

john 15:4
A **b** **i** **d** **e** **i**n **M** **E**



Bible studies for disciples who make disciples

Loudonville Community Church

Volume 4 - Number 8
The week of December 9, 2018

Sermon Series: *The Real Thing*
Antichrists vs. Christians
1 John 2:18-23

THIS WEEK'S CORE STATEMENT

The Deity and Sinlessness of Christ *Colossians 2:9*

We believe in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life.

When Christians Began Speaking of 'the' Antichrist

by Thomas Kidd¹

A number of academic books include an intriguing 1840 quote, and editorial insertion, about Manifest Destiny and "the" Antichrist. The quote says that Manifest Destiny and the spread of Protestantism into Catholic lands represented the "beginning of the downfall of [the] Antichrist, and the spread of the Savior's power of the gospel." As we can see from the quote, Manifest Destiny was deeply tinged with anti-Catholicism.

But why do historians routinely assume that sources like this must mean "the" antichrist, even to the point of putting "the" in corrective brackets? The author meant to say "downfall of Antichrist," not "downfall of *the* Antichrist." It turns out that speaking of "the" antichrist is a relatively recent development. Inserting [the] before antichrist misunderstands the way that most Protestants before 1900 thought about the meaning of that eschatological term. For most observers between the Reformation and about 1900, "antichrist" was a power instead of a person.

Many readers will recall that 1 and 2 John are the only places that the term "antichrist" appears in Scripture. In the King James Version (the dominant English-language Bible well into the 20th century) "antichrist" appears four times in those books. None of the KJV references speaks of "the antichrist," although 2 John 7 speaks of a deceiver who is "an antichrist"; 1 John 2:18 suggests that there is a single antichrist to come, but also notes that many antichrists have already entered the world. Of course, there are other references in the Bible, such as the "man of sin" of 2 Thessalonians and the beast(s) of Revelation, that commentators have associated with the antichrist.

Modern translations like the English Standard Version, New American Standard, and New International Version include "the" in most of the antichrist references in 1 and 2 John. My colleague David Garland tells me that in the Greek, "The definite article with antichrist appears in 1 John 2:22; 4:3, and 2 John 7. It is absent in 1 John 2:18, but that does not necessarily make the noun indefinite."

Before the 20th century, most Protestant commentators spoke of "antichrist" far more frequently than "the antichrist." For example, a search of Jonathan Edwards's works gives 670 hits for "antichrist" but only 48 for "the antichrist." Most of the latter are in editors' words rather than in Edwards's. Many commentators in this period, including Edwards, associated "antichrist" with Roman Catholicism, and sometimes with Islam. These were the great world religions they saw as opposed to the true interest of Christ in the world. Less frequently did commentators assert that the pope or Muhammad was "an" or "the" antichrist.

Edwards (as always) is instructive, writing about antichrist and “the antichrist” in a 1723 note on Revelation 13:11’s beast coming out of the earth. “This is he that is called Antichrist in Scripture,” Edwards wrote. He associated this beast with Catholicism, or “popery.” It was antichrist because of the perfect and universal contrariety of popery to Christianity, and its peculiar opposition to it, beyond all religions that ever were; and because this is the contrivance of the wit of hell in opposition to the gospel, the masterpiece of all his inventions against the interest of Christ, the most cunning and subtle, the most effectual, of longest duration, the fruit of the greatest and longest labors and study: so that however there have been a great many antichrists, this is the Antichrist.

Satan was dreadfully surprised by Christ’s appearing in the world and the proclaiming [of] the gospel to all nations, and begun to look upon himself totally overthrown. But he, at length, thought of one thing more a means to defeat the design; and this was the last effort, and how wonderfully did he seem to succeed! Fitly, therefore, is this grand contrivance for opposing the gospel called antichristianism.

“Antichristianism” is closer in meaning to the typical concept before the 20th century than our modern concept of “the antichrist.” For these theologians, antichrist was a power, rather than a single individual, although a single individual might certainly be at the head of world antichristian power.

What changed in theological terminology so that “antichrist” without “the” started to seem like a mistake to historians? There was never a time when the usage of “the antichrist” vanished entirely, so it is hard to identify a single turning point when “the antichrist” started to become the norm.

But undoubtedly the advent of dispensational theology, with its elaborate end times chronology, was the key development. The Scofield Reference Bible, the most popular text of dispensational theology ever, emphasized the personal nature of the coming antichrist. “Antichrist the *person* is to be distinguished from the ‘many antichrists’” of 1 John 2, Scofield wrote (his italics). “The ‘many antichrists’ precede and prepare the way for *the* Antichrist,” he said.

In popular Western culture, the phrase “the antichrist” may have also become standard, ironically, in part because of Friedrich Nietzsche’s furiously anti-Christian book of that name in 1895.

