

Critical Issues Commentary

A BIBLICALLY BASED COMMENTARY ON ISSUES THAT IMPACT YOU

March/April 2001

Issue Number 63

ANTICHRISTS AND THE ANTICHRIST

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“Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that Antichrist is coming, even now many Antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour.” (1John 2:18)

It might surprise many that John considered himself to be living in the last hour with contemporary “antichrists” and that he saw the need to warn Christians about such individuals. Many consider an “antichrist” to be a person who is “against” Christ. If that were the case, it would seem odd that any Christian would be fooled by such a person. However, careful study of the Scriptures reveals that antichrists are subtle. They actually present a message which appeals to many Christians.

In **1John 2** we learn these facts about antichrists: 1) their primary target is Christians, 2) they arise from within the visible church, 3) they claim to have a special anointing, 4) they claim access to supernatural knowledge not available to ordinary Christians, 5) they have a defective doctrine of Christ, though they claim to believe in Him. If we compare John’s teaching to other New Testament passages on this topic we will find that many antichrists operate in our day and their target is the Christian church. It stands to reason that Satan’s deceptive practices target the church, since the world is already under his sway: *“We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1John 5:19).*

ANTICHRIST AND CHRIST

That “antichrists” arise from the visible church and work to deceive professed Christians might seem rather odd to many. The reason for this is

that it seems implausible that people who are “against” Christ would find credence with those who claim to love Christ. Even cults do not claim to be “against” Christ, they just change their definitions of who He is. Therefore, how could an “antichrist” get a hearing with Christians? The answer lies in the Greek prefix “anti.” It can mean “against” but also can mean “in place of.”¹ Both concepts are combined here in the sense that the method “antichrists” use to oppose Christ is to set themselves up as specially anointed teachers. Their opposition is subtle. Their teaching about Christ is always unbiblical. John wrote *“They went out from us, but there were not really of us . . .” (1John 2:19a).* This shows that they were a part of the church and considered “Christian.”

So in the “last hour” antichrists arise from within the church, going out deceiving many. John used the term “last hour” twice in **1John 2:18**. In the original there is no definite article. The phrase “last hour” is qualitative² and is describing the nature of the days between Christ’s first and second advents.³ Throughout church history there have been “antichrists.” They exalt themselves, claim special anointing, and distort the Biblical doctrine of Christ. The early church historian Eusebius said that the gnostic heretic Cerinthus was a contemporary of the apostle John and Cerinthus claimed special revelations.⁴ The early church

father Irenaeus said that this Cerinthus denied the virgin birth and claimed that the Christ (anointing) descended on Jesus at His baptism and left Him at His crucifixion.⁵ Its likely that gnostic teachers like Cerinthus were the “antichrists” John had in mind.

1John 2 emphasizes the term “Christ.” In the Greek “the Christ” literally means “the anointed one.” Antichrists are claiming to be “anointed ones.” John tells us in **1John 2:20**, *“But you have an anointing from the Holy One and you all know.”* The gnostic heretics claimed to have special spiritual knowledge. The “antichrists” John mentioned claimed special knowledge based on their special anointing. He reassures his Christian readers that they all are anointed and have knowledge of the truth (see verse 21). Therefore those teachers who arose from within the church, claiming a special anointing, and claiming to have unique knowledge because of that anointing were offering something Christians do not need. They are already anointed and have access to the truth that is in Christ — all the revealed truth that is in God’s Word. The antichrists with their grandiose claims have nothing to add but lies and deception. So it is in our day.

In the two places the New Testament mentions the “anointing” and Christians, it teaches that all true Christians are anointed by God. One is this passage in **1John** and the other is **2Corinthians 1:21,22**: *“Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.”* The word “anointed” in the Greek is “*Chrisma*.” Therefore the “antichristos” is one who claims to have special “*Chrisma*” which in fact all true Christians already have. We do not need whatever they claim to have. They claim a superior spirituality, special anointing,

special revelations, and do not openly claim to oppose Christ. If they did they would never find followers in churches, which are their primary target. Even Mormons do not claim to oppose Christ. They merely “substitute” their doctrine of Christ for the Biblical one and claim to have received special revelations (the Book of Mormon).

