protect God's people from antichrists & thee antichrist.