By the 1970s, wildly popular dispensational books such as Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth* made it a commonplace that “the Antichrist” was a person who would come in the future. Lindsey and other dispensational writers construed him as a globalist political leader more often than a religious leader. Lindsey interpreted the beast out of the sea in the early verses of Revelation 13 as the Antichrist. “The passage is obviously talking about a person because the personal pronoun ‘he’ is used,” Lindsey wrote.

Such writers relegated the second beast of Revelation 13 to the status of the “false prophet,” or head of an apostate church that aids the work of the Antichrist. The best-selling *Left Behind* series of books in the 1990s and 2000s promoted a similar dispensational framework of the last days. *Left Behind* featured the Romanian politician Nicolae Carpathia as the head of the United Nations, and secretly, “the Antichrist.”

By the time of the *Left Behind* novels, it was hard to remember a time when most Protestants spoke of “antichrist” rather than “the Antichrist.”

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STEP ONE . . .

OBSERVATION

What does the text say?

1 John 2:18-23

¹⁸ Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. ²¹ I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. ²² Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. ²³ No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.

- Circle the word *children* in verse 18. Write above it: *A New Test-Doctrinal*.
- Draw a square around the word *antichrist* and *antichrists*.
- Underline the word *many* in verse 18.
- In the margin of verse 18 write: see 2:22; 4:3; 2 John 7.
- Double underline all five time-phrases that appear in verse 18.
- Highlight in one color all the references to *us*.
- Highlight in another color all the references to *they*.
- Circle one of the pronouns *us* and draw a line out to the margin and write “Christians.”
- Circle one of the pronouns *they* and draw a line out to the margin and write “antichrists.”
- Above the word *anointed* in verse 20 write the *Holy Spirit*.
- Above the phrase *Holy One* in verse 20 write *Jesus*.
- Write above the phrase “*I write to you*” the word *purpose*.
- Place a parenthesis around three denials found in verses 22 & 23.
- Draw a line between *denies* and *confesses* in verse 22 and on the line above it write the word *opposite*.
- Underneath the word *confesses* write, *to declare as true*.

Complementary Passage

~ Jude 17-23 ~

¹⁷ But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ They said to you, “In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.” ¹⁹ It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. ²⁰ But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. ²² And have mercy on those who doubt; ²³ save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

STEP TWO . . .

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

What does the text mean?

The commentary is intended to enhance your own study of the text.

¹⁸ **Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming.** Used only here in the NT, the time-phrase **last hour** [*eschatos*] is probably synonymous with another time-phrase used in the NT *the last days*. In the Greek, the definite article is absent before **hour** emphasizing *not* a definite time, but the character of a particular critical period. The term **antichrist** (translated in some versions as a proper noun and capitalized) occurs only in John's letters (2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7). It is a combination of *anti* (against or instead of) and *christos* (Messiah or Christ). Generally, **antichrist** is anyone who denies Jesus is the Christ. **Is coming** is stated in the present tense which some scholars treat as a prophetic present which makes the phrase equivalent to *is about to come*. The entire period between the first and second comings of Jesus is known as the last days (see Acts 2:17; 2 Timothy 3:1; 1 Peter 1:20).

So now many antichrists have come. So now means at the time of John's writing in the final decade of the first century. **Many** [*polus*]: a large number. **Antichrists have already come:** perfect tense, indicating that they had arisen and were still present.

Therefore we know that it is the last hour. We know [*ginosko*]: John includes himself as among those who have encountered antichrists. John employs a kind of circular reasoning. He says, "**In the last hour** antichrists will come. Antichrists have come so it is **the last hour.**"

¹⁹ **They went out from us, but they were not of us. They** refers to the antichrists. **Went** is in the active voice which indicates volitional action. **Out from** is one preposition [*ek*] which indicates that they were once among the community of believers but voluntarily defected. Note how John draws a repeated contrast between **they** and **us**. The pronouns **they** is used six times and **us** five times in verse 19. The pronoun **us** conveys the unity of all true believers and the perseverance of all true believers.

For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. For is a term of explanation. **Continued** or remained. John uses an uncommon tense (pluperfect) which indicates that at a point in the past they went out once and for all.

But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. But is a conjunction of contrast. John is contrasting staying vs. departing. **That** or *so that* explains the effect their defection had on the church. Plain means to

disclose or reveal. The departure of the antichrists had a purifying effect on the community of believers because it clearly revealed they were not a part of the body of Christ. Continuing is a test of professing. In their departing, the spurious nature of their faith was unmasked.