To avoid deception we need to keep something very clear in our minds. According to the New Testament, there is only one specially anointed one (remember “anointed one” is merely a literal English translation of the term “Christ”). The anointed one is Jesus Christ. **Hebrews 1:9** cites **Psalm 45:7** to prove that Jesus was the true Messiah: *“Thou hast loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee With the oil of gladness above Thy companions.”* All who are regenerated by the Holy Spirit—who have believed the gospel—are anointed by God, but not in the unique sense the Christ is. Likewise we all have knowledge of the truth and have no need for any supposed “anointed one” who claims to give us teachings we would otherwise have no access to: *“And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.”* (**1John 2:27**). Sadly, in our day many Christians run off to hear preachers claiming special anointing and revelation knowledge. These Christians apparently do not realize that the Bible specifically warns against such preachers.

HOW ANTICHRISTS DECEIVE

To help us understand how “antichrists” arise from within the church to deceive, let us summarize what we have learned from **1John**. Antichrists claim to have a special anointing from God, beyond that of “ordinary” Christians (shown by the fact that the term “christ” means “anointed one” and that John assures his readers in two verses that they all have an anointing from God). They claim to have special “knowledge” that is spiritual in nature and

goes beyond the teachings of the New Testament (shown by the fact that John told his readers they already have knowledge of the truth). They likely do not directly oppose Jesus Christ or they would never have been part of the church. John saw the fact that they went out as evidence that they were false. Had they been active and vocal opponents of Jesus Christ they would have been obvious heretics all along. Rather they oppose Him subtly by setting themselves up as “anointed ones” who would substitute themselves for Christ’s unique role in the lives of His people.

By studying other passages in the New Testament we find out more about the deceptive qualities of the false “christs” who arise in the last days. They also do signs and wonders to convince people that their claims of being special “anointed ones,” i.e. “christs,” are true. Jesus warned: *“Then if anyone says to you, ‘Behold, here is the Christ,’ or ‘There He is,’ do not believe him. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect”* (**Matthew 24:23**). Notice that as in **1John**, the targets of their deceptive lies are Christians. Have you ever heard people say, concerning some contemporary “prophet,” “Here is the anointed one”? Have you heard preachers claim to have received special anointing from God that provided them with spiritual knowledge that goes beyond the teachings of the Bible? I have heard these claims many times. According to Jesus we should never believe people who make these claims. They often get by with their deceptive ways simply based on a simple fact that English Bibles generally transliterate the Greek work “*Christos*” as “Christ” rather than translate it to the English equivalent “anointed one.” Also thrown into the equation is the fact that the Greek “*Christos*” is a translation of the Hebrew word for “messiah.”

Many people are not aware of this so they don’t realize that contemporary preachers are making unbiblical claims that put them into the category of “antichrists.” They merely see them as “anointed teachers” who have come

with power and revelation knowledge. They do not deny Jesus, they claim to believe in Him. As I will show later, some claim that Jesus gave them special anointing, revelations, power to do signs and wonders, and sent them to be His special “anointed ones” to solve our problems. It is totally amazing that in their scheme of things Jesus Christ is sending out people who fit the Biblical description of antichrists!

So we see that doing signs and wonders also is part of the deceptive scheme of antichrists. Some validly ask if this means that all signs and wonders are deceptive. The answer is “no.” Signs and wonders that were truly from God took place in the book of Acts. There is a very clear distinction, however, one that we must be aware of. All true signs and wonders, as those in the gospels and Acts, point to one clear truth: that Jesus Christ is the true Messiah. False signs and wonders point to some preacher as being a supposed “great man of God.” Those doing false signs and wonders have defective doctrines about Christ, and use the signs to promote themselves or their unbiblical teaching. In Acts, when God did signs and wonders, the teaching that accompanied them was that God had raised Jesus Christ from the dead and showed Him to be the true Messiah. Modern day “prophets” have little interest in such things.

Paul also wrote about false teachers that arise in the last days. In **2Timothy 3:7,8** he mentions those who are “*ever learning and never come to the knowledge of the truth*” who are like the Egyptian magicians who opposed Moses. Clearly that means by the use of false signs. There are many in our day who are a part of the “signs and wonders” movement who seemingly despise “doctrine.” They can be heard ridiculing “dry, dead” churches that teach doctrine but do not have the power to do signs and wonders. Again, they play on ignorance to find followers. The term “doctrine” simply means “teaching.” People will listen to a preacher go on for an hour claiming that “doctrine” is “dead” and worthless. Yet the one making these claims is “teaching.” The irony is that

the teaching that “doctrine” is dead in itself “doctrine.” They are merely substituting a “doctrine” that they came up with out of their own minds, or claim to have received by revelations, for Biblical doctrine. Thus they “*never come to the knowledge of the truth*” because they refuse to submit to the truth that was once for all given to the saints.

Paul warned Timothy elsewhere about those who claim special “knowledge” but who have gone astray: “O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called ‘knowledge’— which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith” (1Timothy 6:20,21). This is not about modern “science” which some have assumed based on the King James translation of this verse, but about “*gnosis*” or ancient Gnosticism like that John warned against. The false teachers claimed special spiritual knowledge and used it to promote themselves. As we saw in 2Timothy 4 they also used supernatural signs to gain credibility.

THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST

Because “antichrists” are ultimately usurping Christ’s unique role, they always have a defective doctrine of Christ. There are many ways this has been manifested in church history. As I mentioned earlier, the gnostic heretic Cerenthus claimed that the “christ spirit” came on Jesus at His baptism and departed at his crucifixion. John’s second epistle also shows his concern about the doctrine of Christ and its distortion by “antichrists”:

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the Antichrist. Watch yourselves, that you might not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him

into your house, and do not give him a greeting; (2John 1:7-10)

John is concerned about the doctrine of Christ, particularly as it has to do with His incarnation. The reason the incarnation (“coming in the flesh”) is so very important is that it proves that Jesus was the promised Messiah who came from the lineage of David as well as the eternal “Logos” (John 1:1) who existed with God and as God from all eternity. Thus Jesus is unique (John calls him the “only begotten” in John 1:14 which implies “unique one, only one of his kind”).

Antichrists will always distort the Biblical doctrine of Christ in some way. If the “Christ spirit” came upon Jesus at His baptism, then others might be anointed like this and become “christs” If all the things about Jesus’ bodily existence are not believed, then His uniqueness is questionable. For example, if Jesus was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, was crucified and buried, and bodily raised on the third day, and will not appear on earth again until He comes with the armies of heaven with glory and power to judge the world, then there is no other Christ that can appear in history. He is unique. Likewise if Jesus’ eternal deity is denied, then some ordinary human might achieve “christ” status. God cannot “become God” by definition. He is eternal. Neither can God cease being God, because by definition true deity has no beginning or end, but always is.

Antichrists, in order to become substitute “christs,” must find a way to deny the uniqueness of Christ, otherwise their claims would be obviously false. The Mormons claim that God was once as we are, so that we can become “gods” as He is. In that context they will agree with the idea of the deity of Christ. They think a man can achieve godhood, so why couldn’t Jesus Christ. However, their definition of deity is unbiblical and their “Christ” is not unique as the Biblical Christ is.

I have encountered false teachers who have come up with another way to deny the uniqueness of Christ. They hold to the so-called “kenosis” doctrine: that Jesus literally “emptied” Himself of

deity and lived on earth **only** as a man. One pastor told me quite frankly, “of course Jesus was only a man like us on earth, otherwise it would not be fair.” I asked, “What would not be fair?” His answer: “Then He would have an edge in doing miracles.” Somehow this pastor got the idea that Christianity is about doing miracles and Jesus came to show us what is possible if any man has enough faith. There are various versions of this teaching popular in our day. The claim is that there is nothing essentially different between Jesus when He walked the earth and us, other than that He was a little better at doing things or had more faith.