²⁰ **But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. You have** is in the present tense signifying that this anointing is their permanent possession. The **anointing** [*chrisma*] which refers to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, means to daub or smear. The anointing is from the Anointed One (Jesus). Protection from the antichrist is in the anointing we have received. **You all have knowledge** [*eidoi*]. This knowledge is different from *ginosko* in 2:18. It refers specifically to intuitive, experiential knowledge. As Christians, we have a God-given instinct which enable us to detect and refuse whatever is incompatible with the truth.

²¹ **I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth.** The truth John is referring to is the truth about Jesus Christ, the long-awaited Messiah and Second Person of the Trinity incarnated in human flesh. True believers know this truth because they know Him. **No lie is of the truth:** Something cannot be simultaneously true and false. **Lie** [*pseudos*] describes an untrue statement or deception.

²² **Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?** A rhetorical question that John immediately answers with a description of the **liar** [*pseustes*]. By use of the definite article, **the liar**, the denier is a false or faithless person who strikes at the heart of the gospel. **The liar** is the one who **denies** (present tense) or opposes the truth of Jesus' humanity and deity.

This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. The spirit of the antichrist is found in anyone who denies that Jesus is God come in the flesh (see 1 John 4:3). Presumably, some of these antichrists were professing belief in the Father while rejecting the Son. John is making it clear that in denying the Son, these antichrists were also denying the Father.

²³ **No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. Confession** [*homologeō*] means to confess or declare something to be true. Confession is the opposite of denial.

STEP THREE . . .

EXPLORING the passage through discussion

Questions

1. John begins by again referring to his readers as *children* and issuing a *warning*. What was something your parents warned you about as a child?
2. Read 1 John 2:18-23. What does John mean when he says it is “the last hour”? (v.18) In what way does that phrase make sense since John wrote it 2000 years ago and Jesus hasn’t returned yet?
3. Who is “antichrist” that is coming? (v.18) Apparently, in John’s day, there were many “antichrists.” Is this still true today? What does this tell us about this last hour we are living in?
4. Who are they who “went out” and what does that mean? What conclusion is John making about their departure? What is the application for us?
5. What does the Holy Spirit have to do with our understanding of truth and doctrine? How does the Spirit protect us from false teaching?
6. What is a key test for determining whether a person is antichrist or not?
7. What does John call someone who denies that Jesus is the Christ? How do we reconcile this strong word with our culture of tolerance today?
8. Who was the first liar? Why does Satan use *lies/deception* as one of his chief weapon against us? What makes this effective? What are some of the lies he uses?

NICENE CREED

We believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.
And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
begotten from the Father before all ages,
God from God,
Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made;
of the same essence as the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven;
he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary,
and was made human.
He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered and was buried.
The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again with glory
to judge the living and the dead.
His kingdom will never end.
And we believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life.
He proceeds from the Father and the Son,
and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.
He spoke through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.
We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look forward to the resurrection of the dead,
and to life in the world to come. Amen.

A PRAYER

Holy Father,
We unashamedly confess our faith in Jesus Christ,
the only begotten Son of God.
We unequivocally declare that the Lord Jesus—
Existed eternally in the form God;
In the fullness of time, He became flesh,
by being born of a virgin.
He came under the Law,
To redeem those who were under the Law.

Thank you, Father, for the anointing of Your Spirit,
That teaches us to know the difference
between truth and falsehood.
Between Christ and antichrist.
Enhance in us this God-given sense of truth,
So that we can escape the schemes of Satan,
And abide continually in Your Word.
Cause us by Your Spirit to persevere in Christ,
To humbly identify with the communion of our fellow saints,
So that together, we might grasp the height and width and depth
of Your love for us—
through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Sunday, December 9 thru Saturday, December 15, 2018
Zechariah 1-3, Isaiah 49; Zechariah 4-6, Isaiah 50;
Zechariah 7-9, Isaiah 51; Zechariah 10-12, Isaiah 52;
Zechariah 13-14, Isaiah 53; Malachi 1-2, Isaiah 54

THE MISSION OF LOUDONVILLE COMMUNITY CHURCH

We are committed to reaching and teaching people to become devoted followers of Jesus Christ, connecting them to one another and sending them to serve their families, communities and world.

10 CORE BELIEFS OF A DISCIPLE

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God.

The Godhead *2 Corinthians 13:14*

We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Deity and Sinlessness of Christ *Colossians 2:9*

We believe in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life.

The Sufficient Atonement of Christ *2 Corinthians 5:19-21*

We believe in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood.

The Resurrection and Return of Christ *Acts 1:3, 9-11*

We believe in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His personal return in power and glory.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

We believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful man, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential and that a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit *John 14:16*

We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life.

Unity in Christ *Ephesians 2:14-17*

We believe in the spiritual unity of all believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Eternity *Revelation 21:22-27*

We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

We believe that everything we have or own belongs to God.

Memory Verse

~1 John 2:15~

**15 Do not love the world or the things in the world.
If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.**