For example, consider what the *defacto* founder of the modern “Word of Faith” movement wrote about Jesus Christ:

Jesus in His earth walk, as the Incarnate Son of God, beginning with His baptism, lived exactly as every child of God should live today. God wasn’t anymore His Father than He is ours. . . . He was the Son of God. You are a son of God. He was Deity. You are a partaker of the Divine nature, that is Deity. . . . The difference is that Jesus gave the Holy Spirit right of way in a sense of which we have never yet learned.⁶

Notice that Kenyon claimed that the difference between Jesus and us is that we just have not learned to give the Holy Spirit a way to work through us the way Jesus did. The obvious error in this is that the gospel writers were claiming the exact opposite. Not only did John call Jesus the “only begotten,” but throughout the Gospel of John Jesus’ miracles are used to prove that He is unique, and is the only true Christ. The other gospels make the same claim. If Jesus learned, after His baptism, to do things through the Holy Spirit that any of us could, then there can be many “christs.” If Kenyon and his followers are right, the miracles of Christ no longer demonstrate that He is uniquely the Christ, but merely that He is a fore-runner of many possible “christs.” This is a good example of a twentieth

century “antichrist” teaching.

WHAT MOTIVATES ANTICHRISTS?

The context of **1John 2:18** where we are warned about antichrists is instructive. John had just finished warning us about the lusts of the world (**1John 2:15-17**). Antichrists are motivated by the things of this world: the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the boastful pride of life. Simply put they are motivated by pleasure, possessions or power. They offer a better life in this temporal world at the expense of “doing the will of God.” They claim that the “anointing” and the revelations that they get from it are going to help us have a better life in this world. We can get the things we want, ascend the social ladder, and enjoy life like the supposed “successful” people they claim we could be if we only had what they have.

Peter confirms that the false teachers of the end times will be like this:

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. (2Peter 2:1-3).

These false teachers also have a false doctrine of Christ (denying the Master), they promote a sensual version of faith, and they are motivated by greed (exploiting their followers with false words). Antichrists tell people what they want to hear to gain advantage for themselves through their worldly motivations.

ANTICHRISTS AND ANTICHRIST

The antichrists that arise in church history are not the end of the story. John told us that, “[A]ntichrist is coming” (from **1John 2:18**). That there are antichrists throughout church history

does not mean there will be no literal “Antichrist” at the end of the age. That which characterizes antichrists shall be embodied in its fulness in Antichrist. Paul calls Antichrist, “The man of lawlessness” (**2Thessalonians 2:3**). This person is the Beast of **Revelation 13** and the “little horn” of **Daniel 7:24, 25**. He shall deceive the world for a time. He will make a covenant with the Jews (**Daniel 9:27**) at the beginning of the great tribulation. But after three and one half years he will break it by setting up the “abomination of desolation” (**Daniel 9:27, Matthew 24:15**), and declaring himself to be the only object of worship (**2Thessalonians 2:4**).

Some deny that there will ever be a literal Antichrist, but merely see the antichrist spirit at work throughout the church age. However, since there are so many clear references to him (those quoted above are a sampling), it is hard to believe that John and Paul were not talking about a literal person. John clearly distinguishes between antichrists and Antichrist (**1John 2:18**). This poses a problem for those who do not take future prophecy literally. It is interesting how they try to solve it. For example Lenski, (quoted earlier) who is usually a very able, conservative Bible scholar does not hold to a literal great tribulation or literal millennium. Here is what he writes about “Antichrist” of **1John 2:18**: “The great Antichrist is the papacy.”⁷ Yet he does affirm that “Antichrist is a single man.”⁸ The papacy is an institution and a series of men, its hard to see how as such it fulfills the prophecy of a coming “Antichrist.”

Antichrists are forerunners of Antichrist who as such operate under the same spirit and principle. That there will be a literal Antichrist who embodies this evil, worldly, and Satanic spirit is in keeping with Biblical prophecy from the Old and New Testaments. It is helpful to see how it also follows the Biblical themes of “already — not yet” and “the many and the one.”⁹ Just as Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of the promises of God for redemption, Antichrist is the ultimate fulfillment of the evil hopes of the world for one

world religion, a religion of man for which the rebellious world has been looking since the tower of Babel.

CONCLUSION

We have discussed the principles of antichrists from a Biblical perspective. Some may wonder if there is any real application in our day. As a matter of fact, there are popular teachings that show remarkable similarities to those warned against in **1John**. For example, a book entitled *Understanding the Anointing* claims that Jesus didn’t have a mortal body until Gethsemane. This teaching comes from the unbiblical “identity” doctrine (that Jesus became just like us and then went literally to hell as a mortal man to fight Satan so that we could become just like Him).¹⁰ The author of the book on the anointing writes: “Then, in the Garden of Gethsemane, when He took upon His spirit nature our sins and our diseases, His body became mortal, and they could kill Him.”¹¹ He also wrote previous to this: “The reason Jesus could have the Spirit without measure was because His body was not mortal.”¹² This is a doctrine of Christ very much like the one John warned us would characterize antichrists: “For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist” (**2John 1:7**). The Bible does not teach that the nature of Jesus’ body changed at any given point from His virgin birth to His crucifixion nor does it say that it was not mortal.

This is not the end of the problems with this teaching. The author also claims to have received special anointing from Jesus Christ Himself. In a section called “A Special Anointing,” he claims that Jesus appeared to him and the following happened: “He laid His hand my head and said, ‘I’ve called thee and have anointed thee and have given unto thee a special anointing to minister to the sick.’”¹³ Then the words of Jesus are quoted: “This anointing will not work unless you tell the people exactly what I told you.”¹⁴ So a contemporary teacher has a special revelation from Jesus that we have no access to

except through him. He also claims that he has to tell us about Jesus' appearance to him and Jesus' word or we will not have faith like we need.¹⁵ Jesus is further directly quoted, "[Y]ou tell them you saw me. Tell them I spoke to you. Tell them I laid the finger of my right hand in the palm of each one of your hands. Tell them the healing anointing is in your hands."¹⁶

Here is a popular teacher who has an unbiblical doctrine of Christ, claims a special anointing beyond what ordinary Christians have, claims special revelations and knowledge, claims that we can only get this information through him, and has written down supposed words of Jesus as direct quotations, thus adding to the Scriptures. In the second paragraph of this article I outlined five things found in **1John 2** about antichrists. You can compare the teachings in this popular book and draw your own conclusions. People who promote such teachings enjoy huge followings, including many unsuspecting Christians. Do you see why John warned the church about antichrists?

END NOTES

1. A.T. Roberston *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. VI; (Baker: Grand

Rapids, 1933) 215 explains: "Anti can mean substitution or opposition, but both ideas are identical in the word *antichristos*."

2. R.C.H. Lenski *Commentary on the New Testament - 1-2 Peter 1-3 John Jude* (Augsberg: Minneapolis, 1966; Hendrikson pub. edition, 1998) 429.

3. Simon Kistemaker *James and 1-III John* (Baker: Grand Rapids, 1986) 274.

4. Eusebius *Church History* book III chapter 28.

5. Irenaeus *Against Heresies*, book I, chapter 26. Here is what he wrote about Cerinthus: "He represented Jesus as having not been born of a virgin, but as being the son of Joseph and Mary according to the ordinary course of human generation, while he nevertheless was more righteous, prudent, and wise than other men. Moreover, after his baptism, Christ descended upon him in the form of a dove from the Supreme Ruler, and that then he proclaimed the unknown Father, and performed miracles. But at last Christ departed from Jesus, and that then Jesus suffered and rose again, while Christ remained impassible, inasmuch as he was a spiritual being."

6. E. W. Kenyon *In His Presence*, (Kenyon's Gospel Publishing Society: Seattle, 1944) 22.

7. op. cit., Lenski, 432.

8. Ibid.

9. The same Hebrew conceptions help us understand Messianic prophecy. For example consider how the seed of Abraham is the many (his Hebrew descendants), but also

anticipates the one (the seed of Abraham who blesses all the families of the earth, i.e. Messiah). The seed of David is a series of descendants beginning with Solomon, but the ultimate "Seed of David" is Messiah. This Hebrew conception of the many and the one is likely at work in John's understanding of Antichrists and Antichrist.

10. See D.R. McConnell *A Different Gospel*, (Hendrickson: Peabody, 1988) chapter 7 "The Doctrine of Identification, The Born-Again Jesus, and The atonement of the Devil" 116-131, for a thorough examination of the false Christology of Hagin and others of the faith movement.

11. Kenneth E. Hagin, *Understanding the Anointing*, (RHEMA Bible Church: Tulsa, 1983) 135.

12. Ibid. 134.

13. Ibid. 136, 137.

14. Ibid. 137.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

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